



Intent and Behavior: Closing the Gap by Sterling E. Freeman, Executive Director

On January 6th, 2006 the William C. Friday Fellows of the Wildacres Leadership Initiative (WLI) and the Senior Fellows of the Lee Institute (Lee) met on the campus of Queens University of Charlotte. The group -- university administrators, philanthropists, business people, community builders, environmentalists, legal and health care professionals - was a sectoral potpourri, emitting the aroma of a common interest - ethical leadership.

Dr. Bill Grace, founder and former director of the Center for Ethical Leadership, was our teacher, instigator and motivator for the day. Dr. Grace offered himself as a resource, experienced in the field of leadership development. Refreshingly, he did not cast himself in the role of universal, flawless authority, waving a pristine palm and promoting a "5 step program" to the resolution of all of our ethical dilemmas. Rather he invited us to wrestle with him, as co-laborers - fallible and imperfect - in the struggle to be ethical leaders.

Dr. Grace admonished us to be careful of words (moral intent) and more conscious of our feet (behavior), and when we see them on divergent paths, act to close the gap. Closing the gap requires commitment to core values and courage to integrate them in our daily practice. He noted immanent scholar Cornel West, who suggests that we must speak truth to power in love. To power and in love are not mutually exclusive, but inextricably linked. Without the former, those figures who are in positions to help stimulate the moral barometer are left unchallenged and change is left stuck in the proverbial fantasyland. Without the latter, incivility and combativeness heightens the risk of aborting proposed change. The combination of the two calls moral influencers, whatever the context - local, state, national, international communities -- to account, and makes it easier for them to hear that call. And when we speak truth to power in love, let our witness be wrapped in the conviction that we can all do better. We can live better, act better, treat one another better, make better decisions, create better communities and leave this world a better place. Having hope is the key.

What Dr. Grace offers is thoughtful, provocative and of benefit to anyone who is serious about closing the gap.