Ghost Ranch Hosts an International Quaker Conference

For the 18th Triennial Meeting of the Friends World Committee for Consultation, 260 Friends from six continents assembled at Ghost Ranch the first two weeks of August. The commitment to turn over the facilities of the ranch to the Quakers was made ten years ago in recognition that the event was important to both the world community of Friends and to Ghost Ranch. It was the first time in 30 years that the International Conference had met in the United States.

Though Quakers all, it was a diverse group of people, with differences in nationality, race, language, and economic conditions, and representing a wide spectrum of Quaker worshipping practices. The spirit of God speaks to Friends in a variety of ways. Some delegates were from "silent" worshipping communities, where members are hesitant about using words to describe their deepest spiritual experiences. Others were from congregations where worship is a joyful combination of song, prayer, and Bible teaching in which participants share a vivid experience of salvation through the teaching, life, and death of Jesus Christ. At the FWCC gathering, everyone could share in various modes of worship, which was an enriching and enlightening experience.

Each person was assigned to a Worship Group that gave further opportunity for sharing diversity. For example, in one group there were persons from Denmark, England, Africa, Jamaica, India, Australia, and seven different parts of the United States. Everyone spoke English, but for many it was not their first language, so in plenary sessions consecutive interpretation was provided in Spanish and simultaneous translations by microphone were made as needed in French and Japanese. Many Friends felt the slower pace of consecutive translating deepened awareness of the value placed on all the different Quaker traditions, and they appreciated the need to listen carefully so that language differences did not become a barrier.

There are about 240,000 members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in some 56 countries. (Many delegates were surprised to learn that there are more Quakers in Africa than in the United States, converts brought to Christ through the devout efforts of evangelical congregations.) The task of the Friends World Committee for Consultation is to help transcend the many differences of language, nationality, and worship practices to promote better understanding among Friends the world over. FWCC is a channel of com-
munication between Friends, a place to nurture identity as Quakers and seek together how to be faithful as a people of God in response to the need for peace, social justice, and environmental responsibility in today’s world.

Interest groups met around the many world issues of concern to delegates. There were speakers and panel presentations followed by discussion. Representatives from various geographic areas reported on the problems and challenges they face at home and the faithfulness, courage, and hope they witness in their circumstances. Throughout their time together, the Friends—in worship, business, personal conversation, discussion—shared their common threads of the love of God, Quaker witness to the Inward Light, testimonies, and membership-in-common in the Religious Society of Friends.

In the Exhibit Hall there were crafts to be purchased. Quakers from Costa Rica, Mexico, Bolivia, Peru, and Kenya brought handcrafted items which they marketed during the conference. Craft industries are encouraged by Quaker communities in these countries, providing employment and income for many.

Delegates had several opportunities to enjoy the flavor of Northern New Mexico’s diversity. Tewa dancers performed one evening following dinner, and the weekly Mercado provided local crafts and artifacts for sale. On other occasions they were entertained by the Vecinos musicians and Jim Shibley’s stories of Ghost Ranch. There were excursions to Santa Fe, Bandelier, the Pueblos, and surrounding villages, as well as walkabout trips on the ranch.

Gratitude was expressed many times over for the opportunity to hold this important meeting at Ghost Ranch. Delegates felt a common bond with the Mission Statement and values of Ghost Ranch. They left with the same appreciation for the majestic splendor of God’s creation and sense of a Divine presence that has touched the lives of so many over the years who have found Ghost Ranch a “magic place.”