



Friends Association for Higher Education

To Friends and colleagues everywhere:

After a one-year hiatus resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, Friends Association for Higher Education held its 41st conference June 7-11, 2021 over Zoom on “Peacemaking in the Liberal Arts.” We have been invigorated by plenary sessions with George Lakey (author of *How We Win: A Guide to Nonviolent Direct Action Campaigning and Facilitating Group Learning: Strategies for Success with Diverse Learners*) and Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge (whose leadership has included terms as Deputy Minister of Defense and of Health for South Africa), 23 workshops, worship and other opportunities for community and emboldened with better understanding of the foundations and history of the Friends Peace Testimony and renewed commitment to supporting our student activists as campaigners for the loving community we seek.

It is natural, Lakey explained, to fear and be repelled by the rising polarization around us. Polarization is an inevitable consequence of the extreme economic inequality and racial injustice of our society. Just as a forge makes metal malleable, so polarization provides the heat that drives societal transformation -- for good (as with the Nordic countries in the early 20th century) or ill (Nazi Germany and fascist Italy in the same era). Since today’s polarization is inevitable, we must prepare to engage with it.

Lakey’s plenary and other sessions -- by providing us with a better understanding of historical peacemaking that emerges from close study of Quaker origins in the 17th century, case studies of Friends service committees in the 19th and 20th centuries, the 1960s Civil Rights campaign, and the dismantling of Apartheid in South Africa -- gave us reasons for optimism.

Oppression and injustice cry out for forceful action and offend a loving God. But, the slave master’s tools cannot break the master’s chains. Successful transformation depends on vision (prophetic witness), inspired strategy and the health of the change community. It may well be that the key gift to us from early Friends is less the reality of our unmediated access to continuing revelation than the acknowledgement of the inner struggle to be faithful to the seed of God within.

Madlala-Routledge reminded us that the “search for Peace is always a collective effort. It starts with truth-telling, incorporates justice tinged with Mercy...and a lot of meeting with other fully-as-flawed human beings.” She gave us a careful accounting of the successes and continuing challenges of South Africa’s experience with Truth and Reconciliation.

