

Pastoral Care *Newsletter*

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

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Four Paths on the Journey to Spiritual Enrichment

Editor's Note: In this expanded issue, the Pastoral Care Newsletter presents four articles, each one defining a different aspect of spiritual enrichment as practiced among Friends today. Elizabeth Meyer provides a detailed overview of her yearly meeting's program; Michael Resman describes how small groups might adapt a yearly meeting's program; Beckey Phipps and Deborah Fisch report how FGC's Traveling Ministries Program seeks to serve the spiritual needs of many different meetings; and Margery Mears Larrabee writes about the one-to-one personal experience of spiritual friendship.

BYM's Spiritual Formation Program Enriches Lives by Elizabeth Meyer

For more than 20 years, the Spiritual Formation Program has been enriching the spiritual lives of Friends and strengthening monthly meetings in Baltimore Yearly Meeting. The program invites its participants into a deeper experience of God's presence through retreats, devotional readings, spiritual community and individual spiritual practices.

Spiritual Formation provides a practical way for people in our busy culture to turn to God with their minds through spiritual reading, with their hearts through daily spiritual practices and with their human relationships through local friendship groups.



Elizabeth Meyer

Participants attend retreat weekends at the beginning and end of the Spiritual Formation Program year (September through May). During the program year, participants attend two meetings per month: the monthly meeting of the local group to share reflections on a spiritual book that all have agreed to read and the monthly meeting of the friendship group, a subset of the local group—usually three to five people—who meet to share spiritual journeys and to support one another in spiritual practices.

In addition, each participant is expected to devote at least 15 minutes per day to a spiritual practice. Those who make this commitment are rewarded with a closer relationship with God and an opportunity to form deep spiritual friendships. Later in this article, I will expand on these elements.

The program serves Friends (and meeting attenders) who are at many stages of their spiritual journeys. Those who are new to Friends find that the program is an effective way to learn about Quaker spirituality and to form personal friendships within the meeting. Long-time Friends, experiencing a period of spiritual dryness or burned out with committee work, turn to the program for spiritual renewal. Friends who are beginning to feel God's call into service and who want to explore their gifts and leadings

in community find that the program meets their needs. The program meets all of its participants wherever they are in the journey, and all benefit when the group includes Friends with a variety of backgrounds and reasons for participating.

The Spiritual Formation Program changed my life. Like many convinced Friends, I was attracted to Quakerism because of its mystical faith and its commitment to put faith into practice through social action. I knew that Quakerism was a way of life rather than just an activity for Sunday, but in my busy life of lawyer, wife and mother, I could barely even manage to get to meeting on Sunday.

Moreover, meeting for worship was not particularly satisfying because I had not undergone any spiritual preparation during the week. Nor did I feel especially connected to others at the meeting; they were nice people, but I did not feel part of a real spiritual community.

I knew there was more to the spiritual experience of being a Quaker, but I did not know how to find it. I asked myself, "Am I really a Quaker, or am I just a faker?"

Being a Quaker was part of my identity. But I was so wrapped up in the importance of being Quaker that I was really worshipping Quakerism rather than worshipping God. Of course, in worshipping Quakerism, I congratulated myself on having been smart enough to find and join the best religion in the world, so I was really just worshipping myself. Self-worship, or self-centeredness, is a human tendency. Humans are naturally self-centered, but God calls us to become God-centered.

A self-centered life is an empty life. I had everything I had ever wanted: a lovely family and home, a good job and interesting career, but I felt unhappy and empty at the core. No amount of worldly activity, material possessions or even satisfying personal relationships could fill the void. I needed to feel God's presence in my life, and the program provided a structure to seek God in spiritual community.

I found that as I participated in the program,

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the Spirit was showing me, little by little, how to turn myself to God. God was forming me and molding me as a potter molds clay, and the program gave me spiritual friends with whom to share the experience. God continues to form me; this is a life-long process. As my life has become more God-centered, I feel a sense of God's presence and awesome power, which leads me into service.

In addition to enriching the spiritual lives of individuals, the Spiritual Formation Program benefits monthly meetings by building community, nurturing spirit-led ministries, and developing spirit-led leadership.

A local spiritual formation group is a building block of community for the larger meeting. As Spiritual Formation participants deepen their spiritual lives, they are better prepared to discern how God may be calling them to serve. Their

vocal ministry now comes from a deeper spiritual experience, and their service ministries spring from an even deeper commitment to do God's work. The local spiritual formation group is a place where leadership can be nurtured and leadership gifts practiced and tested. Here are the program's five important elements:

Opening Retreat Weekend

The retreat is the opening event in September providing an introduction to the program and a chance for participants to begin forming a spiritual community. We set an expectation of spiritual hospitality for the year, asking participants to accept each other just as we are.

Spiritual Formation Groups

Throughout the year, local groups meet monthly for a potluck meal followed by worship sharing centered on a book or pamphlet that the group has agreed to read. A local group may be any size, but a group of 8 to 12 people is ideal—large enough for interesting sharing, but small enough so that each member can be heard.

Spiritual Practices

We ask each participant to take on a spiritual practice for at least 15 minutes per day. Spiritual practices include prayer, meditation, contemplation, scripture study, journal keeping, yoga, and walking meditation. A practice is right for us if it brings us closer to God, regardless of whether we rigidly follow some traditional practice. Some participants create their own practices or customize a practice for their own needs through variations or combinations of traditional practices.

Friendship Groups

Within each local group, several subsets of three to five people will form friendship groups. Each friendship group meets monthly, and its members serve as companions for one another in the spiritual journey. The group may share conversation over a meal followed by a time of deep worship sharing.

The friendship group is a safe place to share concerns from one's past and present struggles with faith and spiritual practices. As spiritual friends share deeply from their own experiences and as they feel tender listening, the sense of

community deepens. By the end of the year, the members of the friendship group feel closely bonded. Lifetime friendships are formed, and many friendship groups continue to meet on a regular basis after the Program year concludes.

Closing Retreat

At the end of the year, we hold a closing retreat for the participants from the various local groups to come back together in celebration of the year of spiritual growth. There we share our spiritual gifts and begin to discern where God may be leading for the future.

Many other yearly meetings and monthly meetings have established spiritual formation programs based on the Baltimore Yearly Meeting Program, and we are always glad to offer assistance. For more information, contact efmeyer@comcast.net.

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Elizabeth ("Betsy") Meyer is a member of Sandy Spring Meeting in Maryland and has served as its Clerk. Betsy is part of the servant-leadership of the Baltimore Yearly Meeting Spiritual Formation Program. Recently, she has begun to serve Baltimore Yearly Meeting as Clerk of Interim Meeting.

Small Groups Adapt NYM Spiritual Nurture Program

by Michael Resman

Northern Yearly Meeting began a program intended to deepen the spiritual lives of participants in the fall of 1994. Patterned after Baltimore Yearly Meeting's Spiritual Formation program, it consisted of two weekend retreats for the whole group and local monthly gatherings of small groups. The Spiritual Nurture Program began as an ad-hoc yearly meeting committee.

NYM is a young yearly meeting and didn't have a Ministry and Nurture Committee until several years after the Spiritual Nurture Program began. That committee now has the program under its care. The primary tasks involved each year are the development of the two retreats, publicity, and forming small groups. After the first year, the small

local groups decide whether and how to continue on their own.

The Spiritual Nurture Program, and the small groups, evolved over the years. The core emphasis continued to be the formation of local groups of four to eight people. Groups were encouraged to meet monthly, respect confidentiality, choose a daily spiritual discipline and worship share about their spiritual lives.

Some of the small groups formed in 1994 continue to meet, and have played vital roles in the spiritual growth of participants and their meetings. Some small groups disbanded after a year, others evolved into groups that were more social in nature. Graduates of the program occasionally

Small Groups Adapt

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join other spiritual nurture groups in their home areas.

Spirituality is impossible to quantify, but many felt their monthly meetings and the yearly meeting becoming more spiritual. Some chose not to participate because the commitments expected of group members weren't always clearly understood. There was some tension here and there about being "in" or "not in" groups that were closed to new members once they'd begun.

Closed group membership is perhaps the most serious obstacle to the development of new programs. It is unusual in Quaker circles not to be welcoming and open. Small groups can be re-formed each year composed of members new to the program, those shifting between groups and those continuing.

Once a small group has been formed however, membership stability is important. Months will be needed for this new gathering to develop norms and formats. A deep level of trust is needed to allow the sharing that must go on if the most tender aspects of participant's lives are to be nurtured.

The small group of which I have been a member provided an opportunity to be supported by others in my meeting. We evolved away from speaking about suggested readings, finding that we preferred to hear more deeply about each other's lives. We had to learn that these were not "therapy groups" and we came to offer advice sparingly and only after the regular work was done.

The format we settled on begins with a significant period of silent worship, broken when someone begins worship sharing. None are required to speak, but most members share each time. While sharing centers around our spiritual lives, other life concerns are shared as well. This is not a "head sharing" but sharing from deep within. Frequently, hurts, dreams and fears are shared here that are spoken of nowhere else.

We also include prayer requests, for we have developed the group expectation of praying for each other daily. This was an outgrowth of the original call for daily spiritual disciplines. Praying daily for someone—and knowing that they are praying for you—forms a unique bond. A level of trust and connectedness develops that transcends friendship. These bonds in turn form unseen, unspoken supports that deepen the development of community within our monthly meeting.

The deceptively simple acts of sharing and listening have proved to be very powerful. To be listened to, with focus and an open heart, is quite rare. When speaking in our group, we frequently discover something coming out of our mouths about our own lives that is a revelation to ourselves. The opportunity to be most deeply who we are—flaws, triumphs and all—allows us to become something more.

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The knowledge that we will be expected to share about our lives provides an element of accountability that has been very fruitful. We know that members will hear what we say, and what we don't. Deep listening leaves little room for the glib rationalizations that come so easily. Knowing that I will be sharing inspires me to pay attention and stay faithful day by day to this sometimes difficult spiritual work.

Successful groups require each participant to commit to deepening their spiritual life, attend meetings, respect confidentiality and learn to share and listen deeply. With these elements we no longer have to walk alone on our spiritual journeys. Within this safe, predictable structure, we listen each other into growing.

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Michael Resman is a retired Occupational Therapist. He currently clerks the Rochester (MN) Friends Meeting and Northern Yearly Meeting's Building Management Committee. His publications include the Pendle Hill Pamphlet, Special Education as a Spiritual Journey and the novel Iron Finns, coming out this summer. He has co-lead workshops on mysticism at Pendle Hill, the FGC Gathering and his yearly meeting.

Spiritual Friendships Foster Deep Listening, Sharing

by Margery Mears Larrabee

At the heart of any Spiritual Friendship relationship is a time set aside for Spirit-led listening, a time for each to speak about what's in his or her heart while the other listens deeply. The focus is on one's relationship to God—how one maintains that connection and how one has or has not responded to the Spirit in one's daily life. It is an opportunity to be reminded of our true nature and the life we are called to live.

One person tells of her experience with spiritual friendship this way: "Having someone interested enough to listen and able to understand what I am saying, to be heard and understood, somehow gives substance to a seeking that one may tend to dismiss as not relevant to the 'real world.'"

While a spiritual aspect may be naturally a part of an ongoing friendship, it generally is helpful to plan for a structured time apart to focus on the substance of the spiritual friendship. Such a time might include, in addition to Spirit-led listening, prayer and sharing what you have journaled. Other choices might include worship, worship sharing, study, consideration of personal disciplines and practices, relevant exercises, and/or support activities.

Spiritual friends may adopt practices such as avoiding criticism, choosing to relate to that of God in others, and acting from a spiritual perspective in various ways in one's daily life. Thus the relationship between God and each of us is strengthened and we are held accountable for what we are called to be.

Another Friend reports: "It's been ... a real intentional friendship, and a good way to nurture my spiritual life. It's helped me work through issues I was dealing with and helped me stay disciplined."

One might get started in a spiritual friendship

in different ways. It may be initiated by an individual inviting a specific other person to join in a spiritual friendship. Or the meeting's spiritual nurture committee may offer to help establish spiritual friendships in the meeting. Initially, it helps if one person is led to begin a friendship with another person, try it out, and learn from it. Supporting two other people in forming a friendship and learning from their experience might be the next step.

Continuing as two separate spiritual friendships is optional, or the four people might join together to make a small group. Those who are truly led to carry forward the idea of spiritual friendship should first have the experience themselves. Then, when it seems right, go to a committee of the monthly meeting to share information about developing a program within the meeting and to seek spiritual and financial support. To be informed and connected with spiritual friendship activity is of great value to the monthly meeting. Having a program in the monthly meeting in no way precludes developing spiritual friendships independently. However, having the community involved enriches and deepens the experience.

As the number of spiritual friendships grow it can be helpful to hold a meeting of everyone involved periodically to which newly interested people are invited. New people will get a sense of what the program is about by attending this session. Experienced people have the opportunity to hear what each other's experience is like and to have a guest presenter shares perspective on some topic such as prayer, continuing revelation, or something that is of interest to the group.

In time, several of those experienced in spiritual friendships may create a support committee, which can help with the formation

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Spiritual Friendships

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of new groups and be available for questions that come up. I have written two pamphlets about spiritual friendship. The appendix of "There is a Hunger,"* contains a description of how to set up a program, which includes recommendations for small group planning such as how often to meet, where to meet, what guidelines are needed for the meeting, choosing a focus for the meeting and so forth.

"Spiritual Friendship"* shares in detail the various aspects of living out a spiritual friendship and includes a variety of quotations from those who have actually experienced spiritual friendship.

TMP: Spiritual Enrichment for Meeting Communities

by Deborah Fisch and Beckey Phipps

Since it was established, the Traveling Ministries Program (TMP) of Friends General Conference has coordinated the visits of seasoned Friends to over 300 meetings and groups in the US, Canada, and Australia.

In 1997 a small group of Friends, including the clerks of several FGC committees, felt a leading to develop a program that would coordinate travel by committee members and others they knew who were called to public ministry. Their hope was to spiritually enrich the meetings that FGC serves, while revitalizing the classic Quaker practice of travel in the ministry. In the keeping with tradition, the TMP was clear to send Friends out in pairs to companion each other in growing deeper in faithful service.

In visits that have now touched the lives of possibly thousands of Quakers, there is much the TMP has discovered about the spiritual condition of Friends, which will likely resonate with the readers of PCN. Quakers are hungry for their meetings to be more than a place to worship for one hour on First Day—they yearn to be engaged members of vibrant spiritual communities. Friends inform us that they need

I close with another quote from one of the participants: "I have now learned that there's a different element of trust with spiritual friendships, so that makes it safe."

*See Resources.

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Margery Mears Larrabee of Mt. Holly (NJ) Meeting, is a teacher, leader, and facilitator of workshops and retreats in monthly meetings, yearly meetings and Friends General Conference. She is an elder and minister in FGC's Traveling Ministries, graduate of the School of the Spirit and Shalem, attender and teacher at the Servant Leadership School. Author of several essays and Pendle Hill pamphlets, she was an initiator of Friends Counseling Service, Spiritual Friendship Formation Program, and Friends Servant Leadership Institute. She is a proud grandmother.

others in their meetings to truly know them—what Friends once called "knowing each other in that which is eternal." TMP visitors often hear that meetings do not know how to care for members and attenders in ways that are spiritually encouraging.

Quakers also labor to find ways to share their experiences of being faithful to the Divine, without being afraid of insulting others or being criticized for being too Christian, too liberal, etc. Friends who are called to ministry look to their meetings to nurture their gifts of the Spirit, and to hold them lovingly accountable for deepening their faithfulness through effective clearness and support. Meetings are searching for ways to care for the spiritual gifts of members, while gaining understanding of what it means to come under the weight of those gifts—corporately.

Goals of the Program

The Traveling Ministry Program was created to help meet such needs and to foster spiritual connections among Quakers. We accomplish our goals in these primary ways:

- Responding to requests from meetings

for seasoned Friends to visit, lead retreats and workshops, and to provide various forms of ministry and spiritual nurture for the meeting community (e.g. Spirit-centered listening, teaching ministry, understanding gospel order, naming and nurturing spiritual gifts, supporting public Friends called to ministries beyond their home meetings);

- Assisting Friends called to travel in the ministry under a particular concern, including help with discernment, finding companions in the ministry, and coordinating travel arrangements;
- Assisting Friends who are led to travel in the ministry without any agenda, other than being faithful to Divine promptings to worship with meetings and seeking other opportunities for fellowship.

Needs of Meetings

The foundational practice of the TMP is spiritual discernment. The TMP coordinator, with the assistance of the members of the Traveling Ministries Committee, listens carefully to Friends who serve their meetings in pastoral ways, such as clerks and members of Ministry and Counsel (or equivalent), as well as to Friends called to travel. Friends may lack clarity about what their meetings need.

Several conversations may be needed to sense how to respond, including which Friends might have the particular gifts and experience to serve a meeting. It is also common that clarity about the true spiritual needs of a meeting is only reached when the TMP visitors arrive—when they are able to listen to what is both said and unsaid—or afterwards, when the ministry begins to sink down and do its transformative work.

One meeting contacted the TMP for assistance with discernment how to wisely use some precious resources. Friends had differing ideas about their right use; they had been at an impasse for so long it had hindered some relationships and their ability to deal with other business of the meeting. It was clear to the TMP

visitors that, at the base of the meeting's conflict, was a need to listen to each other with freshness and care. The presence of a sensitive minister, and companion in the ministry, provided an opportunity for Friends to feel for their unity with renewed tenderness. The visit helped them experience the hope and possibility of being in gospel order—feeling themselves in a rightly ordered loving relationship under the guidance of the Spirit. Both visitors and the visited felt a cherished tie afterwards.

More Opportunities

To broaden its service to Friends the TMP also offers small gatherings and programs that foster connections among Friends, such as:

- Bi-annual consultations where yearly meetings send representatives to worship

Questions for Reflection

1. How does our meeting encourage personal spiritual practices among members and attenders? What can we do to strengthen our practice?
2. What is the role of the pastoral care committee in helping to deepen the meeting's practice?
3. How do we convey the essence of the inner life to members and attenders?
3. How do we help members discern gifts of the Spirit and the call to serve? How are these gifts understood and shared? How do we nurture one another's spiritual gifts?
4. What can we do to more fully foster a Spirit-led sense in all dimensions of the meeting's life including committee meetings and meetings for business?
5. How do we encourage and nurture those who are nurturing the life of the Spirit in our meeting?

Traveling Ministries

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and share with each other what their meetings are doing to nurture ministry in all its forms. Last fall nearly 60 Friends attended a special consultation for Friends with emerging gifts in gospel ministry.

- Annual retreats for Friends who travel in the ministry—that they might benefit from each other's experiences.

One retreat focused on how meetings can nurture those called to ministry; attendees were invited to bring a Friend from their care/support committee or Ministry and Counsel committee to learn more about the challenges and needs of public Friends.

Most recently a retreat provided 50 Friends the opportunity to learn a mutually supportive group practice for growing in faithfulness.

The Traveling Ministries Program welcomes Friends involved in pastoral care in their meetings to contact us if they would like to discern together how we might help spiritually enrich their meetings.

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Deborah Fisch, of Paullina Monthly Meeting, Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative), is associate secretary for Programs and Traveling Ministries for Friends General Conference. She serves as clerk of IYM-C and travels in the ministry as Way opens.

Beckey Phipps of Fresh Pond (MA) Monthly Meeting, NEYM, serves as clerk of FGC's Traveling Ministries Program. She is a core teacher for The School of the Spirit's new program, The Way of Ministry.

Resources

The Baltimore Yearly Meeting Spiritual Formation Program, Deepening the Spiritual Experience of Modern Friends, Elizabeth Meyer (efmeyer@comcast.net)

Companions Along the Way: Spiritual Formation Within the Quaker Tradition, Florence Ruth Kline with Marty Grundy, eds., Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 2000 (<http://www.pym.org>)

FGC's Consultation on Calling Forth & Nurturing Gifts of Ministry (<http://www.fgcquaker.org/connect/spring00/2.html>)

Listening Spirituality: Volume 1, Personal Spiritual Practices Among Friends, Patricia Loring, Opening Press, 1997.

Gospel Order: A Quaker Understanding of Faithful Church Community, Sandra Cronk, (Pendle Hill Pamphlet, No. 297)

On Living With a Concern for Gospel Ministry, Brian Drayton, Quaker Press of FGC, 2006

Members One of Another: The Dynamics of Membership in Quaker Meeting, Tom Gates, Pendle Hill Pamphlet, No. 371

Tall Poppies: Supporting Gifts of Ministry and Eldering in the Monthly Meeting, Martha Paxson Grundy, Pendle Hill Pamphlet, No. 347

Spiritual Friendships, Liz Yeats, FGC, (<http://www.fgcquaker.org/library/fosteringmeetings/0203.html>)

There Is A Hunger, Mutual Spiritual Friendship, Margery Mears Larrabee,*

Spiritual Friendships, Kristin Henderson and Margery Mears Larrabee,*

* available from Quaker Books (quakerbooks.org), Pendle Hill (pendlehill.org/bookstore) and the author (mlarrabee3@gmail.com).

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