

Pastoral Care *Newsletter*



*For Member Care Committees,
Ministry and Counsel, Overseers,
and others who provide pastoral care
in unprogrammed Friends' meetings.*

Vol. 14, No. 4, June 2007

Does Your Meeting Suffer from a “Lightness Deficiency”? by Jacob Stone

We need not look far into the history of Quakerism to find a time when we were a solemn and humorless group. Our work among Friends and non-Friends was a serious endeavor that Friends believed was best approached with sobriety and intensity. The 1834 quote shown at right, or some version of it, appeared in every book of discipline from the 18th and 19th centuries, urging Friends to avoid pleasurable pastimes.

Friends have evolved, and the specter of a disapproving “watchful eye” is largely a thing of the past, but a remnant of that image may linger among newcomers. If we can “lighten” our meetings, we can enrich our own lives as Friends and make our meetings more welcoming to new attenders.

A meeting that suffers from a “lightness deficiency” might be missing opportunities to build a strong and joyful community, to effectively welcome new attenders, to help Friends be less anxious about our worship and business processes, and to help members and attenders (dare I use this word?) *enjoy* our time together in worship, work—and in play.

What do I mean by “lightness”? It is a concept that doesn't lend itself to precise definition. I am alluding to a community:

- That sees having fun together as part of a full and meaningful life;
- That recognizes fun and humor as a useful response to the intense work of a meeting and its committees, and understands that approaching this work with some lightness can enhance our effectiveness;
- That consistently welcomes and nurtures newcomers and offers the opportunity for everyone—newcomers, members and attenders—

“As our time passeth swiftly away, and our delight ought to be in the law of the Lord, it is advised that a watchful care be exercised over our youth and others, to prevent their going to stage-plays, horse races, music, dancing, or any such vain sports and pastimes.” from *Faith and Practice*, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1834

“In his cool sunglasses and his bright Hawaiian shirt, Foxy George is telling



Friends a little fun won't hurt.” The words of

Foxy George, 2002, the fictional alter ego of the Quaker band, Faith and Practice; “The Foxy George Song” was written by Gretta Stone.

to feel joyfully connected to a community of seekers;

- That welcomes humorous self-examination;
- That fosters enduring personal friendships.

I believe that this “lightness” is consistent with our historic but evolving testimonies, and can offer our meetings new energy and participation. It is useful to consider why we may be viewed as overly serious, and why this might inhibit some attenders from joining fully in the life of a meeting. Here are some possible reasons:

- Our form of worship and business can seem arcane and opaque to newcomers. If our processes

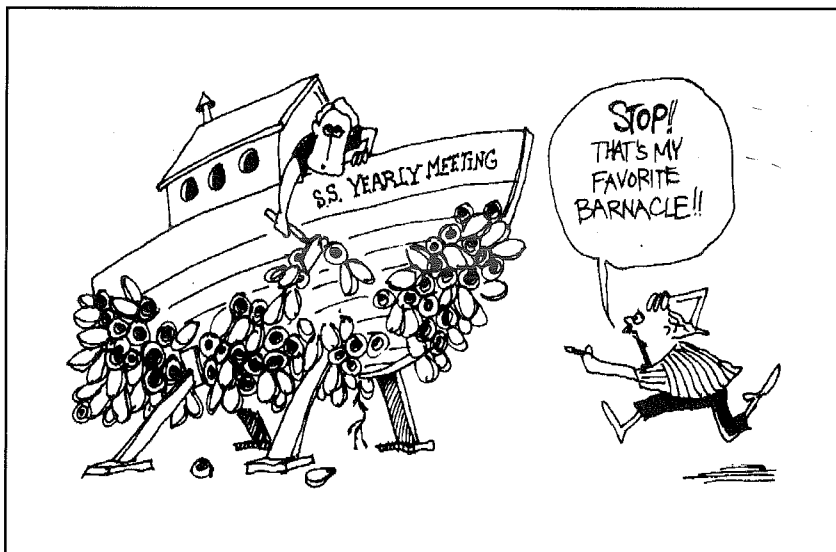
seem inaccessible, it might follow that visitors perceive us to be inaccessible as well. Quakerism is best learned through the slow process of osmosis.

When we can offer true community while new friends learn about Quakerism, they are far more likely to trust the gradual growth of insight and knowledge. It is also useful to help newcomers realize (and for others to remember) that questions and doubts are part of our journey of ongoing growth and revelation, and that joy can comfortably coexist with uncertainty.

- Our ambiguity about outreach, while firmly rooted in our testimonies, sometimes leads us to be so passive about welcoming newcomers that we appear unwelcoming. We have a rich opportunity to make our outreach more active and enjoyable without appearing to be evangelizing.

- Our history of being serious still instructs and informs our lives as Friends. Even if this culture may be seen by some as only a fading afterglow, it is still a reality in many of our meetings, and affects the spirit of all that we do, both in and out of meeting for worship.

We can challenge these historic images by seeking to make our meeting communities sources of fun and joy. There's no special secret to encouraging fun and social connection. Anything that helps us to become friends (small "f" friends) and helps us find fun and joy will add an important dimension to the life of the meeting. It will help everyone see the meeting as a hub in our lives that includes light times,



as well as spiritual growth.

I would like to suggest measures that a meeting can take if it discerns that more "lightness" is rightly ordered. They include conducting programs and activities that encourage fun, conversation and social connection (these may or may not have a manifestly Quaker theme), and considering how meeting for worship can retain its meaning as the centerpiece of Quaker life while becoming a bit lighter.

Programs that Encourage Social Connection

Programs that encourage social connection are, in effect, a form of sustained welcoming, but in a format that is informal and relaxed. Framing these social activities as sustained welcoming might energize a meeting's efforts to plan and carry out social activities. There are some time-honored approaches to this that a meeting can utilize.

Participatory music can be a wonderful community builder. **Group singing** is inviting because it is a safe and fun venue for people who might be nervous about an evening of worship sharing or discussing social justice issues. All a meeting needs to have a sing-along is a guitarist or two—every meeting probably has them or can recruit them—some copies of "Rise Up Singing" and/or "Worship in Song," and an open invitation to members and attendees. (It is particularly useful to extend personal one-to-one invitations to newcomers.) Holding the sing-along at the home of a member or attendee enhances the friendship building



since it helps us know each other more intimately. Add in a potluck dinner and an evening of fun and building community is assured.

When we were at Doylestown Meeting, sing-alongs were frequent events fueled by the serendipitous presence of a number of acoustic musicians. Many meeting newcomers found friendships, a sense of belonging, and full entry into the life of Doylestown Meeting through these gatherings. Another result of these sing-alongs was the founding of "Faith and Practice," a bluegrass/folk band dedicated to the proposition that Quakerism, fun and music are eminently compatible. The band's motto was "When Good Quakers Go Bad," and it is the only band in history to play "Love Potion Number Nine" at the annual sessions of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. The audience had fun, the band had fun, and PYM still thrives despite being subjected to a "vain pastime."

For many years, our meeting arranged an annual expedition to a **major league baseball game**. Each of these outings gave us opportunities to simply have fun together and get to know each other better. One cannot imagine a Friends meeting doing this in 1900. Another time we organized a meeting outing to a **jug band concert**. Not a single religious song was sung, but the twenty-five of us who participated had a glorious opportunity to bond in a different way than would have been possible within the meetinghouse.

Another approach to getting to know each other better can take place as part of a meeting's **adult forums**, configured as opportunities for members

Thanks to Pulitzer Prize winning cartoonist, Signe Wilkinson and *Friends Journal* for permission to use cartoons and graphics, just for fun.



and attenders to share their interests, passions and adventures with others in the meeting. This can be far more than just a "show-and-tell" session; it is a way for presenters to share the things that give meaning and depth to their lives. Many years ago when I was asked to present a forum about my passion for the poetry of Walt Whitman, I felt honored to have been asked and those in attendance learned something about me that they had not known. It fostered enduring connections and it was a valuable event for me in my relationship with the meeting.

I write this on the evening after Santa Cruz (CA) Friends Meeting—our new Quaker home—finished its annual meeting retreat at BenLomond Quaker Center. The theme of the weekend was to invite members and attenders to share their gifts, with minimal structure or format. The dining room was filled with members' and attenders' artwork; music was performed; poetry was read; a family genealogy history was presented, and — most

important of all—old friendships were strengthened, new friendships were forged, and a sense of lightness, joy and laughter infused the entire weekend. We got to know each other in a profound and rewarding way and had a good time too.

Lightening Meeting for Worship

It might seem to you that "lightening" the centerpiece of the Quaker communal experience would weaken it and demean our historical practices. I am not suggesting that we turn meeting for worship into the "Sunday Morning Quaker Comedy Hour." Each meeting has its own culture of messages, but a meeting might want to evaluate whether its culture encourages intensity or welcomes both serious and

lighter messages.

One might wonder how to change the culture of messages in a meeting. Perhaps it is best done when longtime Friends occasionally model different—lighter—styles of sharing messages. When some messages have a “lightness,” this might encourage messages from others who might have been reticent about vocal ministry. This is important, because sharing messages in meeting for worship is an important step in the journey toward feeling fully part of the community.

When new attenders see that someone they consider “weighty” has a light-hearted message, they someday might be ready to offer messages as well. The entire process of vocal ministry can be made more accessible to members and attenders, I believe, through this “lightening” process. Worship and Ministry committees might want to initiate a discernment process about this opportunity.

Questions for Reflection

1. Is our meeting experienced as a place of warmth and fun and joy?
2. What impression do new seekers have of our meeting community?
3. How do we bring generations together so they can know each other better and enjoy each other's company?
4. How does our meeting plan events or work projects so that they are a way to have fun together rather than just a task reserved for a specific committee?
5. What events in our meeting bring the most joy?
6. How is music used in our meeting to bring the community together in a lighthearted way? Do we encourage young people to share those gifts?
7. In what way does our meeting reach out and share our joy with the wider community?
8. Do some people in our meeting question efforts to “lighten” the meeting? What can we learn from their perspective? How can the two perspectives be integrated in the life of the meeting?”

Sometimes the “lightness” comes by surprise if there is a communal sense that it is acceptable. One day at Doylestown Meeting, I was sharing a serious message about the meaning of disownment among Friends in the 18th century, to differentiate disownment from shunning and excommunication.

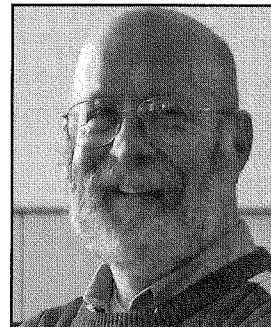
I told the meeting that a disowned Friend in the 18th century was still able to attend meeting for worship and socialize with others in the meeting, but was not permitted to participate in meeting for business. The comment caused one Friend to fail at stifling a laugh, which in turn led to everyone in attendance breaking into laughter.

The message came through clearly, but we also had a moment of shared amusement about the challenge of lengthy business meetings. I like to think that some community building came from that moment of lightness; I am very grateful for that Friend's laughter, and I'm grateful that the culture of Doylestown Meeting encouraged that laughter. I believe the entire process of vocal ministry can be made more accessible to members and attenders, and more pleasurable for newcomers, through this “lightening” process.

Friends, we have a rich and wonderful history with traditions that nurture us and hold us together. Building this warm and welcoming community—a community of people who can work, worship, sing and laugh together—resonates with our valued traditions as we interpret them today. With the passing centuries Quakerism has evolved, and a part of this evolution includes recognizing the truth of Foxy George's message that “a little fun won't hurt.”

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Jacob Stone and his wife Gretta are longtime members of Doylestown Monthly Meeting in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. They are currently serving as co-directors of the Ben Lomond Quaker Center in Ben Lomond, California, and sojourning at Santa Cruz Friends Meeting (Pacific Yearly Meeting). They served as Friends in Residence at Chena Ridge Friends Meeting, in Fairbanks, AK and have been leading couples enrichment programs through the FGC for twelve years. They were also founding members of the bluegrass/folk band, Faith and Practice that brought “lightness” and joy to so many of their listeners.



Jacob Stone

One Meeting's Experience

Fort Collins Meeting Members of All Ages Enjoy "Fun-raisers"

Fort Collins Friends Meeting is a young meeting, organized in 1984. We started worshipping in homes of Friends and later moved to various spaces. Finally in 1994 we acquired a meetinghouse and truly began to grow. Along the way, we have enjoyed creating a wide variety of multi-purpose events that have helped us to grow and have fun together as a worshipping community.

One First Day each August, we hold Meeting for Worship outside at a member's ranch where we gather around a fire circle in a grove of cottonwood trees. The ranch dogs join us and quietly wander about during worship. This event helps keep families with children in the meeting. The First Day School also meets outside on the farmhouse patio and we always have a wonderful potluck lunch there, too. Worshipping outdoors brings a sense of peace and tranquility.

Many committees in the meeting are involved in community building—the work gets done and, as a bonus, we have fun. The Finance Committee has organized an annual "gourmet dinner" as a fundraiser. Members and attenders of all ages provide food, beverages, and labor. We sell tickets to our friends and acquaintances and always enjoy the food and company. Besides being a fund-raiser and fun-raiser, it is a form of outreach to non-Friends.

The Religious Education Committee sponsors an annual tent camping trip over a weekend in August at a group campsite in the Poudre River canyon about 45 minutes from town. We sing, tell stories, do crafts, cook, roast marshmallows, worship, and go tubing in the river. If it rains (it has only once in four years), we gather in a picnic pavilion with a cozy fireplace to hang out, tell stories, and spend happy times together. This time allows us to bond as a group. Adults help kids with tubing and everyone cooks and shares meals.

This committee also sponsors an annual ski/snow boarding/sledding trip in January to Snowy Range in nearby Wyoming. The committee encourages all children to attend—with or without parents! Not all Friends are avid outdoors people; others enjoy spending this time with children and youth who are learning alpine sports. Many of the kids feel that the ski trip is something they love about the meeting community. Other Religious Education activities that kids have enjoyed are rock

climbing and visits to an amusement park.

Adult religious education Coffee House Seminars, held in local coffee houses, give young adults and newcomers a way to learn about Quakerism and to enjoy each other's company without having to prepare food or clean up. Our meeting benefits from the increased knowledge, the deepening of spiritual development, and the sense of sharing among members of the community. One year we arranged a barbecue

for adult young Friends to allow them get to know one another outside of Meeting for Worship. They enjoy one another's company and connect socially this way.

We have fun doing "serious" things as well. The Building and Grounds

Committee organized a brainstorming session to gather ideas on the design of new classroom and multipurpose spaces for First Day School, incorporating children's and adults' views in an exercise of visioning and imagining how we could be. Previously, when we were purchasing our meetinghouse, we struggled to find unity and complete all the necessary tasks. This time, everyone seemed to get behind the project and felt included.

Playing together and having fun as a community helps us to be present to each other more deeply. We experience one another's ups and downs naturally. This prepares us as individuals and families for giving and receiving help and pastoral care when it is needed.

Charlotte Miller

Fort Collins Friends Meeting

Fort Collins, CO

Shape Note Singing

Shape note singing, also known as sacred harp, is one of the ways we have fun. Our small group is almost entirely Quaker, and we gather at the meeting site weekly to sing these wonderful four-part harmonies found in the Sacred Harp book.

We don't take ourselves too seriously, nor do we worry about the theology undergirding some of the words. We happily sing about God's wrath smoking against his people, as long as the music takes us to joyful places.

We sometimes play with the words, so asking God

(continued on next page)

to melt "my frozen heart" becomes "my frozen truck." We belt out the line in "Greenfields" that asks, "And why are my winters so long?" We laugh together and share stories in between singing.

Charley Basham
Chena Ridge Meeting
Fairbanks, AK

The Ties that Bind

Richard Moses was a life-long Friend and in the custom of always wearing a dress shirt and tie to meeting. Over the years he observed that fewer and fewer of the men were coming to meeting wearing ties and he took up the practice of counting the ties being worn to worship each week. He wasn't judging the evolving fashion, just observing that times were changing.

In honor of Richard's 80th birthday, some members of the meeting got the bright idea that we should all wear ties to worship on the day of the celebration. Phone calls and e-mails swirled around reminding people to wear a

tie. Greeters at the door had a supply of ties to distribute. When we sat down for worship, whether or not it suited the shirt or dress they were wearing, nearly everyone was wearing a tie. During announcements at rise of meeting, Richard observed with great good humor that there were lots of ties in meeting that day. A visitor introduced himself and said that his experience that morning had given him a new view of Quakers. In his growing up, he said, playing children would recite the verse:

Quaker meeting has begun
No more laughter, no more fun
If we see your teeth or gums
You will pay a forfeit.

Of course, there were some sober Quakers who wondered if this was appropriate for meeting for worship. If God is love, I think that our showing love for Richard infused our meeting with both Light and lightness.

Patricia McBee
Central Philadelphia Meeting
Philadelphia, PA

CAROLYN NICHOLSON TERRELL 1921-2007

Carolyn's gift to the Pastoral Care Newsletter began with the inception of the newsletter in 1993. Her experience with writing and editing, her knowledge of Quakerism, her attendance at conferences and workshops around the world, her teaching experience and work with young children, her study of religion in college, and her interest in non-theism and Quaker Universalism, made her a rich resource on the PCN Working Group.

The gifts for which we will miss her the most were her thorough editing skills and her radar, which could always find the hidden mistake or typo. Even at the end of her life, when her compromised balance kept her close to home, Carolyn scrutinized each issue.

PCN has lost a loving and helpful friend. In her honor, we have kept her name in our masthead for this issue

Resources

A number of Quaker websites offer ideas for community building, intergenerational activities and youth activities. Chestnut Hill Monthly Meeting's website has fun ideas.

quaker.org/chestnuthill/potpouri.html
fgcquaker.org/library/ministry/ideas5.html
pym.org/education (Ideas for Teaching First Day School)
westernquaker.net/quaker_humor.htm
fgcquaker.org/library/teachingresources/video-scavenger.html
pym.org/education/relednews/2003-09.htm

Spirit Games: 300 Fun Activities That Bring Children Comfort And Joy, by Barbar Sher, Wiley 2002.

The Quaker Way, FGC, illustrated By Signe Wilkinson, Quaker Press of FGC 1998.

Rise Up Singing, 15th Anniversary Edition, edited by Annie & Peter Blood-Patterson, Sing Out 2004
Worship In Song, A Friends Hymnal, Quaker Press of FGC 1996.

The above four publications are available from Quaker Books of FGC, 800-966-4556.

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