



# A Friendly Letter

Issue Number Fifty-Seven

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Twelfth Month, 1985

Dear Friend,

Three important personnel developments in major Quaker operations need to be noted here:

First, a hearty welcome is in order for Martha "Marty" Walton, on her nomination as the new Executive Secretary of Friends General Conference. (She will officially take office in mid-First Month.) Although born in the Philadelphia area of longtime Quaker stock (her great uncle Bernard Walton was also FGC Secretary more than a generation ago), Marty comes to her post from a background in the Midwest and West, and a career as a successful executive with a printing and packaging company. She has also been a longtime FGC activist, chairing numerous of its committees and playing important behind-the-scenes roles at its annual Gatherings. Although she takes the helm at a time when FGC is still critically strapped financially, staff morale is reported to be high and she is anxious to get to work. She has our best wishes and prayers for a successful tenure.

Midway across the country, in Richmond, Indiana, The Administrative Secretary of Friend United Meeting, Kara Cole, will be taking a six-month sabbatical beginning First Month. At least part of it will be spent at Woodbrooke, London Yearly Meeting's study center in Birmingham. She will be missed; FUM is a deeply troubled institution, but Kara has been a strong point within it, weathering numerous crises and almost nonstop criticism. Undoubtedly she needs a change of pace, but we will be anxiously awaiting her return.

On the West Coast, the turn of the year will see a new face in the editorship of the *Evangelical Friend*, the monthly magazine of the Evangelical Friends Alliance, that of Lon Fendall. Lon is well-known to evangelical Friends, and has filled numerous slots in Northwest Yearly Meeting. He has also worked for several years on the staff of Oregon Senator Mark Hatfield, and in 1984 chaired Hatfield's successful reelection campaign. Most recently, Lon has been the founding director of the pioneering Peace Learning center at George Fox College, a position he will continue to hold in addition to the *Evangelical Friend* editorship. The combination is sure to keep him busy, and he too has our prayers and best wishes.

One last, seasonal topic deserves mention here: In the next issue we will once more profile our nominees for **Quakers of the Year**, and this year again your suggestions are earnestly solicited. Have a happy and holiday holiday.

Yours in the Light,

*Chuck Fager*  
Chuck Fager

## SURPRISING TRENDS IN QUAKER MEMBERSHIP STATISTICS

The statistics summarized below reveal a startling and--to me at least--unexpected pattern in membership growth trends among North American Quakers. Put simply, the pattern is this: Over the past five or six years, most unprogrammed "liberal" YMs have been gaining members, while most pastoral "evangelical" YMs have been losing them, many in substantial numbers. This trend is the more surprising because the unprogrammed YMs without exception eschew formal proselytizing, whereas for evangelical Friends it has always been a major corporate priority, and for many years these YMs were indeed growing steadily in numbers.

As an illustration, consider the performance of the Evangelical Friends Church-Eastern Region and Baltimore YM. EFC-ER has spent more than a million dollars over the past five years on its Evangelistic, Pastoral and Extension Board; but despite this investment EFC-E grew by only two percent in these years, increasing its total by only 197. By contrast Baltimore Yearly Meeting gained 365 members in this same period, an eleven percent increase yet in these years the annual budget of its intermittently active Advancement and Outreach Committee never topped \$200. That's an investment by EFC-ER of almost \$5600 per net new member, versus an average for Baltimore of about two dollars and seventy five cents apiece.

What is going on here? Before speculating about answers, let's present the figures:

### RECENT MEMBERSHIP TRENDS AMONG MAJOR NORTH AMERICAN YMS. (Figures are from 1980-84 except where noted.)

#### LOST MEMBERS:

<u>PASTORAL/EVANGELICAL YMS</u>			<u>UNPROGRAMMED YMS</u>		
Northwest <sup>1</sup>	-5%	-401	Philadelphia <sup>3</sup>	-6%	-718
Iowa YM(FUM)	-4%	-178	New York <sup>4</sup>	-5%	-292
Western <sup>2</sup>	-8%	-716	Illinois	-14%	-152
Wilmington	-6%	-191			
N.Carolina(FUM)	-7%	-963			
MidAmerica <sup>2</sup>	-7%	-571			
Indiana	-8%	-1114			
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<b>TOTAL LOSS</b>		<b>-4134</b>			<b>-1162</b>

#### GAINED MEMBERS:

<u>PASTORAL/EVANGELICAL YMS</u>			<u>UNPROGRAMMED YMS</u>		
EFC Eastern Region <sup>3</sup>	2.3%	+197	Canadian	+7%	+76
California <sup>2</sup>	+1.5%	+105	New England	+2%	+61 <sup>5</sup>
			Pacific	+5%	+66 <sup>5</sup>
			North Pacific	+9%	+40 <sup>5</sup>
			Intermountain	+53%	+345 <sup>5</sup>
			Southeastern	+4%	+17 <sup>5</sup>
			South Central	+4%	+15 <sup>5</sup>
			Baltimore	+11%	+365
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<b>TOTAL GAIN</b>		<b>+302</b>	<b>TOTAL GAIN</b>		<b>+985</b>

NET LOSS (Gains minus losses)-Pastoral/Evangelical: -3832      Unprogrammed: -177

Sources: YM Yearbooks and FWCC data; and special thanks to the Haverford College Quaker Collection staff.

NOTES: <sup>1</sup>Figures for 1979-1985.    <sup>2</sup>1979-83.    <sup>3</sup>1979-84.    <sup>4</sup>1980-83.    <sup>5</sup>1982-84; total growth 1980-84 was probably higher.

The unprogrammed YM situation looks even better when the Philadelphia YM numbers are analyzed. For twenty years it has been the biggest loser on the unprogrammed side, and was dropping an average of 165 members per year for the previous four years; but in 1984, the loss dropped abruptly to less than half that, only 76. And the key factors seemed to be the important ones: from outside, a big jump in applications; and from inside, a sharp rise in births. So that while Philadelphia is still slipping, it may be about to reverse this long decline.

Exactly what these trends mean is not easy to pin down. One leading evangelical considering them, wondered whether I was "recommending that [pastoral Friends] all become unprogrammed?" The answer to that is: not necessarily, though my own preferences should be evident. But while not making such recommendations, I do have some hunches about this data which may be worth putting on the table for consideration/debate. Here they are:



**Hunch #1: These trends are not a fluke.** Five years is enough time to show that something real is going on. Moreover, the evangelical losses are so widespread that despite varying conditions among the YMs, I doubt the data can be explained by purely local factors. The same goes, with some exceptions, for the growth pattern of unprogrammed YMs.

**Hunch #2: These trends raise basic questions.** One Friend who is experienced and well-informed in this field declared flatly that this data "shows the utter bankruptcy of the popular evangelical approach to church planting." Whether it establishes that or not, it certainly raises the question of how to account for them. Why has a constituency which works so hard at church growth been producing such a small payoff? And why are so many unprogrammed YMs growing despite their seeming indifference to formal evangelism?

#### ***Moving Toward a New Unprogrammed Majority?***

**Hunch #3: These trends could change the face of American Quakerism.** According to 1981 FWCC figures, there were then about 30,000 more pastoral Friends in America than non-pastoral. But if these trends continue, and especially if a Philadelphia turnaround becomes a reality, the unprogrammed YMs would close that gap within another generation. That is not a long time as such things go, and the ramifications of such a shift would be far-reaching.

**Hunch #4: Unprogrammed Friends are "evangelical" too.** One possible clue to what is happening here turned up in a book, *Secrets For Growing Churches* (Harper & Row, 1979) by Charles Mylander, now Superintendent of California YM, based on his doctoral thesis at Fuller Theological Seminary. Fuller is an acknowledged leader in the field of "church growth" scholarship. Mylander cited research which suggested that lay members who spent considerable time sharing their faith with outsiders "provide the cutting edge for reaching the uncommitted." This comment struck home when combined with one of the most surprising results of our National Quaker Poll published in Issue #47, namely: That unprogrammed respondents shared their faith with others just as often as the pastoral respondents did. The membership figures seem to confirm what the poll showed, a sense that there is a lot more "evangelism" being carried on by unprogrammed Quakers than ever shows up in their budgets.

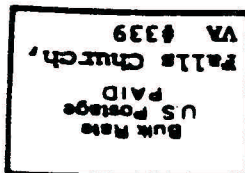
#### ***Differences Versus Distinctives: An Important Distinction?***

**Hunch #5: Maybe Differences DO make a difference.** Hunch #4 leads to a further question: Lay outreach may be the basis for the unprogrammed YMs' growth, but if pastoral Friends are doing as much, and spending lots more money on it besides, why the erosion of their numbers? Now that's still a mystery, but pondering it takes me back to the evangelical leader's question about recommending that they all become unprogrammed. I'm still not recommending it, but one feature of unprogrammed Quakerism does seem to pop up here, namely that, even in its liberal environment, a Friends meeting held in silent waiting without formal leadership offers newcomers a religious experience that is unmistakably different, one not found elsewhere. We unprogrammed Friends are proud of this "differentness", no doubt often too proud. Even so it is a common experience for new members to say they were attracted by this uniqueness--and for dropouts to say it was unmistakably not their cup of tea.

Pastoral Friends on the other hand typically see themselves as part of a larger stream of Evangelical Christianity, within which they retain certain "distinctives," such as the lack of outward sacraments and, here and there, a noticeable peace witness. But are these essentially secondary "distinctives" enough to build a strong loyalty to a Friends church as a Friends body, rather than as simply one among a large number of basically interchangeable evangelical denominations? (Several Quaker Poll respondents from evangelical YMs answered a definite NO to this: asked to list corporate priorities for Friends, they put "De-emphasize Quaker, emphasize Christian," at the top.) Other reports indicate there is much "shopping" among many such "generic" evangelical churches based on such things as the pastor's preaching, a convenient location or an attractive building. In this context, could the recent membership data be posing the issue of whether programmed Quakerism is sufficiently distinctive as a religious body? If it is, I can't help but wonder whether projecting a more distinctively Quaker identity would help reverse the negative membership trend. If so, what would such a more distinctive pastoral Quaker identity consist of?

TIME-DATED MATTER  
POSTMASTER: PLEASE EXPEDITE DELIVERY

INSIDE: SURPRISING NEWS ABOUT  
QUAKER MEMBERSHIP GROWTH



From: Chuck Fager, A Friendly Letter  
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### THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

It was on 12/1/1926 that Rufus Jones met Mohandas Gandhi, at an ashram in Ahmedabad, India. Jones had come to India via Japan, China and the Philipines, where he had given dozens of lectures. Gandhi was then in retirement at his ashram, after leading a long civil disobedience campaign against British rule and on behalf of Hindu-Moslem unity. The campaign seemed to have failed, though, and many said Gandhi was finished as a leader of the independence movement. To Rufus Jones, however, a visit to the ashram was, along with seeing the Taj Mahal, the high point of his stay in India. Once there, he questioned Gandhi at length about his knowledge of Christianity and Quakerism. The responses were not what he had hoped for: Gandhi said he knew little of Quakerism, though some close associates were Friends. And as for Christianity, he did read regularly from the New Testament, but said that "his own faith in love as a way of life was born out of native sources rather than foreign sources...."

"I was sorry to discover," Rufus wrote in his journal, "that Gandhi lacked the wider universal interests which are so obviously lacking in him. He is first, last, and always Hindu. He has very little of that universal mystical experience which is the ground and basis of a really universal spiritual religion. He is not quite the prophet type....In his own sphere, however, he is an extraordinarily great man and a beautiful character--a lover of men and an unselfish spirit." But universal mystic and prophet or not, by 1944 Rufus described Gandhi as "the greatest person now living on our planet."

### QUAKER CHUCKLES

Charles Walker of Cheyney, Pennsylvania, claims to have found in a nearby attic some previously unknown letters between William Penn and various other worthies of his day. Among the excerpts he gleaned from them were these:

From Lord Baltimore of Maryland to Penn: "Now that Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon have completed their survey of the dividing line between our respective colonies, can we agree on a name for it?" Penn's reply: "Suggest it be called the Jeremiah-Charles Line. That's something any school child can remember."

From the supervisor at Pennsbury Manor: "I told the new hired man that before I could pay him the crown we agreed on he must sign a receipt. But he is illiterate and can only sign with an X. Shall we waive the requirement and save him embarrassment?" Penn's reply: "No cross, no crown."

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