

# A Friendly Letter

Issue Number Twenty

Eleventh Month, 1982

Dear Friend,

There is some very good news and some very bad news this month. The good news is that on 10/23, the Friends United Meeting General Board agreed to accept into FUM the two new East African Yearly Meeting in Kenya: Elgon and Southern. (Of course, Elgon is actually 10 years old, but it is new in the awareness of many American Friends.) The Board's decision was in the form of a recommendation to the 1984 FUM Triennial, where final action will be taken. This decision was reached after long and weighty consideration, and after a full hearing of the objections of a delegation from East Africa Yearly Meeting--Kaimosi, in favor of which the other two meetings had previously gone unrecognized. It is also reported that the Friends World Committee for Consultation--Africa Section has received applications from these two new YMs, and there is a chance they will be accepted there as well. Once these two acts of recognition are finalized, one of the biggest defaults in recent Quaker history, the exclusion of these two large and lively bodies of Friends from the world Quaker community, will be ended. For that we can be very grateful.

I am also grateful to *Friends Journal*, which in a recent report on African Friends referred plainly and candidly to the ongoing problems in the relations among these three Yearly Meetings. This was really the first fully straightforward comment on these problems in the pages of a mainstream Quaker publication; I hope it won't be the last.

The bad news, Friends, is very bad indeed: on 11/20 Don Green, pastor of the Reedwood Friends Church in Portland, Oregon passed away. He had been in a coma for some weeks after an accident. His death is tragedy enough for his wife Ellie and their four children; it is magnified by the quality of work he had done at Reedwood, and the esteem in which he was held by that community. But its effects go far beyond Portland, or even Oregon, for Don Green was an emerging figure on the world Quaker scene: He made a major address at the Kenya FWCC conference just a few weeks before his accident; he was leading the way in ecumenical contacts between Evangelical and unprogrammed Friends. Thus his untimely passing deprives Friends at large of one who had great promise for shaping our life as a Society. I met him only last spring, and mourn the loss of opportunity to know him better and work with him. If he is lost to us now, his example need not be.

Yours in the Light,

*Chuck Fager*

Chuck Fager

PS. As the year is rapidly drawing to a close, I want to invite your suggestions for our second annual nomination of Quaker of the Year, which will be contained in the First Month, 1983 issue. And with the holidays approaching, I hope you will consider sending gift subscriptions to *A Friendly Letter* this year: to Friends, to your Meeting library, to a Friends pastor. A flyer for this purpose is enclosed.

WESTERN YEARLY MEETING: NO FRIENDLY PERSUASION

*"When one of you has a grievance against a brother, does he dare go to law before the un-righteous instead of the saints?...I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is not among you wise enough to decide between members of the brotherhood, but brother goes to law against brother....? To have lawsuits at all with one another is defeat for you."*

*--First Corinthians, 6:1,5-7*

Unless something changes fast, Paul's cry of dismay at the public conflicts among his Corinthian flock will be fulfilled again soon, this time among Friends of Western Yearly Meeting in Indiana.

At this writing a court trial is set for Twelfth Month sixth in a suit that pits Western Yearly Meeting (WYM for short) against one of its constituent groups, Hinkle Creek, a pastoral meeting in a rural area north of Indianapolis. At stake in this impending litigation is control of the meeting's bank account, its property, the pastor's tenure, its style of worship and even its status as a Monthly Meeting. As this issue went to press, one last attempt to reach an out-of-court settlement had just failed, as had several earlier efforts over the past several months.

This is not the first time that Quakers in WYM have faced off at the bar; on the last occasion, the case went all the way to the Indiana Supreme Court. That was in 1883.

*Where it All Began--Maybe, and Then Again, Maybe Not*

According to some reports, the current troubles started in Tenth Month 1981, when Hinkle Creek's pastor, Clyde Thralls, announced from the pulpit one First Day morning that if there was no objection, he planned to begin serving communion during worship services. No objection was voiced at that point, and communion has been served there ever since.

Such performance of the "outward ordinances" is, of course, at variance with Quaker tradition and the practice of the vast majority of Friends groups, including most pastoral meetings.

*(Note: The handful of Friends churches in the U.S. that do serve communion and practice baptism are mostly found in the Evangelical Friends Church--Eastern Region, centered in Ohio. There this tradition goes back to the late 19th century, when it was begun under the influence of David Updegraff, a leading minister of that Yearly Meeting who was in turn much influenced by Wesleyan revivalism. Updegraff faced strong opposition to his innovations, but defended himself by saying he was not urging these practices on all Friends, and that those moved to observe these rituals ought to be permitted to do so on the basis of Friends' long history of respect for freedom of conscience. Thus framed, his request was permitted, albeit with some lingering uneasiness.)*

*The Problem of Process, or The Lack Thereof*

Other reports say that the introduction of communion at Hinkle Creek was not the source of the problem. WYM Clerk Dan Carter of Russiaville insists rather that the process pastor Thralls used to introduce it was defective: he did not, as Thralls admits, take it first to the Ministry and Counsel Committee, which under WYM procedures oversees the pastor's work. Further, it is asserted that the serious objections of several members, voiced after the initial announcement, were disregarded. Soon thereafter, five members of the Meeting were removed from their committee posts at a tumultuous business meeting. These five appealed their removal to the Yearly Meeting, arguing that they had been disciplined for no good cause and in violation of Quaker processes. The YM upheld them. When Hinkle Creek's leadership ignored this ruling, the WYM Executive Committee took over the meeting's bank account and directed that Hinkle Creek be reduced to Preparative Meeting status until WYM's directives were complied with. The local leadership responded by filing suit against the local bank, to free its funds. The Yearly Meeting, to uphold its authority, was soon drawn into the action. WYM's Executive Committee has also directed that Clyde Thralls be terminated as pastor.

All this had occurred by late last spring. After several delays, the court trial is now set for next month in a nearby county court. The court's decision, whatever it is, stands a good chance of being appealed, as was the previous case 99 years ago.

It may not be entirely accurate, however, to point either to the introduction of communion or the way it was done as the ultimate source of the current difficulties. Both parties seem to agree that there has been a long history of quarreling within the Hinkle Creek group. Pastor Thralls says it goes back sixty years, to a disagreement over whether to install electricity in the meetinghouse. This chronically acrimonious atmosphere, he adds, has meant that few of its pastors have lasted very long in its service.

Now this spirit of division is manifest not only in the court action, but also in the presence of two rival Hinkle Creek congregations: the church, which occupies the building and is focussed around pastor Thralls, and Hinkle Creek Preparative Meeting, made up of those who were removed from committee posts and their supporters, which has declared its loyalty to Western Yearly Meeting and its decisions regarding the church. Both groups claim to represent a majority of the original congregation.

*Litigation--Probably; Reconciliation--Probably Not*

At WYM's regular annual sessions this past Eighth Month, the actions of its Executive Committee leading up to the suit were reviewed. Considerable regret and chagrin was expressed over this departure from Friends traditional avoidance of such suits, and--in this biblically-oriented body--the applicability of the rebuke of Paul cited above. But the decisions were at length endorsed, and the Executive Committee was empowered to act for the YM in seeing the matter through. It is not surprising, then, that clerk Dan Carter, who has spear-headed the YM actions, says his committee has acted properly throughout. Pastor Thralls, by contrast, insists that the Executive Committee has far overstepped its authority, and has openly aligned itself with one side in the dispute, rejecting any other solutions. Both sides say their attorneys are confident of victory in the courtroom.

There have been several attempts to mediate the case and head off court action. The most recent came on 11/20 at the autumn meeting of the WYM Administrative Council, the representative body which acts for the YM between annual sessions. A Hinkle Creek delegation including pastor Thralls appeared and presented a proposal: that all court action be dropped, and the outstanding issues be settled by negotiations between Hinkle Creek and the full YM, without the involvement of the Executive Committee. After very lengthy discussion, however, the Council could not find unity to accept this proposal. Thus it appears all but certain that the court action will proceed.

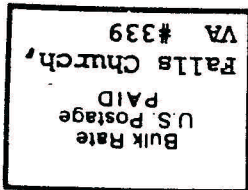
*A Settlement Unlikely to Settle Much*

The public airing of such internal Quaker quarrels before a secular tribunal is a dismaying prospect. Still, after hearing from advocates in both camps, it is difficult for an observer to imagine what sort of informal reconciliation might now be possible between the factions at Hinkle Creek. Bitterness runs deep; the grievances are well-worn. Property is involved, as are strong egos, the pastor's job and control of meeting offices. No simple solutions present themselves; perhaps recourse to the state is all that remains.

In 1883 the Indiana Supreme Court found in favor of WYM and the local group aligned with it. No doubt the courts can again come up with a decision which will "settle" the concrete matters in contention between the Hinkle Creek parties and WYM: who will be permitted to meet in the building, under what authority and with what pastoral leadership, and so forth. But who will resolve the fracturing of the community of Friends there, and how long would such an effort take?

When Eastern Friends separated in 1827, several of the rival groups also ended up in court over property and such matters. It was the great-grandchildren of these Friends who healed the breach, well over a century later. Hinkle Creek and Western Yearly Meeting offer a contemporary illustration of why the healing was so difficult, and took so long.

INSIDE: INDIANA QUAKERS PREPARE TO  
TELL IT TO THE JUDGE.



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### THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

By now everybody knows that it was three hundred years ago this month that William Penn came to his colony in the New World and treated with the Indians, so I'm not going to say anything further about that. What is less well-remembered is that on election day this month in 1872 Susan B. Anthony, a Friend by origin, voted in Rochester New York along with 16 other women, most of them likewise Quakers. This would be no great thing today; but in 1872 it was illegal, and Susan B. Anthony was arrested, jailed, indicted, convicted and fined for her effrontery.

A century earlier in the same month, George Fox was passing through Virginia on his way to visit Friends in North Carolina. His route is a few hours by expressways now; then, he travelled on horseback through trackless woods, sleeping in the open, often in pouring rain, with wolves howling around his camp all night. Yet he complained not, neither did he slow down.

### QUAKER CHUCKLES

#### *A Late Report*

Unprogrammed Friends have their differences with each other too. One of the most common and persistent is the running skirmish between two opposed parties, the Punctualists and the Tardyites. Punctualists, named after Elias Punctual, an early Friends minister who arrived on time for worship every First Day of his adult life, believe the depth of one's Quaker faith can be gauged by how closely to the appointed hour one enters the meetinghouse. Tardyites, who are followers of Joseph John Tardy, a longtime critic of Friend Punctual who never quite made it to meetings in time to get his position entered on the agenda, believe by contrast that it is a sign of grace for many people to make it to worship at all. The conflict between these two perspectives is ongoing, and frequently flares into proposals for locked doors and other drastic measures. If there is a cure, I haven't heard of it.

#### *Spreading the Message*

I have often wished that Friends were more visible in the public arena, even in advertising. Thus it was heartening to learn recently that the buses in most cities carry Quaker propaganda over their rear doors, on the inside. The message is simple, concise and theologically sound. It is: "Wait for the Light, then push."