

## Family Differences

July 25, 2015

Dear Editor,

I applaud Pablo Stanfield for his excellent article on "Those Other Friends." I have always supported efforts of the Friends World Committee on Consultation. My first experience with a FWCC conference was back in the 70s, when there was such a conference at Friends University in Wichita, Kansas.

Months prior to the conference, I had written to the organizers of the conference to ask for two things: 1) to have a booth which would focus on gay and lesbian concerns, and 2) to provide a workshop where LGBT issues could be discussed. It was then when I realized that Quakers are very good about working towards peace outside our family of "Friends," but we are not very good at working towards peace within our own family.

When I sent the letter, the response was fast and furious. The Evangelicals threatened to boycott the conference if either of these requests were granted. Chuck Fager wrote about this in a Pendle Hill pamphlet, which I think is now out of print (but a few of us still have copies). They did not even want to discuss homosexuality, especially on the grounds of a Quaker school.

Finally, we were able to find compromise. No booth was allowed, but we could have a discussion, as long as it was not on the campus of Friends University. We found a non-Quaker church nearby. Friends from all Quakers theologies were present at the workshop, and the meeting provided a forum for folks to express their views. There was much press about this in the Wichita paper, as well as other publications.

But a lot has changed in 40 years, and a lot has stayed the same.

The Sacramento Friends Meeting and the Sacramento Friends Church are less than 15 minutes away from each other and miles apart theologically.

The pastor of the Friends Church and his parents were, at one time, members of our Meeting. The father of the current Friends Church pastor served as Clerk of our Meeting for a while. When the family found Jesus, they decided to form their own church. I have had many discussions with the pastor of the Sacramento Friends Church over theological issues as well as gay rights. We are miles apart on both.

A woman, who had been attending the Friends Church for a while, decided she wanted to become a member of the church. They told her she had to accept Jesus Christ in order to

become a member. She didn't understand that language. Later she found out about the Sacramento Friends Meeting, which didn't have such a requirement. When Sacramento Meeting wanted to have its own meetinghouse, she donated the land. So the Meeting is very thankful to the church for not accepting her as a member.

When my spouse and I were planning our marriage under the care of Sacramento Meeting, I invited the pastor of the Friends Church. He declined.

In spite of all this, however, the two groups have worked together on several issues. One issue is helping to raise funds to educate children in Kenya. We have a joint picnic coming up late August.

Years ago, the two groups put on an exhibit on the grounds of the State Capitol called "Eyes Wide Open." It was a showcase of shoes of people who have died in war. Recently, FWCC had a mini conference here in Sacramento, held at the Friends Church, and Friends from many various branches attended.

We come together on issues we can work on together and accept our differences as siblings accept the fact there are going to be differences that may never get resolved.

I believe in miracles. We may never agree theologically, but eventually, the Spirit will help Friends see the Light that "liberty and justice for all" means just that.

Gary Miller, Sacramento Friends Meeting (PYM)