

The Inlook-Outlook Letter

Of the Prison Ministry of the St. Lawrence Valley Friends Meeting
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
Potsdam, NY (March 2010)

As so many of our prison members and attenders have been taken far from us or otherwise are unable to attend our prison meeting, we at St. Lawrence Valley Friends Meeting compose this 'Inlook-Outlook Letter' for you, to let you know you are in our hearts and prayers and will always be so. When we *look into* our hearts we see God and this benefits our *outlook*. This edition asks the question: 'What is the Quaker Worship Group about?'

What is the Quaker Worship Group About?

Our remarks are directed to those who are new to The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), and to those from other religious traditions that may have questions about us. The Quaker Worship Group (QWG-also known as 'the Quaker Study Group' because in addition to worship we have discussion and study as well) in Gouverneur CF began when an inmate who was a Friend requested it. St. Lawrence Valley Friends Meeting in Potsdam began the necessary steps to make that happen nearly two years ago. Our group started with one person but soon others joined us from other religious faiths.

The Quaker message is simple: *The Lord will teach his people himself* as revealed to George Fox the 17th century Quaker leader. Our teacher is no less than God, sometimes we refer to this as 'the inward light' or 'inward teacher'. The implication is very good news indeed, that we are not alone, not ever; God is always there and willing to guide us out of our troubles and into a better life. John (1: 5, 9) (We have been studying the Gospel of John lately) describes this as *the real light that gives light to everyone* and further adds: *light shines in darkness, and darkness could not overpower it*. Quakers believe in continuing revelation; John tells us this is *light* as exemplified in the life and teaching of Jesus. Jesus' teaching reminds us we have a responsibility as religious people to overcome darkness (ignorance, injustice, strife, hatred, misunderstanding, fear and the like) by following God's unfailing guidance. Notice *light* overpowers darkness not by force, but by its very nature.

The implication of the Quaker faith is that God did not cease to speak to people after the prophets of the Old Testament, rather he has always been there for us, we simply have failed to notice. Jesus was sent to remind us of this fact. God can help us understand who we really are and what we are sent here to do. In the silent worship meeting we learn from God or from others sharing their understandings; we in turn may minister and learn to obey the summons to do God's work on earth. Why must we do this? Because there is suffering in the world and as religious people (of whatever denomination or persuasion) we have been sent (like Jesus) to be instruments of overcoming that suffering, to heal the world.

Notice that we are not so different from other religious faiths in this regard. I believe every faith posits a possible direct relationship with God (as each of us understands God); the Quaker faith simply pares down the essence of Christianity to this. Thus, we welcome men from all religious faiths to the QWG. We have no expectation that a participant become a Quaker. Friends have traditionally avoided proselytizing. In fact, for those who relate to the Quaker faith but prefer not to become members, there is an auxiliary organization of Friends for you to keep abreast of Quaker doings: **The Quaker Wider Fellowship**. When we worship we settle into the silence in order to find God. There is no one person designated as 'minister'; we minister to one another, each according to his light; inmate/outmate distinctions disappear. We discover strengths we never thought we had as we grow in the light of Christ together. □

We are glad to have received two letters! One from Nick (below) and one from Dre (Dre should know we are working on a QWG for CVCF-Hang in there!). Nick writes from GCF:

Dear Friends,

This is to thank all those who give their time and come behind these walls and fences to share the light and show us the way. I was introduced to Quakers back in the 1990's while an inmate at Eastern. Participating in AVP (Alternatives to Violence Project), there were several Quaker volunteers and I really enjoyed the program. The volunteers treated us like normal human beings. The Quakers were not apprehensive or timid towards us and were eager to help us overcome our shortcomings.

I enjoyed AVP so much I signed up for the advanced workshop, going on to become a facilitator and eventually an AVP coordinator. The AVP program pointed me in the right direction, and I want to thank all these volunteers who give their time to make a difference in our lives.

At the present time I am still incarcerated and will be appearing for my third parole board in May. At that time I will have been incarcerated for twenty years, over half of my life. About a year ago here at GCF, I ran into people I knew from Eastern and other facilities. Brother Andre and brother Edwin were members of the Quaker Worship Group. They encouraged me to attend the bi-monthly meetings. It was then I remembered my time at Eastern and the Quakers who volunteered to help us.

I want to thank Edwin and Andre for bringing me into the Friend's Study Group. I have met such wonderful Friends who have helped me see the light that all of us have within ourselves. They have made such an impact on my life and cannot thank them enough. I would also like to express my gratitude to all the volunteers in the world that give their time to help us become better people. Thank you.

Sincerely, Nick

Psalm 130: "Out of the Depths" (King James Version):

Out of the depths have I cried unto thee O Lord!

Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.

If thou Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.

I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.

My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say more than they that watch for the morning.

Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.

And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

May God bless you always. **Anybody who wishes to receive the 'Inlook-Outlook Letter' may request a subscription by writing to the address below.** Be sure to let us know your complete address. You will be put on our mailing list and receive a monthly copy at no cost. Also, please feel free to write us with your comments, suggestions and contributions to the Letter: **St. Lawrence Valley Friends Meeting, P.O. Box 292, Canton, NY 13617.**

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