

**Proceedings of:
WCTS Ministers/Elders
Colloquium
Reflecting the Light:
Answering the Call**

I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob, I will gather the survivors of Israel; I will set them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture; it will resound with people.
—Micah 2:12 (NRSV)

**October 6-9, 2017
Cenacle Retreat Center
Chicago, Illinois**

Cover painting by Jennifer Elam.

**A Publication of *What Canst Thou Say*
2017**

Organizers:

Overseers of the Colloquium: Maurine Pyle and Pamela Richards

Hospitality for Evening Programs: Mariellen Gilpin

Epistle Writing Team: Michael Resman, Mariellen Gilpin, Judy Lumb, Bill Mueller

Proceedings: Judy Lumb and Mariellen Gilpin

Speakers:

Answering the Call: Maurine Pyle (*p. 11*)

Restoration of the Art of Eldership: Paul Buckley (*p. 17*)

Clay Exercise: Jennifer Elam (*p. 21*)

Our Spiritual Calling: Lucy Davenport (*p. 25*)

Overcoming Obstacles: Dan Davenport (*p. 35*)

Covenanting of Ministers and Elders: Fernando Freire (*p. 51*)

Invited Participants:

- Participants were invited who show evidence of making a commitment to ministry with some history of doing so.
- Elders were invited who have supported ministers.
- Louise Wilson's spiritual autobiography *Inner Tenderings* was required pre-reading.

Invitation

WCTS Ministers/Elders Colloquium

Theme: Reflecting the Light: Answering the Call

In any phase of the ministry we are reflecting—the light we find in others, the presence of Spirit, the light our elders have given us.

Overview: For this four-day event we are using the term “colloquium” rather than “retreat.” Its definition in this context will be: a conversation, a dialogue, and a formal presentation of papers. We will be looking back to a time when such conferences were held at Quaker Hill at Richmond, Indiana, with invitations to seasoned elders and ministers from all four branches of Quakerism. The consultation was hosted by the Earlham School of Religion over a few years inviting the most seasoned elders in the Religious Society of Friends in the 1980s to participate in considering a selected theme. Louise Wilson, recorded minister of North Carolina Yearly Meeting, was one of the main presenters at a consultation held in 1985 which was attended by Maurine Pyle. We are recommending that her autobiography be a pre-reading for each participant as a means of connecting us with the traditional Quakerism of the 20th Century. Much wisdom about discerning spiritual gifts has dissipated in the 21st century, but we are “under the weight of a concern” to restore the practice of eldership in our times.

We are seeking well-seasoned Friends to attend the colloquium, not newcomers. This program will be announced to a selected group of Quakers from different branches who have wisdom and experience. We are looking for people who have given evidence of their commitment to service or who are seasoning a calling into being ministers or elders. We also are inviting younger elders or ministers who have an emerging call into service. Each person will be individually invited to attend so there will be no general advertisement of the program.

The program design is formal presentations by speakers followed by small group interactions around the content of their speeches. Covenant groups will be formed among participants to encourage further support in the tradition of Ministers and Elders.

Some Queries to Consider:

- How will Spirit open the way for a renewal of authentic power in the Society of Friends?
- What are the difficulties we face with secular practices entering our communities that are replacing spiritual seeking after Truth?
- How are we being called for supporting Friends through the rising tides of secularization?
- How are we leading emerging ministers among us to discover their gifts and to have them recognized and supported under the care of the meeting?
- Are we genuinely engaging the tradition and contributions of earlier Friends as Spirit leads?
- What is the spiritual state of our Quaker meetings and churches related to the discernment of spiritual gifts?

Epistle

Greetings to Friends everywhere from the participants in the “Ministers and Elders Colloquium” organized by *What Canst Thou Say? (WCTS)*, a Quaker journal, a meeting for worship in print:

Twenty-nine of us gathered at the Cenacle Retreat Center in Chicago October 6 – 9, 2017. Experienced ministers and elders were invited from a number of the branches of Quakerism, the diversity of which enriched the gathering. The two planners and one of the group leaders fell sick at the last minute. Other Friends stepped up at a few minutes’ notice. Those of us who like everything planned were a little cranky, but we marveled at the miracles and mischief of the Holy Spirit manifested among us. Some Friends expressed concern about the diminishment of the Christian base of the Religious Society of Friends. Other Friends shared their sense of signs of renewal among Friends that gave them hope.

In the information sent prior to the Colloquium, participants were encouraged to read the book, *Inner Tenderings* by Louise Wilson, especially chapter 11. Louise Wilson was definitely a presence among us throughout our time together.

In the opening worship one Friend shared a heartfelt message saying the Society of Friends is in deep trouble because we are not surrendering to the Holy Spirit. Another Friend said we were planting seeds every day and leaving the harvest to God. Schedules were then distributed that included the Monday morning that was empty, leaving space for the Holy Spirit, and the Saturday morning worship was extended in response to the Friend’s concern. Several Friends served as elders holding the gathering in the Light for an hour each morning before breakfast.

Paul Buckley spoke about “Restoring the Art of Eldering,” at its core: “see the Light, turn toward the Light, follow the Light.” Jennifer Elam tapped into our creativity as we played with clay and then wrote our impressions. Lucy Davenport spoke on “Laying Claim to our Calling” and Dan Davenport offered some resources and reflections on II Corinthians 12:1-10, after which we met in small groups to consider queries.

Fernando Freire facilitated a Spirit-led discussion of “Covenanting,” after which we broke into our same small groups to ponder passages from Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 8:6-13, and the Journal of George Fox on covenants and talk of our own experience about the possibilities to form covenants from this Colloquium. On Monday morning sitting we heard reports from those small groups and discussed options for forming covenants among ourselves. All presentations and other reflections from participants will be published in the Proceedings, which will be available online on the WCTS website <whatcanstthousay.org> after the first of 2018.

Evening sessions included an “Open-Mic” with poetry, essays, stories, and songs, and the second night of Interest Groups. John Edminister led an Interest Group on “Searching Early Quaker Online Resources with the help of the Quaker Bible Index and the Digital Quaker Collection.” Paul Buckley led an Interest Group on Early Friends. Mariellen Gilpin and Judy Lumb led an Interest Group on the journal WCTS in which several themes were developed for future issues, along with volunteers to be Guest Editors for those issues.

One Friend summed up the Colloquium as a “Love Banquet” and we are all taking home left-overs.

Why did What Canst Thou Say Organize Ministers and Elders Colloquium?

Mariellen Gilpin, Judy Lumb, and Mike Resman

In 2012 the editorial team (Mariellen Gilpin, Judy Lumb, and Mike Resman) for *What Canst Thou Say?* (WCTS) met in person for the first time, at least for this group of editors. On our agenda was how to insure the longevity of WCTS beyond us. We looked at each other and said, “We should have a gathering.”

As we planned our first gathering, everything fell together easily. Even though we were quite late, Earlham College was willing and able to host our gathering, “Sharing Our Stories: The First Annual Gathering of Friendly Mystics” the next June. We advertised only through WCTS and 45 participants from our writers and readers signed up. We had no real program, no facilitators, no committees, no business, only “Sharing our Stories.” We split up arbitrarily into small groups for intimate exchanges. We had two time slots for Interest Groups and 15 rooms, so we put out 30 sheets of paper with a room and a time on each for participants to sign up with topics they wanted to lead and those they wanted to attend. That worked beautifully. All participants were seasoned Friends and groups proceeded in good order. It was a wonderful reunion with many people meeting for the first time after knowing each other in print for years.

In the midst of that first gathering, one participant had a leading that this group should “name the spiritual condition of the world.” As we planned for the next year, we added a day of extended worship to address that leading. By the time of the second gathering, we had determined we must first name our own spiritual condition, which became the theme of that gathering.

For the second gathering, “A Mystic Call,” we advertised more broadly and had 28 participants, some of whom were not seasoned Friends and the groups did not go so well without assigned facilitators, but we did address the naming of our own spiritual conditions in extended worship.

The third year we offered a Mystics Retreat, “Touching God Together,” ably facilitated by Elaine Emily. “I am a child of God, a mystic, and have been called to give voice to my experience” was the mantra of the 18 participants. From the Epistle, “As we entered extended worship, the “Prayer of the World” continued as a theme in worship with messages describing our human impact upon Earth, including the specific example of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch (thousands of square miles of plastic in the ocean) which led to a lament and a chant to Yemaya, the Yoruba goddess of the ocean. One participant said she felt this heart-felt worship fulfilled that leading to name the spiritual condition of the world.” We published Proceedings from the first three gatherings of “Friendly Mystics” which are available on our website <whatcanstthousay.org/past-gatherings>.

Last year (2016) there were only 14 signed up and before the gathering started we planners decided it would be our last. But several of the participants were adamant that we continue these gatherings, so we looked for a way to continue. Mike had the idea that we could combine with a Traveling Ministers group, so he approached Maurine Pyle about a combination gathering.

The plan was to hold two gatherings in consort, one for the Mystics and one for the Ministers, that we would worship and eat together, but have separate programs. Maurine and Pam invited participants for the Ministers and Elders Colloquium and at one point 35 had committed to come. We advertised for the Mystics Retreat, but only two registered, so we cancelled the Mystics Retreat. Four of us (including Bill Mueller) attended the Ministers

and Elders Retreat as organizers with responsibility for registration and documentation, including drafting an Epistle and producing these Proceedings.

The WCTS editors were disheartened by the dwindling registrations for mystics retreats. After several rounds of emails after returning home, it was decided that WCTS would no longer host retreats. We invite Friends to organize gatherings of Ministers and Elders as a follow-up to this Colloquium as you are led.



Kathy Kovalik, Diane Reynolds and Tom Roberts

Answering the Call

Maurine Pyle

My Childhood Calling to Seek God

Up the Magnolia Tree*

Let your life be a story worth retelling, I always say. For me life is all about storytelling. Those ancient griots of Africa sitting around the campfire could recite all of the “begats” for their tribe, recounting tales of generation upon generation. I want to restore that storytelling tradition from a spiritual perspective, sharing the lessons I have gathered along the way.

At the heart of my story is my love for Jesus Christ and his love for me. That love has made all the difference. I was surprised and overwhelmed by his love. From the moment I embraced Jesus, my former life was overturned. My life was no longer my own. He said to me, “Lay down your life, take up your cross and follow me,” and I have been following ever since. This is a story about how I became a follower. Before that encounter with Jesus my first intention always was to lead, not to follow. And I started leading when I was very young.

My first kingdom was the magnolia tree in the front yard of my parents’ house in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I loved its smooth branches and fragrant white blossoms. There were small cones filled with bright red berries and glossy green leaves with a fuzzy undercoating perfect for

*Excerpted from my 1998 Plummer Lecture, *Follow Me* <quaker.org/plummer/1998.html>

writing secret messages. Most of all I loved being held lightly, but firmly, in her topmost branches. I suppose my mother would have scolded me had she known I was up on the highest branches, but she was always too busy with her many children to spy on me. I was up so high I could see over the trees and look down upon the glistening lake below.

As the wind blew, her branches would cradle me, gently rocking me. Although I was feeling safe as can be, had folks seen me up there, they would have pointed out the obvious danger. But this experience became the pattern of my life—taking apparent risks while feeling perfectly secure. Even then I knew that I was truly safe. For it was there atop the magnolia tree that I first learned to speak to God, to hear gentle whispers in my soul. Visions and mysteries enfolded me. There was just blessed silence, the wind and me, and the magnolia tree.

I knew even then that I could not tell others what I had learned there. Even a child knows the dividing line between everyday reality and the divine mysteries. Maybe children especially understand. They keep their mystical secrets carefully concealed until the moment comes to reveal them. High atop the magnolia tree I learned to let the winds of God blow me wherever it would.

Spiritual:

Up over my head, there's music in the air,
Up over my head, there's music in the air,
Up over my head, there's music in the air,
There must be a God somewhere.

Who Am I?

My own story and my early religious life was grounded in the Cajun Catholic culture of South Louisiana. The Cajuns (i.e. Acadians) were French settlers who were forced by the British to flee from their homes in Nova Scotia in 1756, with many of them eventually ending up in South Louisiana. They have added spice to the

American culture in their spiritual practices, as well as their famous cooking.

As a counterpoint to most of American culture, in my Cajun family we do not find it strange to hear reports of conversations with dead people or of messages from the saints. From early childhood, I knew that I could hear the voice of God speaking directly to me, telling me in which direction to go. This was not considered strange or dangerous in my religious culture.

As I was growing up, I kept searching for a way to answer the ever-present and insistent message to serve God. For a female growing up Catholic in those days, the call to service could be very troubling since the Catholic Church of the 1950s and 1960s was intensely patriarchal, a society largely closed to women. Only nuns could serve God. Anyway, I knew I wanted to be a mother; therefore, no religious path seemed open to me within the Church. As a young adult, I eventually left Catholicism quite angry over not finding acceptance of my gifts.

Later when I heard of the Quakers, I was delighted to discover their long history of equality for women. I resolved to locate their meeting houses and group members, which was not an easy task. They usually congregate in small groups that are often hidden, so my attempts to find them met with little success. Finally, it was through God's serendipity that my path crossed theirs. In 1973, my husband and I were living in Maryland. We loved to wander the countryside looking for colonial buildings. One day we spotted a "chapel-of-ease," a tiny Episcopal Church building where country residents in colonial times could worship when severe weather prevented them from going into town. As I approached the building, I saw a small sign which read "Welcome: Quaker Meeting." The following Sunday, I joined their small silent worship group. The white-washed interior filtered a pure white light. In the pristine silence, I found my joy. I was home at last!

I had been looking for a place where a woman's spirituality was respected. I joined the Liberal branch of the Religious Society of Friends in my twenties. What I discovered was that for the Friends, having a direct experience of God was normal religious practice.

At the age of 24, I was accepted into membership and made a lifelong commitment to the Quaker way. Many wonderful elders taught me by their example how to be a Friend. There was no catechism or instruction manual to guide me, only the elders gently guiding me along the path. I have been a Friend now for over 40 years, and it has been a richly rewarding lesson in how to live adventurously. Now I have become an elder whose role is leading young Friends on their adventures in spiritual development. In return, they teach me how to remain refreshed and connected to life in all its vicissitudes.

Among the Friends I found a spiritual community where I could respond to God's beckoning. At age 35, I received a spiritual calling to become a minister, and finally was recognized by a Quaker meeting in Southern Illinois that released me to become a traveling minister at age 60.

My Spiritual Timeline among the Friends

1983—received a vision of the Cross of Joy.

1985—began hearing messages to “record my ministry.”

1985—met Louise Wilson at a Quaker Hill Consultation sponsored by Earlham School of Religion (sent by an elder of my meeting, Alice Walton, who recognized my calling and tried to bring it to acceptance at my post-Christian meeting).

1985—met Lucy Talley [Davenport] and formed a covenant group with Evanston Friends: Wilfred Reynolds, Lucy Davenport, and Annette Reynolds, which met weekly to pray together. We were all devout Christians.

1998—was asked to give the Plummer Lecture at Illinois Yearly Meeting which was a call to Friends to return to Christ.

Clance Wilson, a returning elder to Clear Creek Meeting, heard my message and asked me to “become his minister.”

1998—went to Louise Wilson in Virginia Beach for confirmation of my calling into ministry. At that time, I was facing strong resistance to my being a “called Christian minister” in a post-Christian meeting. She assured me that I should go forward.

2003—was called to serve as clerk of Illinois Yearly Meeting (ILYM) during a period of organizational and building restoration.

2005—was called to serve as ILYM Field Secretary.

2008—resigned my membership in my Quaker meeting because of strong resistance to my Christian ministry.

2009—asked for clearness to become a member of Southern Illinois Quaker Meeting. I was graciously received into membership even though several attendees said that they were atheists. They recorded my ministry even though I had not requested it. Then I moved to Carbondale and entered graduate school [2000 – to date). I have traveled among Friends of all branches in America.

2013—was invited to be the plenary speaker at Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting. I met Pamela Richards who later became my constant traveling ministry companion.

2014—was invited to travel to speak at the Menucha Women’s Conference in Portland, Oregon. “Wilt Thou Go with Me on My Errand?” was the theme—traveling ministry. This conference of Unprogrammed and Evangelical Women of the Northwest have been meeting for years to bridge the cultural religious gap. Lucy and I spoke together of our experience with Louise Wilson and how each of us had found difficulties in bringing forth our ministries. Below, in brief, is what I said to the Menucha Women: I have named my story “Set Apart by God.”

I told them my life story. It concerns my receiving a leading in 1985 to become a called minister for Christ. I

was then a member of an unprogrammed Quaker meeting where I faced another door that did not open to me.

“The time has come,” said God, “for you to come away and be alone with Me for a while.” I wrestled with this thought like Jacob with the angel. I was to be given a new name if I succeeded in this wrestling match with my God. Did I want to be renamed? I knew in my heart that I would be set apart from all that I had come to love in my life if I accepted the name of God’s Child. The path ahead was murky and uncertain and caused me to tremble with fear. At that moment, a brilliant light appeared showing me the way forward. It was Jesus, my guide and my teacher, leading me one step at a time. My fear began to leave me.

Then I told them about the challenges that I had encountered in recording my ministry and my encounters with Louise Wilson who encouraged me to keep going forward. I finally found an open door among Friends in Southern Illinois Quaker Meeting. Several people asked me for copies of my travel minute because they too were looking for a way to go forth, and it spoke to them of their own struggles to have their gifts acknowledged.

All around the conference room on the final day of the retreat I could hear the voices of Quaker women of all ages, all stages of life, singing with great joy and gusto:

Oh let us sing, sing till the power of the Lord comes down,
Oh let us sing, sing till the power of the Lord comes down,
Lift up your voice, be not afraid,
And sing till the power of the Lord comes down

2016—I was invited by my friend Mariellen Gilpin to attend my first WCTS Mystics Reunion in Chicago. At the end of the retreat, Michael Resman asked me to create a design for a Ministers and Elders Retreat. At the moment he asked me, I knew this would call forth all of my experiences as a Friend. I said, “Yes,” and immediately consulted Pamela Richards, my traveling ministry companion.

On Eldership

Paul Buckley

(Editor's Notes)

And oh, how sweet and pleasant it is to the truly spiritual eye to see several sorts of believers, several forms of Christians in the school of Christ, every one learning their own lesson, performing their own peculiar service, and knowing, owning, and loving one another in their several places and different performances to their Master, to whom they are to give an account, and not to quarrel with one another about their different practices! (Rom. 14:4) ...

And he who knows what it is to receive any truths from the Spirit, and to be led into practices by the Spirit, and how prone the fleshly part is to make haste, and how dangerous that haste is, will not be forward to press his knowledge or practices upon others, but rather wait patiently till the Lord fit them for the receiving thereof, for fear lest they should receive and practise too soon, even in that part which cannot serve the Lord. And this I can truly say concerning myself, I never found my spirit forward to draw any, either to any thing I believed to be true, or to any practice or way of worship I walked in; but desired that the power and leadings of life might go before them, and was afraid lest men should receive things from my hand, and not from the Lord's. —Isaac Pennington, 1660

Eldership is in service to those who serve in Ministry. It is like the baseball quote, "Hit the ball, catch the ball, throw the ball." I thought it was from Casey Stengel to the 1962 Mets, but it is from the film, *Field of Dreams*.

Kevin Costner was explaining baseball. We can say that about Quakerism, “See the Light, Turn to the Light, Follow the Light.” In baseball you don’t ask, “where did the ball come from, what materials is it made of, whose ball is it?” Likewise we don’t have to ask about the Light. “See the Light, Turn to the Light, Follow the Light.” Do that and let everything else go. That is what eldership is about.

God the Christ has placed a principle that will guide. Anyone who follows is among the people of God. Maybe we are using the wrong word in “elder” because now it has other connotations.

Being an elder is to take the person where he is, turn him toward the Light, develop his skills, help him to see the Light, and turn toward the Light. Nurture skills; help the person practice those skills. See impediments and help the person overcome those impediments.

It is like the crumbly clay. Wham! It is all over the table and the people at the table. Aren’t you better now?

Elders are nurturers. They ask simple things. They have their own spirit, their own being. All we can do it point the person toward the Light.

Early Quakers kept these roles very separate. If you were an elder and you started speaking in Meeting for Worship, you would be made a minister. And you could not be both.

Discussion

Donne --- Another aspect of eldering is to have the care and health of the spiritual body of the Meeting. Elders can deal with individuals if they are interrupting the health of the Meeting.

Paul --- One cannot mold a whole Meeting. You have to work with individuals.

John --- Wilma Wilcox joined our Meeting the year I was born, but never spoke a word. I wondered who or

what was pulling me deep in Meeting for Worship. Once she was gone, it was gone. Elders can feel the culture of the Meeting. If members are addicted to reading the New York Times before Meeting, they will come to Meeting infected by the world. It is the hidden things that an elder can affect by praying for the Meeting.

Jennifer --- Discernment is important. We need one another for that. We can help move the Meeting in the way of eldership.

Mike --- There is a widespread feeling that we have lost elders, but most Meetings have Ministry and Council Committees.

Some Meetings have felt muzzled with personal crises.

Dan --- Ministry and Council becomes a ministering committee.

Paul --- Britain Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice says that elders must meet regularly and hold the Meeting in prayer.

Donne --- There is a dimension beyond the care of the individual. There is too much emphasis on the individual and not enough on the whole. In my Meeting once there was someone who speaking way too long, going on and on, and three people stood in silence. The person got the message and sat down. Elders must protect the whole.

Michael --- Once in a Meeting for Business, the Clerk was aware of an underlying problem and said, “There is some anger here. We are not leaving here until we talk about it.”

One method is to start a meeting asking everyone to share what is on their hearts, especially in a State of the Meeting session.

Muriel --- There are different kinds of elders. Some are focused on the whole and some on individuals. We can have both.

Helene --- Another definition of an elder is one accompanying and supporting a traveling minister. It is the ministry of grounding.

Michael --- Bill Taber said he could not have ministered if it weren't for the silent Friends.

Paul --- I have travelled with an elder. The person was to nurture me and help me to be faithful.

Susan --- I am working with the FWCC Traveling Ministers. We can talk about that later.

Mariellen --- Part of the responsibility of the larger body is to vet the traveling ministers so we don't send out someone half-baked.

Alison --- A quiet elder is comforting. I have served as one accompanying a traveling minister. It is not just to help that person be faithful. I did speak and was told later that it was moving. We need to be careful not to be too ritualistic. Being an elder is a place to exercise huge humility. You don't get a lot of strokes. Most people don't notice you. Everyone has the responsibility to be both ministers and elders. But the responsibility is to serve God, to be faithful. If the ball comes, you catch it.

Paul --- The question is whether the job is being an elder or serving God.

Glee --- I can't describe elders without ministers. I experienced successful eldering in a gathering. We were involved in "woundology." As a minister we are called to do things we never thought we could. Elders see it and hold it open. The story was told of the early Quaker traveling minister. They started out in a boat without a compass and just went where the wind blew, making way for the wellspring of our faith.

Paul --- I know who I am, what gifts I bring, know when I have to stop. I can't do everything.

Clay Exercise

Jennifer Elam

When I first got the announcement about the WCTS ministers and elders colloquium, I decided to go. Then I got distracted with caring for my elderly parents and decided it was too much. But, Tuesday morning of the week it was to happen, I woke up hearing clearly that I was to go. I argued with God saying the plane tickets would be too expensive, there would be no rooms available, and there were all these “things I HAD to do.” But, I kept hearing that I was to go. So, I got a plane ticket and amazingly, Michael said there was a room available as there had been a cancellation. “OK, God, I don’t know what THIS is about but here we go—flying from Philadelphia to Chicago.”

I got to the location after being lost for three hours and went to Maurine’s room. She quotes me as saying, “I’m HERE! What do you need?”

She explained that Pam had become ill and could not do her part of a workshop and she would explain it to me the next morning. She did. I took Pam’s instructions related to leading the clay activity to my room and studied it. The wires of my brain shorted out! It seemed like a wonderful activity but there just was not enough time to figure out that many details.

So, I prayed. What came to me was an activity I had done with Sally Palmer in about 1998. The activity involved taking the clay and in silence sitting with it and letting the Spirit move your hands and see what your hands did

with the clay. When I had first done it, my hands made a very closed figure. We were to then write about the experience for seven minutes non-stop. At the end of the writing, I knew that the figure was not complete. I took some more clay and a very open figure came forth. The message was clearly about opening more of myself to the world out there. And the activity clearly brought Spirit into communication with me.

When I joined the planning group with that suggestion, they were very open to it. The theme fit with what we were learning about—moving into the world with our ministries and what do we need from our elders. A significant detail to know about the clay: it was crumbly. Pam had had a plan to make the clay work-able but again, there was no time. And it was just right!

When we go out to do our ministries, sometimes they are like crumbly clay that needs a lot of kneading. My question for participants to write about was: What would have been helpful in the way of eldering for you to be able to move forward with your clay ministry? And several people giggled that the crumbly clay was perfectly analogous to what they had experienced. Help was needed! And many were able to articulate how the eldering they needed in many ways would be like what they needed to get the crumbly clay workable. Interestingly, some were able to make the clay look like a product they intended but most had to stick with the process longer to move forward with a product. Sound familiar?

Small groups shared their process then shared with the bigger group. I observed much animated conversation.

Feedback from participants indicated that the conversation moved forward for most of them by working with the clay, articulating what they would have benefited from in an elder, and hearing the input from others.

Judy Lumb—Clay Experience

I enjoyed working the clay, just playing with it, kneading it. I continually worked it from the time I first sat down. It eventually became pliable. I did two different sets because after I had the first piece nicely pliable, I moved to a different table. Jennifer Elam sat down at that first place and got that piece of clay I had already worked. I started over with the next one, but I still had time to get it nice and pliable. I really am tactile! I guess that is what I like about quilting, the feel of a quilted section. I didn't remember what I created. I just enjoyed working it. But I looked it up in my notes to see what I made. At first the clay wanted to be a dolphin. Then I continued to work the clay with my left hand while I wrote with the right, taking notes on what people were saying about their experience. The fact that I could do two things at the same time became a message. Sometimes elders need to speak.



**Marcia Nelson, Kathy Kovalik,
Diane Reynolds and Lucy Davenport**

Laying Claim to Our Spiritual Calling

Lucy Davenport

In this presentation I am going to use two Quaker women ministers as examples of how a spiritual “calling” progresses and how we might understand our own experience in light of others’ understanding of learning to follow the promptings from the Divine. I like these examples because they are separated by hundreds of years and yet their accounts bear surprising similarity. Also, both women are quite certain that spiritual discernment is learned by ongoing obedience to the One who is greater than ourselves, whom we come to know by hearing an inward voice—the voice of our Teacher. As we follow the promptings of this voice, this teacher, whose instruction we come to “feel” as very specific to our own condition, we become empowered for spiritual work, work that is sometimes beyond our comprehension or imagining, work that brings benefit to the spiritual community of which we are a part.

The first of these two ministers, Louise Wilson, I came to know personally at the height of her public ministry. Her memoir, *Inner Tenderings*, which Maurine has recommended we all read, is an account of the dealings of the Divine with her. Much of what she shared, at retreats and in private conversations, during the years I knew her well, confirmed the work of God in my own life and encouraged me to look deeper to the Source and Wellspring of my faith, at a time when I saw my Meeting and other struggling in spiritual poverty and confusion.

Louise gives an account in her autobiography of how

she was mentored by one of the great spiritual leaders of her time. She became friends with Howard Thurman when she was still quite a young woman. He recognized the call of God on her life and helped her understand more deeply what she was being taught by God, and what a life lived in obedience would mean. She in turn became a spiritual mentor to many people in my generation during her years as a “public Friend”, leading retreats on spiritual healing.

(Note: I first met Louise at the 1984 Friends’ Consultation on Spiritual Authority and Accountability, held at Quaker Hill Conference Center, Richmond IN, under the care of ESR.)

Louise reports a conversation with Howard Thurman in 1969, when she had already known him for several years. She says:

I talked with Howard about my dilemma in discerning God’s will for my life. Even though we had talked on the subject many times, I found myself again seeking to know answers. He said to me, “I am not sure that there is a hard and fast line between a person’s fundamental desire and the will and mind of God. How else can He come into full play to us except through the deepest depths of our living.” Gradually these words seemed to take root in me, and I began to tell God my sincere desire and will, asking that it be done if it be His will. It was as if a load was lifted off my shoulders. Had God been waiting for me to articulate my deepest desires? Was God wanting me to come to know what I really wanted and to express it? I believed that to be true. (Tenderings, p. 59)

In 1984, Louise formed a healing prayer group in her own Meeting. She had already come to prominence among Friends and other Christian groups, including the Church of the Saviour, a large denomination in Washington D.C. that was dedicated to healing ministry, as a retreat leader. Her prayer work was going deeper, into the heart of the mysteries of God’s healing presence and power. In March 1985 Louise led a retreat entitled:

“Wilt Thou Be Made Whole?” It was the first of several retreats I would attend with Louise as leader. It was a time of deep spiritual suffering for me. My marriage had foundered, and was only slowly recovering, and my Meeting seemed impoverished and shallow. I sought out a private conversation, an “opportunity,” with Louise. She confirmed the path I was on, recognized and prayed for my spiritual suffering to be lifted, and gave me words of encouragement to continue on my own spiritual journey. It was a life-changing and life-giving encounter. Louise was instrumental in guiding many people during those years in active ministry.

I’d like to read a section from Louise’s memoir about a retreat I attended in 1987. She writes:

Early in 1987, Downer’s Grove Meeting near Chicago invited me to lead a weekend retreat on prayer and healing. Friday evening one of the retreatant’s daughters was killed in an automobile accident. We gathered Saturday morning filled with shock and sorrow. I was the only person who did not know the young woman.

The entire day was spent in prayerful discussion of how God works in our lives. We had times of silent prayer, times of openly questioning, and times of thankfulness. On one level we were holding the parents at all times. Sunday morning the mother joined us at our session before meeting for worship. In her brokenness and her tears, she expressed her pain. She knew it had just begun; she would live one day at a time. (*Tenderings*, p. 152)

As we move more deeply into our own spiritual vocation or journey, it often seems to bring us into conflict with those we love and share our lives with. This is not necessarily an obstacle to our going forward. It may be, and is often the case, that we must separate our own needs from those around us in order to fulfil the deepest desires of our being. For to neglect these is to starve ourselves. What God is calling forth in us will, in time, nurture and sustain those around us, if we are living authentically.

The second example I have chosen to share about is a Seventeenth Century Quaker minister, Elizabeth Stirredge (lived from 1639-1711). Elizabeth was an early convert to the Quaker faith, who heard two prominent young preachers in her home town of Bristol and joined the new movement. She was living in Bristol when the famed Quaker preacher John Story arrived on a preaching journey. Story's ministry was quite controversial among Friends, as he was opposing many of the teachings that had been established by the founders of the movement. Elizabeth records the prelude to her being led to confront Story's false teaching in her journal, which was later published under the title "Strength in Weakness Manifest", in the early 1700s. Here is her account:

The Lord said, "A testimony I do require of thee." Then I said, "O Lord, if thou will open my heart to declare of thy goodness, what thou has done for thy people, to tell of thy noble acts, and thy manifold mercies, how ready should I be to do it—but these are hard things. Who am I to bear them?" Thus did I reason with the Lord, till my burden became too heavy for me to bear. When I have gone forth in my lawful concerns, and have seen any of them (Story and his cohort), pains did take hold of me, distress of mind and anguish of spirit did seize upon me, insomuch that I sought out private places to mourn in, saying: "What shall I do? Send me to a nation of a strange language, whose face I never knew and make use of a better instrument for this great work. They will not hear me, who am a contemptible instrument. Neither do I know whether any of them will receive my testimony."

... Before I could take any rest, I made a deep engagement unto the Lord to do whatsoever He required of me, if He would give me strength and be with me. (Strength in Weakness Manifest, pp 93-95)

Elizabeth was faithful to the instruction she felt inwardly to confront John Story and challenge his

false teaching and also to remind him of his unfinished business to go home and be reconciled to his own Meeting. He ridiculed her, and her husband came to her defense. She was the first to publicly challenge Story, who was eventually disowned by Friends for his errors.

I would like to read a little more from her memoir, concerning how the Lord was at work in her life, guiding and directing her thoughts and actions, for many years.

Now let all consider whether that testimony that God raised in my heart in that time of great distress, great bowings down, and bitter be-wailings, when the Lord answered me for what my great exercise came upon me, was not true. I can truly say I went under the exercise of their backsliding many a time. The Lord was pleased to exercise me and to cause me to go through a vale of tears and a land of drought in order to humble me, that I might bow to His will and obey Him in all things. “For obedience is better than sacrifice, and to hearken to the voice of the Lord is better than the fat of rams.” [I Samuel 15:22]

There is no hearing of the gracious voice, but by humbling under His mighty power and subjecting the mind unto His will. Then does He make known His mind and will. Then blessed are they that hear His word and obey it. Blessed are they that know His will and do it. (Strength in Weakness, p. 102)

Queries:

- How do these accounts of the inward work of the Divine help us to understand and recognize our own calling to the spiritual work that God requires of us?
- What tests and supports do we need to ensure that we are not falling prey to delusions or misrepresentations of Truth?

I have lifted up these two women to demonstrate God's workings in our "inwards", and to articulate the importance of following God's leadings, and the spiritual exercises that are laid upon us. The work of discernment and eldering is work on behalf of the beloved community. The goal is not our own "self-improvement" -- it is keeping the entire community faithful to God's call and instruction. The very personal and specific call that we receive and hear inwardly is God breaking in upon time, to redeem the whole community, and to make the reality of God's guiding voice and presence manifest in our generation. Louise Wilson's greatest work was in bringing her own meeting to greater faithfulness and dependence on God's power, releasing gifts of healing and prophetic witness. Elizabeth Stirredge's great gift was being faithful to speak out against untruth within her faith community when that deceit threatened the very existence of Friends. The importance of these movements of God's spirit in our lives can be obscured by our inability to develop our inner reserves of discernment and obedience to the voice of the Divine. For it is not only in hearing God's call in our inward parts, but in obeying that voice and following what we are given to do within our communities of faith, that we are furthering the establishment of what has been called "the kingdom of God" on earth.

II Corinthians 12:1-10 (NIV, 1984)

I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say.

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

***Works of George Fox,
(Volume 1, pp 238 and 239. 1655)***

...I wrote also a short epistle to Friends, as an encouragement to them in their several exercises.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

In the power of the everlasting God which comprehends the power of darkness and all temptations, and that which comes out of it, in this power of God dwell. This will bring and keep you to the word in the beginning; it will keep you up to the life, to feed thereupon, in which you are over the power of darkness, and in which you will feel dominion and life. And that will let you see before the tempter was and over him, into which the tempter cannot come; for the power and truth he is out of. Therefore in that life dwell, in which you will know dominion. Let your faith be in the power over the weakness and temptations; look not at them; but in the light and power of God, look at the Lord's strength, which will be made perfect in your weakest state. So in all temptations look at the grace of God to bring your salvation, which is your teacher to teach you; for when you look or hearken to the temptations, you go from your teacher, the grace of God; and so are darkened in going from that teacher which should bring your salvation, the grace of God, which is sufficient in all temptations to lead out of them and to keep over them.
—G.F.

Works of George Fox, (Volume 1, pages 76 and 77, 1647)

At another time I saw the great love of God, and was filled with admiration at the infiniteness of it. I saw what was cast out from God, and what entered into God's kingdom; and how by Jesus, the opener of the door by his heavenly key, the entrance was given. I saw death, how it had passed upon all men, and oppressed the seed of God in man, and in me; and how I in the seed came forth, and what the promise was to. Yet it was so, that there seemed to be two pleadings in me; and questionings arose in my mind about gifts and prophecies, and I was tempted again to despair, as if I had sinned against the holy ghost. I was in great perplexity and trouble for many days; yet I gave up myself to the Lord still. One day, when I had been walking solitarily abroad, and was come home, I was taken up in the love of God, so that I could not but admire the greatness of his love; and while I was in that condition, it was opened unto me by the eternal light and power, and I therein clearly saw, that all was done and to be done in and by Christ; and how he conquers and destroys this tempter, the devil, and all his works, and is atop of him; and that all these troubles were good for me, and temptations for the trial of my faith, which Christ had given me. The Lord opened me, that I saw through all these troubles and temptations. My living faith was raised, that I saw all was done by Christ the life, and my belief was in him. When at any time my condition was veiled, my secret belief was staid firm, and hope underneath held me, as an anchor in the bottom of the sea, and anchored my immortal soul to its bishop, causing it to swim above the sea, the world, where all the raging waves, foul weather, tempests, and temptations are. But Oh! then did I see my troubles, trials, and temptations more clearly than ever I had done. As the light appeared, all appeared that is out of the light; darkness, death, temptations, the unrighteous, the

ungodly; all was manifest and seen in the light. After this, a pure fire appeared in me: then I saw how he sat as a refiner's fire, and as the fuller's soap. Then the spiritual discerning came into me; by which I discerned my own thoughts, groans, and sighs; and what it was that veiled me, and what it was that opened me. That which could not abide in the patience, nor endure the fire, in the light I found to be the groans of the flesh, that could not give up to the will of God; which had so veiled me, that I could not be patient in all trials, troubles, anguishes, and perplexities; could not give up self to die by the cross, the power of God, that the living and quickened might follow him, and that that which would cloud and veil from the presence of Christ, that which the sword of the spirit cuts down, and which must die, might not be kept alive. I discerned the groans of the spirit, which opened me, and made intercession to God: in which spirit is the true waiting upon God, for the redemption of the body, and of the whole creation. By this true spirit, in which the true sighing is, I saw over the false sighings and groanings. By this invisible spirit I discerned all the false hearing, the false seeing, and the false smelling, which was above the spirit, quenching and grieving it; and that all that were there were in confusion and deceit, where the false asking and praying is, in deceit and atop, in that nature and tongue that takes God's holy name in vain, wallows in the Egyptian sea, and asketh but hath not; for they hate his light, resist the holy ghost, turn the grace into wantonness, rebel against the spirit, and are erred from the faith they should ask in, and from the spirit they should pray by. He that knoweth these things in the true spirit can witness them. The divine light of Christ manifesteth all things, and the spiritual fire trieth and severeth all things.

Overcoming the Obstacles

Dan Davenport

The passage in II Corinthians is part of a defense Paul makes to the church at Corinth regarding his ministry. In this section he turns the account (his boasting) to the central message he wants to communicate. It is the one place where he quotes what God said to him.

In Fox's epistle from 1655, George expounds on Paul's message. He claims it is the heritage of all who come to the end of their own resources and believe what is said to them. Looking to the Light, hearkening to the Grace of God to teach them, looking to the Lord's strength, they have all they need to go beyond what can be imagined in the depths. This was written during the spread of the Quaker message south into England by the Valiant 60 and many others. Some were thrown in prison, beaten and harassed. Others were tired. Some struggled with doubts about whether they could face the challenges. Others were distracted by their own inadequacies and temptations. George said the message to them all was the same.

The longer passage from Fox's Journal, set in 1647 lays out a kind of progression from confusion and near despair. It goes through the fire that strips away all the things of our own we have trusted and hoarded. These are insufficient for the situation at hand and the tasks ahead.

I first "knew" I was to come to the Colloquium when this passage came with stark clarity: "Then the spiritual

discerning came into me; by which I discerned my own thoughts, groans, and sighs; and what it was that veiled me, and what it was that opened me.” I used to think that Openings and lack of them came in a kind of random fashion. I was sometimes caught up in waves of God’s love like an ecstasy. At other times I was at the maw of despair with no apparent way to avoid being swallowed. As time has gone on and I have grown in discernment I see better that I often chose the path of despair by looking toward it with fear rather than it coming over me at random. The work of the Lord within which George describes may have taken months or years. I am only certain that this process has taken longer for me because I got in its way more often and more stubbornly than he.

Sometime before the Colloquium I learned that my assignment was to talk about obstacles to ministry. Anyone called to ministry (or elderring) can likely name outward obstacles. What I was to address are inward. I don’t believe this leading was followed adequately in my speaking at the Colloquium and I hope this paper will speak to these inward obstacles more clearly.

A few weeks preceding the Colloquium my mother helped me transcribe the three passages above. But no clear thread came to stitch them into a single presentation, so I found myself speaking extemporaneously, listening as best I could for what was given me to say. This is a teaching story and the context was a meeting of Friends from various parts of the Quaker spectrum. What follows is an approximation with some gaps filled.

Paul labored among the Corinthians, probably more than once. He had cause to set the record straight. I don’t know any of you, so I don’t need to boast, except about my weaknesses.

I have albinism and was also born with an extra curve in my back. I grew up in a small town in Idaho that was enough of a monoculture to not have much room for

differences. My extended family struggled to be accepting. And since I was the third child with albinism my parents were stretched nearly to the breaking point. Fear and outbursts of anger were some of the deepest lessons I learned. These physical limitations tended to marginalize and isolate.

There are positives to report! My parents were Methodists who started attending a Friends Church when I was small. Wesleyan Holiness theology was at its height among Friends churches in the Northwest then, so my father felt at home. Church Quakers love to sing and Dad fostered musical training for all his children. When I was in high school I started a Christian music group which grew in local prominence. My mother suggested our name, the Friendly Persuasion. I worked these young people hard aiming for as high a standard in music quality as I knew. I told myself we were doing “ministry”. By the time I graduated, we had a nearly full summer of concerts ahead of us. But at a practice in June I blew up when this young group was, well, acting like teenagers. Our lead female vocalist quit on the spot. I was completely at a loss, empty. I knew I had caused this breach and it was irreparable. I could not see how we could honor the concert commitments.

Friends Churches had Sunday evening worship in those days. The Sunday following my burst of anger another music group was coming to “do the service” at my church. I had looked forward to this as I had regarded them as a model for our own effort. The whole Friendly Persuasion group was there to hear them. The young woman who had resigned had affirmed both her friendship to me and her decision; she was sitting at my side. I remember being disappointed in the quality of the music thinking, “We are getting better than this!” Almost immediately, a fellow from the visiting group said, “We are not here to give a performance. We are here to let the Holy Spirit work in your lives!” It was as if I had been hit

in the face; my real goal had been the best performance and the accompanying adulation. It was then I heard a voice, “Look what a mess you made.” “OK Lord, you can have the Group.” “What about the rest of your life?”

Altar calls were a regular part of the church culture and this concert had one. I knew I had to go forward to kneel there. When you answered an altar call you were usually expected to speak to the group afterwards, to explain yourself. When it was my turn I said, “Now I want to learn everything Jesus has to teach me!”

I have sometimes regretted those words because I keep being called to account when I try to avoid this teaching.

That girl did not rejoin the group but things started to change. We began to write some of our own music. Practices could be fun and sometimes they became prayer meetings. We witnessed some amazing things in some of those concerts.

In October, I started as a freshman at George Fox College. In this new setting I felt anew the impingement and isolation of my disabilities. I also found that many of my fellow students did not have the zeal or fresh faith I had just enjoyed. I accused myself of being judgmental and began to sink into what I now know was a clinical depression. One day as I was reading this passage in II Corinthians 12, verse 9 jumped off the page. (I had prayed earnestly many times to have my eyesight healed; I wanted to have a more normal life.) I knew I had been thrown a lifeline when I was sinking but I didn’t know what it meant. In Wesleyan Holiness theology, there are two “works” of Grace to be experienced. The first was to be “saved”, or justification by faith. The second was to be “sanctified” i.e coming into a state where you wouldn’t or even couldn’t sin anymore. I assumed my experience the previous June was that second work. So, I was confused, but I knew I had been thrown a lifeline; somehow I had to trust and hold on.

The next input came from Idaho. One of my buddies in the Friendly Persuasion had found George Fox's Journal and Barclay's Apology in the church library. I didn't know about these. I had become a member at age 14 being taught Wesleyan Holiness theology. Fox was mentioned, but the important stuff started when Wesley came along. So, I resisted my friend's urging to check out these books. This seemed too exclusivist.

But, I got desperate. One evening I happened to sit at a table in the cafeteria with Daniel Smith (Dan Smith-Christopher). He and his buddies were talking about reviving a group called the Quaker Fellowship where they would discuss Barclay's Apology and have un-programmed worship. I wasn't quite sure what that was but I almost jumped across the table asking if I could come. I found a copy of Dean Freiday's Barclay's Apology in Modern English and started reading. I eagerly looked forward to the group discussions. These were engrossing but, to my surprise, it was soon the worship that I looked forward to the most.

I had extraordinary opportunities during those years from people who nurtured and cared for me as depressions recurred. Here are a few:

- Dan Smith introduced me to Paul Anderson; Paul and my friend Phil Smith later took up positions of leadership in the Quaker Theological Discussion Group.
- Dan introduced me to Ben Richmond, my first encounter with an AFSC activist. Ben pointedly told me that Jesus was my present teacher; I argued with him trying to find out how to think about that. I failed to connect it with my "testimony" after that altar call in June 1975 until years later
- Dan also introduced me to T. Vail Palmer, whose book entitled *Face to Face: Early Quaker encounters with the Bible* is worth the read.

- Arthur Roberts introduced us to writings of many Early Friends.
- Arthur brought Everett Cattell from Malone College; his devotional book, *The Spirit of Holiness*, is a classic from the branch of Friends most influenced by Wesleyanism
- Arthur also brought T. Canby Jones from Wilmington a couple of times. Canby's book, *No More but My Love* can be a gateway to Fox's epistles for the beginner starting to sample.
- Ralph Beebe brought Elise Boulding to the campus more than once. Here was a challenge from a strong thinker who identified herself as a Friend but not as a Christian.
- Ralph also introduced me to Susan Stark, my first experience of a Friend in plain dress. In that short meeting she taught me her song, *Live up to the Light* thou hast and more will be granted thee, based on one of Margaret Fell's letters. This song has remained with me as a friend and companion in the most difficult moments of temptation and confusion to this day
- Lon Fendall got me a four month volunteer opportunity at the Friends Committee on National Legislation.

Richard Foster invited Lewis Benson to George Fox College in the spring of 1978. This was a pivotal experience though I didn't know it at the time. Lewis' message about "Who Jesus Christ is and how He saves men" based on his lifelong study of George Fox's writing was interesting but just another among many interesting ideas to be had. I had come to flaunt my "membership" among the campus radicals and thinkers. I severely exercised my father's patience and that of the other Church Friends, especially those in Idaho, during these years.

But my physical limitations and the occasional depressions required more than thinking. My spirit required more than self-righteous arguments. I began to find, or perhaps be found by elders and overseers

in need. Bill and Irene Cathers, former missionaries to Ecuador, took me into their home and hearts when I became estranged from my father. My lifelong friends Mark Silliman and Norma Silliman helped care for me in the emotional depths. Mark kept drawing my attention back to Lewis' teaching when I grabbed at the latest idea in some enthusiasm. I began to feel some kind of claim on my life but I tried to hold it at bay. I did decide I had some kind of call to ministry but it was amorphous at best.

After graduation from George Fox College, I followed Dan Smith and Mark Silliman to Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in Elkhart, Indiana. I lasted one semester. I left for several reasons, but two at the forefront were these: I could not read fast enough for serious graduate study. And, I knew that if I managed to stay somehow, they would turn me out to be a pastor rather than a scholar, and I was not sure I was called to be a pastor.

During my senior year at George Fox college, another dear friend, Bruce Allen, and I were musing about what Quakerism might have lost that had once made it stronger. We decided it was the travelling ministry. So, we rashly volunteered ourselves to Ralph Beebe, who clerked the Department of Peace Testimony in Northwest Yearly Meeting. His was a pretty lonely position in 1979; open acknowledgement of the peace testimony was at an ebb, though the conscientious objection rate was high during the Vietnam War. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, the Carter administration started reviving the machinery for draft registration. The initial plan was to register all young men through age 25. This claimed attention to conscientious objection that had faded some after the end of the Vietnam War.

When I left seminary, I was defeated, empty. I tried to back-peddle on the commitment to Ralph and the Peace Testimony road show. Bruce held me to it. We began in June of 1980 and made our last visit to a church in

Idaho in November. We certainly faced some outward opposition. We were uninvited by some churches. Bruce took the brunt of criticism. He was a war tax resister. He had credentials. He was also my spiritual elder. I was along for the ride, literally; Arthur Roberts loaned us his pickup.

This was an extraordinary adventure. We showed up to some places unheralded but mostly we went by invitation. During the first visit, the II Corinthians 12:9 verse came to me sharply. I saw inwardly that it was a basis of the Peace Testimony and was given something to say to that affect. But later, I tried to peddle it without waiting for the inward prompting and it fell dead. At times I listened to others and heard them; I later learned about what Friends call Opportunities and these were a first glimmer. At other times I spoke to them out of my own wisdom, because, well, something was expected. When things went well, my ego swelled. More than once I was ill-prepared inwardly, and when asked for resources, tried to bluster my way through. I did not live consistently in the place of hearing and obeying; I was easily distracted.

What I did discover was that this was much more likely the call to ministry I had felt than to be a pastor. One day that fall, I was considering Paul's "boasts" that he was to preach freely. I was also musing on a few passages of similar vein early in Fox's Journal; Fox said he had enough for himself and some to give to the needs of others. So, how did they do it? Fox does not give much hint, though he mentions his work as an apprentice before he hit the road. Luke tells us in Acts that Paul was a tentmaker and took up the trade as needed. It came clear that I was to get a trade.

It got a lot harder; I returned to Idaho to get another education to take up work in IT. Separated from my closest spiritual friends, I was given new ones in need. My father and I were given a spiritual friendship. A Friends pastor who had been my opponent in past years became a prayer

partner. Most especially, I was given a wonderful elder during this time named Esther White. She was one of the last women recorded in Northwest Yearly Meeting before a long dry spell and had been an itinerant preacher and evangelist. She knew the pain of loneliness and isolation and had wonderful strength and wisdom.

During this time my friend Mark Silliman came to my aid again and again and coaxed me to some New Foundation Fellowship Gatherings. After one NFF meeting in 1984 at Pendle Hill, my father and I did some work with The Tract Association's *Early Prophetic Openings of George Fox*. Dad searched his Strong's Concordance diligently for every phrase. We found them saturated with Biblical quotations and allusions. We had a small group to discuss it from the local Friends church.

Also during this period, I had met up with some liberal Unprogrammed Quakers who had started meeting together in Boise. They let me lead a similar discussion group with folks from their Meeting.

Eventually I acquired enough skills to begin full time employment and somewhat later was able to return to Oregon to live. There I had the privilege to participate in an experiment called the Newberg Unprogrammed Meeting which was started by Wesley Voth and the Sillimans. Many wonderful people were part of this fellowship at various times, including a number already mentioned above. All of them gave me a level of personal support that cannot be repaid as I continued at times to be troubled by severe depressions.

I eventually got medical help for the depression which held out the prospect of a more normal life. With that and the loving support of these Friends in Oregon, I had the occasion to be a part of some travelling ministry occasions with more seasoned ministers who participated in New Foundation Fellowship work, particularly Christopher Stern from New York Yearly Meeting and Ellis Hein from Mid-America YM. I had a few Opportunities with elders

such as Lewis Benson and John Curtis, but enjoyed more sustained relationships with Max and Lorraine Skinner from Canada, Annette Reynolds from Illinois and Terry Wallace, now a member of Ohio Yearly Meeting Conservative. Many of these folks were in on a “plot” to connect me with a young widow, Lucy Talley. They saw that I needed a help-meet and this was granted a few years later.

Here I must say something about patience or lack of it. Fox tells us: *That which could not abide in the patience, nor endure the fire, in the light I found to be the groans of the flesh, that could not give up to the will of God; which had so veiled me, that I could not be patient in all trials, troubles, anguishes, and perplexities; could not give up self to die by the cross, the power of God, that the living and quickened might follow him, and that that which would cloud and veil from the presence of Christ ...*

For some years I had known inwardly that the Lord would supply me with the right person at the right time, but I was unwilling to wait and tried to grasp at something before it was given. So, there were failed relationships and many regrets on my part.

The drawback to getting medical help for the depressions was that I felt strong enough to push envelopes in various directions on my own. These words of Fox seem harsh, but I know them by experience because I have been there:

...the false hearing, the false seeing, and the false smelling, which was above the spirit, quenching and grieving it; and that all that were there were in confusion and deceit, where the false asking and praying is, in deceit and atop, in that nature and tongue that takes God’s holy name in vain, wallows in the Egyptian sea, and asketh but hath not; for they hate his light, resist the holy ghost, turn the grace into wantonness, rebel against the spirit, and are erred from the faith they should ask in, and from the spirit they should pray by.

I thought I was ready to take on the world by myself. I quit listening and nearly lost everything including my “faith”. At the bottom, when I no longer believed in being spoken to by God, I was told to do something, did it cussing under my breath and the world changed. I was given the right help-meet, to use the King James term. Lucy brought sharp discernment to this pairing. She can recognize true suffering in tenderness. She also knows laziness, self-pity and navel gazing when she sees it and doesn’t hesitate to name them for what they are, because, besides being annoying, they are the road to spiritual death.

It is a privilege to have a partner who is called to ministry and has been an elder to many. It has also been an adventure in yet more trials by fire. We have been in a variety of contexts among Friends and been granted many friends. Lucy was a member of Reedwood Friends Church most of our marriage to-date. I did not join, but enjoyed the friendship and sometimes the needed pastoral counselling of Stan Thornburg, Johan Maurer and Ken Comfort. Many others there loved and supported us despite often being on our feet in open worship in prophetic roles.

For a time we were in Denver and both Mountain View Friends and First Denver Friends Church bore up under the Davenports speaking in worship.

Starting “late” in marriage, we wished to have children before it was “too late”. Eventually, we were told that this was medically impossible for us. This was a matter of grief, but when we gave up, we were granted a surprise; a joy in our “old age”. Many know the joys and trials of parenting, so I can’t make any special claims. But, I cried when my son was born and found he had albinism. We were back in Portland when he was born and attending Bridge City Friends some of the time. He grew up at home both at Reedwood and Bridge City and had the loving attention of almost all the people I have already mentioned by name,

who had not passed before in addition to many loving Friends in these two groups.

I resigned my membership at the church in Northwest Yearly Meeting where I had grown up, so was not an official member of any Friends body for some years. But in 2007, the nominating committee at Bridge City Friends sought to nominate me for Ministry and Oversight. I thought I had a ready out since I was not a member but they persisted. This was a crisis for us. Lucy had resigned her membership at a liberal meeting before we got married. Though she was a member at Reedwood, we desired to find a spiritual home together and we didn't think it was either place. Some of our dearest spiritual friends and some of the deepest worship we experienced were among Friends in the New Foundation movement. But there was no membership there in the ordinary sense. Some folks are members of Friends Meetings of various hues and some are outside formal Quakerism altogether. We were thrown back to prayer and listening.

Lucy finally said she believed I should join Bridge City. Like most liberal meetings, it is a "mixed multitude." Some are Christians of various persuasions and some are not. I still thought I had an out. I wrote to them and told them why I had held myself aloof before. I was looking for unambiguous Christ led unprogrammed worship and laid out some of the same history recorded above. They appointed a clearness committee, about half of whom were not Christians. So, I gave them my one-two punch. They said they couldn't see why I should not be a member and besides it was about time for the new M&O committee to start. They recommended my membership. A week later, Lucy was diagnosed with cancer. These people wrapped the three of us in arms of love and we needed them. We were in crisis and I was beset by a new set of fears that left me numb. The folks at Reedwood were there also but let the Bridge City folks take the lead to organize help. We had help from many quarters. Maurine Pyle dropped

everything and came to stay with us as long as needed. Many other people prayed, as far away as Kenya. This is the one time in my life when I literally felt carried on a river of prayer when I could not pray myself.

Lucy finally told me that she had been told by God that she was going to live and that we were to start a reading group. I was given the grace to believe her and since I was now a member of Ministry and Oversight I took the request to start that group to the committee. The NFF had only recently published *That Thy Candles May Always Be Burning: Nine Pastoral Sermons of George Fox*. These sermons had only existed in rough manuscripts in the archives of Haverford and Swarthmore before this book came out. It was a labor of love by Max Skinner and Gardner Stillwell to transcribe the manuscripts. Terry Wallace showed again his wonderful gift as an editor. A group of Friends from Bridge City worked through the book with us for a year and a half. Then, not having had enough, we worked through Terry's edition of Margaret Fell's writings entitled *A Sincere and Constant Love*.

It was obvious at the time and obvious in retrospect that I needed the folks at Bridge City, but I often argued with God about being there. Later it came clear that the substance of the argument was this, "Lord, these aren't my people! I know what my people will look like!" "I will show you what My People look like!"

Back to George Fox for a bit, adding a bit more than was quoted above:

That which could not abide in the patience, nor endure the fire, in the light I found to be the groans of the flesh, that could not give up to the will of God; which had so veiled me, that I could not be patient in all trials, troubles, anguishes, and perplexities; could not give up self to die by the cross, the power of God, that the living and quickened might follow him, and that that which would cloud and veil from the presence of Christ, that which the sword of the

spirit cuts down, and which must die, might not be kept alive. I discerned the groans of the spirit, which opened me, and made intercession to God: in which spirit is the true waiting upon God, for the redemption of the body, and of the whole creation. By this true spirit, in which the true sighing is, I saw over the false sighings and groanings.

Despite all I had learned and enjoyed before, I believe it has been since Lucy's cancer that there has been slow, but more steady progress on the "that which the sword of the spirit cuts down, and which must die" part. There seems to be a lot of this. The cutting down and dying part of these yet more things found that I have held "in secret reserve" is hard. But with each letting go, new vistas open that I never imagined seeing, really seeing with new eyes. There is music to be heard with new ears and aroma to be enjoyed beyond what can be smelled when stuffed up with one's own agenda.

I dare to quote this last part of the passage from George because I can now witness it:

He that knoweth these things in the true spirit can witness them. The divine light of Christ manifesteth all things, and the spiritual fire trieth and severeth all things.

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A New Covenant

Jeremiah 31:31-34 (NRSV)

31 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Hebrews 8:6-13 (NRSV)

6 But Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises. 7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no need to look for a second one. 8 God finds fault with them when he says: “The days are surely coming, says the Lord, “when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; 9 not like the covenant that I made with their ancestors, on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in my covenant, and so I had no concern for them, says the Lord. 10 This

is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 11 And they shall not teach one another or say to each other, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. 12 For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." 13 In speaking of "a new covenant," he has made the first one obsolete. And what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear.

George Fox commentary about the Covenant

And in Heb. Viii, the apostle showeth the fulfilling of Isaiah's and Jeremiah's, and Ezekiel's prophecy; and how the new covenant was come, and he preached up the new covenant, and preached down the old; and how that all should be taught of God in the new covenant: So in that he saith, the new covenant, he hath made the first old covenant as a thing decayed, and ready to vanish away.

For the new covenant and new testament is heavenly and spiritual. And the law of life, that is in Christ Jesus, is not according to the law received upon Mount Sinai, which commanded all these outward elementary things to the Jews; and they were to observe and do them. And the law served until the seed came; which commanded all these outward elementary things to the Jews; and they were to observe and do them. And the law served until the seed came; which the seed Christ is come, and hath abolished them all, and changed the law, and covenant, and priesthood, and the testament.

And so Christ, in his new testament and new covenant, who sent forth his twelve disciples, and after his seventy, to preach the gospel, he did not send them with any carnal weapons or armour, or any carnal set maintenance, or tithes, as was in the old covenant; nay, they were not so much as to take a bag or a staff to defend them.

A New Covenant

Fernando Freire

All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees. Psalm 25:10 (NRSV)

As you know, we were recommended to read Louise Wilson's book titled *Inner Tenderings* as preparation for this colloquium. As we approach Louise's spiritual journey as recorded in her writings, I want to propose that we allow the text to speak for itself by suspending any judgment and preconceived ideas. We should allow Louise to speak to us by listening with an open mind and even more important, an open heart.

Inner Tenderings is a personal account of her life and spiritual journey and, as such, the written text and her life are intrinsically connected. Although there is much that can be said about Louise's spiritual journey and insights, today we will be paying special attention to Chapter 11 and what it says about the relationship between the Christian faith and the society of Friends. We will also look at her mention of the creation of covenant groups at a certain time of her life.

But before going there, we should reflect on what brought us here today. We come from many places and from many different journeys invited to a time of reflection with Friends for whom the Christian faith is important and who are also engaged or concerned with the state of eldering and ministry in our Society of Friends. I truly enjoyed Paul Buckley's presentation on the topic of

elders and eldering even though he had almost no time to prepare when he was asked to substitute for a sick Friend at the last minute.

In the movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, the main character interpreted by Richard Dreyfus had an uncanny UFO experience. After that experience, he becomes obsessed with psychic driven thoughts and feelings that eventually catapulted him into a journey culminating with an encounter with a mothership in the desert. This plot is a fictional account of an encounter with an otherworldly phenomenon that disrupted the life of an individual and guided him to a more profound reality.

I would like that for a few moments we consider the story of Moses and the burning bush as an ancient example of a similar encounter, this time with the numinous and with the weight of a Biblical narrative. Moses' story began in a rather unassuming place under rather mundane circumstances. He was taking care of the sheep belonging to his father-in-law, and while working alone, he saw something extraordinary. He saw a burning bush that was not consumed by the fire.

When Moses approached this miraculous sight, he had an encounter with God that changed his life forever. In this Biblical tale, Moses had a supernatural encounter with God as part of the story of the liberation of the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt. Moses tried to resist God's calling but at the end, he agrees to obey it and that obedience is foundational to the *Book of Exodus* and the wondrous events that happened at Sinai culminating with the establishment of the Covenant between God and Israel.

Another example of a covenant is found in the story of Abraham and how through his obedience a covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants was established. Later interpretations of the descendants of Abraham include all humankind. We also have

experienced a calling, a spiritual prompt, something that has been described so eloquently by some of you as a certainty that you were supposed to come and be here, even if all the details were not clear to you. You submitted yourselves to the leading of Spirit, and here we are.

Our Friend Maurine Pyle received a clear message from God that prompted her to work hard in making this gathering possible with the help and support of other Friends. She has been the unrelenting force that with the help of others, and above all, God's providence made this meeting possible. But then Maurine was struck with illness as was Pamela Richards who had worked with Maurine to plan this Colloquium. Pamela was supposed to present the first talk on "The Art of Eldership" but Paul Buckley stepped in as a substitute. Other people that have wanted to be with us also experienced setbacks that impeded them from joining us, but they are with us in spirit and are praying for us.

Many more Friends that did not plan to attend this meeting are also holding us in the Light and eagerly waiting for the outcomes of this gathering. We are all concerned with the current spiritual state of our beloved Society of Friends. For many Friends, no topic is more urgent and even painful than the current struggle to define and affirm the relationship of the Society of Friends to its Christian roots, especially among what is referred as liberal meetings.

Is there a way to ensure that Christian and non-Christian Friends can be true members of the same meeting where they support and nurture each other's spiritual journeys? How can Friends that affirm the uniqueness and centrality of the Christian faith in their lives continue to be faithful to that faith and feel supported by their meetings? What does it mean to bring Jesus back to the center of the communal experience of liberal Friends? At the same time and on the other side of the spectrum, how do we make sure that Christian meetings remain faithful

to the message and ministry of George Fox and early Friends as preserved and enriched through the passing of time? Our beloved Society is being pulled by some that would like to see it free from its Christian moorings and those that would like to see it move in a direction much closer to evangelical Christianity. I venture to say, and apologize if this is wrong for any of you, that we are gathered here committed to preserving the beauty and uniqueness of the Quaker take on the Christian faith as we also want to lovingly embrace Friends for whom this faith is not central to their Quaker identity.

As we read Louise Wilson's book, we learn from her experience and the faith insights that came from that experience. As I mentioned previously, we are paying careful attention to chapter 11. On page 125 she says,

"I was clearly shown that my lack of clarity about its use [referring to the term *Christ sic*], my not really knowing what it meant, required prayer and listening on my part. I had to know myself before I used any word or words about Christ." Later we read, "In fact, it was six years later before I knew for myself who Christ was to me."

She went on to describe her ever-deepening experience with Jesus in the context of a trinitarian understanding of the Godhead. On page 126 she affirms that it is through Jesus that we understand and experience the Light. It is through Him that we enter and experience the true nature of God. Louise was born and raised a Quaker, and still, it took her years to come to her understanding of Jesus. Her faith took some time to mature and grow through the experiences of life.

She also referred on page 133 to what sounds very close to what in other Christian traditions is known as the "Sacred Heart of Jesus."

"Gradually its meaning has unfolded as I came to know the loving Jesus and knowing his heart are the same-loving God. It is in knowing and loving that we touch the

pain of all who hurt and the joy of all who are victorious.” Louis has come to experience God through the heart of Jesus that is also the heart of God.

On page 138 we find the connection that she makes between the Christian faith and the Religious Society of Friends in a way that is relevant to this gathering. On that section of the chapter, Louise narrated a vision that connected to a memory from when she was a child and played creating dresses for paper dolls. Through the images and feelings present on this vision she came to realize that all the trappings that we may understand as the “dresses” that cover the body of Christ, be these made of the Bible, George Fox, or even Christianity, all need to become transparent to allow the true body of Christ to be revealed.

I want to focus on the message that all the patterns and dresses that we may create, the divisions that separate us, must become transparent if we truly want to see and unite with Jesus the Christ. In the end, it is not to the dresses that we want to pay attention but to what the dresses attempt to cover, Christ himself. How can we make our divisions transparent so who looks at us can only see Christ?

At the same gathering that Louise shares this vision, many felt connected to Jesus and his presence throughout the meeting. Others spoke of the power and unity in Spirit that was experienced. Some of them went on to form what they called covenant groups. These groups were composed of Friends committed to pray and be accountable to each other.

Later in the book, we learned that these groups continued to meet for many years and were of great use and support of its members. We have heard Louise’s journey to the heart of Christ and that special gathering where covenant groups were created. A question for us is if Louise’s vision speaks to our condition. Could covenant groups be replicated and of use to us?

As a practical exercise, today we will break into our small groups and read a passage from the Hebrew Scripture about the Covenant between Israel and God, and a passage from the New Testament about the New Covenant in Christ. You will also find a reflection by George Fox on the New Testament reading.

We will follow a model used by small faith communities in Latin America (*as described in the **The Island of Solentiname** and **Basic Community Approach** which follow below*). It is a very simple model that requires to first listen carefully to the Bible readings allowing Scripture to speak to us and our condition and then allowing God to bring deeper or new meanings to what is read. By respectfully sharing our insights and refraining from intellectual debates, and where everybody is welcome but not obligated to share his or her take on the reading, a communal understanding of what God is telling us through the readings may emerge. We will reconvene later to share the insights of the different groups and further discuss the idea of forming covenant groups that will be part of the discussion at the end of the colloquium.

The Island of Solentiname

For a brief period in Nicaraguan history, the island of Solentiname provided a communal space for artistic experimentation and spiritual discovery. From 1965 to 1966, Ernesto Cardenal, a Nicaraguan priest and now-famous poet established a religious community on Solentiname. This project was based on Christian liberation theology and principles of social justice and community sharing. Cardenal also developed his vision for Solentiname during conversations with North American priest, Thomas Merton.

Roger Perez de la Rocha, a respected painter from Managua, was invited to Solentiname to teach painting techniques, while encouraging individual style and thought. This gave rise to a widespread fascination with

art. Entire families started painting in a style that has now known as “primitivist.” This art drew upon popular Central American imagery such as Chorotega and Nahuatl Indian weavings and painted gourds.

One thousand Nicaraguan campesinos (peasants) participated in dialogues about social equality, analyzing their present living conditions. The book, the Gospel According to Solentiname, evolved from a series of conversations in which campesinos reflected on the life of Jesus Christ and how their Savior would have acted in contemporary Nicaragua.

The Gospel According to Solentiname

Ernesto Cardenal

Every Sunday, on the Island of Solentiname, a withdrawn oasis on Nicaragua Lake, we hold a discussion with campesinos instead of a sermon on the Gospel. The campesinos’ comments are usually more incisive than those of many theologians, but as guileless as the Gospel itself. This is not odd: the Gospel, or “good news” was written for and by people similar to them.

Some friends advised me not to let these commentaries fade away, but to collect and publish them in a book. This is that book. I first began collecting them by memory and went back as far as possible. Then, in a more pragmatic sense, we used a tape recorder.

Many of these interpretations were offered at church, at Sunday mass - also, in the straw hut, where we held our meetings and our community lunch after mass. We often held our mass and discussion of the Gospel here under the open sky, at other islands, or at a small hamlet by a beautiful river with lush, tropical vegetation.

Every Sunday, we give each attendee a copy of the Gospel. That is, those who can read. We have a few who cannot read - mainly the elders. That’s because they come from islands far from the school. Someone who reads

better, usually a younger boy or girl, reads us the chapter that is to be studied. Then, we offer our commentaries line by line.

Thirty-eight islands make up the Solentiname archipelago - some are quite small and only the larger islands are inhabited. There are about a thousand people living there. That makes around ninety families. Homes are typically straw huts that are scattered, one far from the other, on these islands' beaches. Our community or laity monastery, Our Lady of Solentiname, is situated on the tip of the biggest island. The Colombian poet, William Agudelo, his wife, Teresita, and their two small children, Irene and Juan are part of this community. Also, three youngsters were born on these islands, Alejandro, Elbis and Laureano. Communication with the outside world is not frequent and our meditation is not disturbed in this place. It's not easy to reach and lies, thank God, far from business and tourism routes.

Not all of the inhabitants on these islands come to mass. Many don't because they don't have a boat. Some don't because they have lost their devotion to the saints. Others don't because of the influence of the anticommunist propaganda and perhaps because of fear. Not all of those who come, take part in these commentaries. There are some who speak often.

Marcelino is mystical. Olivia is more theological. Rebecca, Marcelino's wife, always dwells on love. Laureano relates everything to the revolution. Elbis is concerned with tomorrow's perfect society. Felipe, another youngster, always has the struggle of the proletariat in mind. Tomás Peña, his dad, cannot read but speaks with great wisdom. Alejandro, Olivia's son, is a young leader and his comments are usually words of counsel for everybody, but particularly for the young. Pancho is a conservative. Julio Mairena constantly defends equality. Oscar, his brother, always speaks of unity. They and everybody else who speaks often and says important things, and those

who seldomly speak but also say important things, and those compañeros like William and Teresita that have participated in these discussions, they are the authors of this book.

It's more accurately said that the true author of this book is the Holy Spirit that has inspired these commentaries. The campesinos in Solentiname very well know that He is the one who makes them speak. He is the same who inspired the Gospel. The Holy Spirit is God's spirit living among his people - He is who Oscar would call the spirit of community cohesion, and who Alejandro the spirit of serving others, and Elbis the spirit of the future society, and Felipe the spirit of the struggle of the proletariat, and Julio the spirit of equality and common goods, and Laureano the spirit of the revolution, and Rebeca the spirit of love.

Fernando Freire: *I was born and raised in a small town in the mountains of Puerto Rico surrounded by nature and what I will describe as a wonderful and magical otherworld. The spirits of the departed were never completely gone, magic practitioners and faith healers were accepted and consulted, although almost never publicly, and each moment of life was an opportunity for the miraculous to happen. There was not a real division between the sacred and the profane, between the realm of God and our lives. You may call it superstition or ignorance but we all knew what things not to do or say to bring on bad luck or offend the spiritual indwellers that lived around us. Many times, as a child I listened to the stories of mysterious occurrences and inexplicable events from the elders and I was encouraged and expected to always show deep respect for the spiritual world and religious practices. Perhaps because these seminal experiences I have never doubted the absolute reality of that dimension of life that is the field and context of the manifestation of the spiritual and religious.*

As far as I can remember, I also experienced God as a real and constant presence in my life. Growing up, God assumed a distinctly Judeo-Christian form with a Spanish Caribbean Roman Catholic accent that included a profound reverence toward Mary the mother of Jesus. Because of Mary, and a myriad of female saints, the divine realm was never exclusively masculine. Perhaps this was a reflection of the matriarchal aspects of the Puerto Rican culture. In my childhood memories the veneration of Mary was center to the worship of God, especially when you take into consideration the belief in the divinity of Jesus. However, I don't think that many people could explain in any theologically sound manner the Trinity, the divinity of Jesus, or the role of Mary in the economy of salvation. We just lived the faith.

By experiencing the culture, the family, and the social fabric of life in a small town in Puerto Rico I received a worldview and understanding of what faith was all about. And at the heart of this faith was the experience of religious life as an expression of the notion that we are all part of the family of God. Let's remember that in most Latin American cultures the family, both nuclear and extended, is at the center of your understanding of who you are and your place in society and life. In my case, I belonged to a very large familia composed by multiple generations of relatives, most of them living within walking distance from each other. I had the paternal branch of my family, who were mostly town dwellers and the maternal side with strong connections to the country side.

My early experience of faith never had rules and obligations at its core. There were clear rituals and beliefs that we followed but they never felt onerous or oppressive. Family, and people always came first. People were always more important than rules, and your faith was supposed to help you to be a better person and in times of need or sorrow to offer consolation. You did not need to be perfect to be loved as it was clearly understood that we all had imperfections and shortcomings, but were still part of the

same family. The family on earth and the family of God that at the end was one and the same.

For a while I explored the possibility of becoming a priest but eventually I discarded the idea. As I grew older, something with my Roman Catholic identity did not feel right. I found myself attracted to the Protestant vision of the Church and after expending some time in the Episcopal Church I settled in with the Lutherans and serving as a clinical social worker.

It was during my time with the Lutherans that I came to Chicago to study to become a pastor, but ordained ministry once again was not for me. Too much energy was required to keep the institutional church going. By the end of my M. Div. program I found the Quakers. That happened in the early 1990s. I contemplated, albeit just briefly, to return to my Catholic roots. Nonetheless, when I thought about it I could not see my understanding of the faith within the Catholic framework of my youth and I was already feeling as an outsider among Lutherans. The reasons for my distancing from mainline Protestantism may be multiple, but the most powerful one resembles what George Fox describes on his journal about his utmost despair when faced with the lack of integrity with the Church of his time. I cannot say that the depth of my feelings even came close to his; but when I found the following quote that you will recognize his words resonated in me.

“And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, oh, then, I heard a voice which said, “There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition”; and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy. Then the Lord let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give Him all the glory; for all are concluded under sin, and shut up in unbelief as I had been, that Jesus Christ might have the pre-eminence who enlightens, and gives grace, and faith, and power. Thus when God doth work, who shall let it? And this I knew experimentally.”

Sometimes God's intervention assumes unexpected forms and if you are open, God's grace will make what was broken whole again. I never stopped feeling God's presence, but I think that I also experienced a noche oscura del alma (dark night of the soul) episode. This term was coined by two 16th century Spanish mystics named Saint John of the Cross and Saint Theresa of Avila. Simply put, a dark night of the soul is when your world is shaken at its foundation, your attachments prove to be a mirage, and you are forced to depend and trust only in God and yourself to bring you back to Light.

I became a member of the Religious Society of Friends in 1993 and it has been my spiritual home ever since. Nowadays, almost every decision that I make is impacted by the thought that the retirement years are not that far, and then I will be welcoming Sister Death. Death has never really scared me. I was scared and anxious by the idea of people that I love and were close to me dying but I am now at peace with the vision of great family reunion and the feast that God is preparing for all of us. But before the time to join that celebration comes, I am finally working in finishing a doctoral degree in ministry that I started long ago. I cannot find a reasonable reason to return to seminary now, but it felt like the right thing to do. I expanded my ministry to volunteer at a hospice and I am looking forward to whatever place Spirit will lead me when I finish my degree next year. I am also working in getting to know Jesus more deeply as I think that I am covered with God the Creator, and the Holy Spirit. I want to contribute to a community of faith where all are welcome, we support each other's spiritual paths even if they are very different from ours, and we know that we are one family, the family of God. That is what I have in mind when I pray, may your Kingdom come.

Basic Community Approach

One of the Bible or lectionary study guides contributed by the members of the North American Association for the Catechumenate <catechumenate.org>

Many of the base communities in Latin America have Bible study as an important part of their life together. The two basic elements of the base community approach are explication and application.

It would be helpful to use *The Gospel in Solentiname* by Ernest Cardenal or *We Discovered the Good News: Brazilian Workers Reread the Bible* alongside of this method. One translates the Bible studies done by the people of Nicaraguan fishing villages; the other does the same for Brazilian workers.

Explication

Step 1. **Hear** the word.

Step 2. **Understand** the political, social, and historical context of the text.

Step 3. **Reread** the text with the context in mind.

Step 4. **Share** comments and reflections on the text.

Application

Step 5. **Reflect** on the similarities and difference between the world of the text and our own world

Step 6. **Share** our problems as they are called forth by the discussion of the text.

Step 7. **Decide** how the text may be relevant to our reality.

Step 8. **Create** our own prayers.

Step 9. **Decide** as a group what tasks need to be done.

Set a time for follow-up so the group can report on what has happened as a result of action taken.

Small Group 1: Discussion of “A New Covenant”

Small group 1 shared on the potential for covenant relationships coming from this weekend. We noted that the scripture passages focus on the connection between God and individuals rather than including a corporate dimension as is needed for a covenant group.

The call to pray was the basis for the covenant group from the consultation in Louis Wilson’s book. Also healing groups were formed. The groups arose naturally. They were not imposed or structured from the outside.

In regard to covenant connections resulting from this weekend, participants had been longing for such a group because of conflicts and feeling marginalized from Yearly Meeting leaders and ministers, and feeling some isolation and uneasiness being around others. One Meeting had members frustrated with Meeting for Worship, so a house worship group was started, which includes non-Quakers who are working for Quaker organizations. Meetings could have covenant groups for members.

We would want to know how it would work. We would want generosity in regard to mistakes and not anger, kindness to another’s tender places.

Some would like a commitment to a small mission house. Another example is an FCNL Advocacy team. Quakers joining bring Spirit into those groups. The question was raised whether there could be a covenant group without being centered in God.

They could be virtual groups that meet via conference call or online. WCTS is an example of such a group as we do all our work via email.

Answers to Queries

Cynthia Sibrel asked Friends from St. Louis Meeting to respond to the queries before she attended the Colloquium. Here are St. Louis Meeting's responses:

How will Spirit open the way for a renewal of authentic power in the Society of Friends?

- 1) We must be willing to LISTEN for Spirit. We need more detachment from ego and from our day-to-day life in the world. Need to always strive to stay connected to Spirit and look for the spiritual viewpoint.
- 2) I wish I knew. I have not felt the power of spirit recently, though I think I see some of its work. People have often found spiritual power during times of crisis when they had to choose to have courage or be cowards—recognizing what they really valued.
- 3) How will The Society of Friends open themselves to the authentic power of spirit and to what purpose or consecration?
- 4) God will talk, we will listen. The enthusiasm, joy, love, and truth will fill our hearts and fill our society with authentic power. We will live up to the highest list God has revealed to us.
- 5) Expectant waiting in silence or through quiet and diligent work. The Spirit cannot be summoned.

What are the difficulties we face with secular practices entering our communities that are replacing spiritual seeking after Truth?

- 1) Respondents were not sure what this referred to. Do they mean the use of e-mail, Facebook, smart phones, etc? We've learned it is not good when Friends attempt to have group discussions via email. Email does not lend itself to silent moments to hear each other. There can be too much rapid-fire multi-responses to group email. These tools can be addictive and do not encourage us to have more quiet time to meditate and reflect.
- 2) I don't so much see secular practices as I see a religion focused on serving as the opiate of the people—for the purpose of making us feel good. I see this very widespread in religion in the U.S. – from fundamentalists to New Agers.
- 3) What secular practices are we willing to confess to—busyness, self-sufficiency, lack of commitment to the divine and our search for it?
- 4) The authority in secularism is logic and opinion; both of these are corrupted by the sin of humans. If our community is ruled by logic and opinion, it is not ruled by God. We could serve and promote the cause of the Democratic Party and not God.
- 5) We assume that reason and effort can be applied to all problems. Some problems require forbearance. Some problems cannot be solved. We have become, as a nation, in all political capacities, beholden to the rhetoric of activism, which solves some problems, but not all, not even many.

How are we dealing with integrity and love with new spiritual insights and practices found among Friends? Are we genuinely engaging the tradition and contributions of earlier Friends as Spirit leads?

- 1) Respondent was not sure what this referred to. Our meeting frequently mentions George Fox and other early Friends.

- 2) Not sure what this is asking. I read about new practices in *Friends Journal*, but haven't encountered many I am aware of. We haven't done a lot of engaging the traditions of earlier Friends except for the discussions on *Barclay's Apology*—and perhaps the book study on *Faith and Practice*.
- 3) In our announcements, we include quotes from earlier Friends, which are thought-provoking.
- 4) Hard to answer the first question. We could spend more time reading earlier Friends, scripture, deepen our connection to each other and God.
- 5) I believe we are engaging in our traditional practices, except that we have too common a tendency to hide our lights under secular bushels.

How are we being called to support Friends through the rising tides of secularization?

- 1) Is secularization referring to politics? We should remind and support one another to search for the spiritual—far beyond the current politics in the U.S. or the world. Be apart from the world. Separate ourselves from nationalism.
- 2) I see rising tides of racism, militarism, greed, scientific hubris, etc. I'm not sure secularism is the right terms for these issues or how we support each other.
- 3) Daily meditation. Living simply.
- 4) Through speaking of God, Speaking of Christ and scripture. By paying attention to small and large groups of Friends that discuss such things.
- 5) We are called to let our actions be our ministry. This starts in the smallest ways and requires discipline and practice. We are called to let the Light shine through us.

What is the spiritual state of our Quaker meetings and churches related to the discernment of spiritual gifts?

- 1) I don't know what takes place in spiritual direction groups (I'm not in one) but our meeting has several.
- 2) The nominating committee this year did a good job of discerning spiritual gifts—something that has not happened for several years.
- 3) The nominating committee does a good job, but this role can be taken on by all in the meeting. To recognize and appreciate the worth and contribution of others, even those who are silent.

How are we leading emerging ministers among us to discover their gifts and to have them recognized and supported under the care of the meeting?

- 1) Are we?
- 2) Ministry and caring makes some efforts to recognize and support emerging ministries—but this is an area we could do a lot more in.
- 3) I don't know that we do this. Seems like it's just a matter of who comes forward to speak or volunteer.
- 4) Appointing people to committee. However, we could have a committee of “spiritual testimonies” and another on “outreach.” Nominating, advancement, and ministry and caring could take the role on too.
- 5) In our Meeting, we actively encourage new attenders and members to participate in the day-to-day pragmatics of the Meeting according to their spiritual gifts.

Monday Morning Wrap-up

Fernando --- Although we entered from different traditions, we came together and at the end we want to know what is coming next. One way is to form Covenants of small groups. It may be as simple as recognizing this wonderful event of souls and going back to our Meetings to report. It may be that individuals who just met here may continue in a spiritual friendship. But there might be some sense of the whole as a covenant. Since it coincides with a group that already exists, that group might facilitate the next step.

Maurine --- Maybe WCTS could facilitate online forums on their website, using the digital example of Self-Help forums. We might like to meet online.

Lucy --- I remember that Maurine and I were first acquainted in a covenant group. We were in a workshop led by Louise Wilson at a time of great turmoil in my life. Louise advised us to find a group that we could pray with. Maurine and I were in a group of five people who met monthly on the phone and every year in person for about five years. I owe my life to that group. We met in the depth of the Spirit. I highly encourage that model. God will show you who your friends in prayer are.

Stephanie --- Fernando asked us to ponder the texts and talk of our experience. Our group noted that the Jeremiah text addresses the relationship between God and a person, not people to one another. The focus was individual, not corporate, but an I-Thou personal relationship. Louise Wilson's groups came out of a

particular context, a prayer group at her meeting. They were not imposed, but developed naturally.

Some in our group expressed a longing for ongoing covenant group activity, as some felt marginalized in their Yearly, Quarterly, or Monthly Meetings. Others were drawn to it but uncertain, not clear to proceed. They want to know more. They wanted a generosity of love, especially toward mistakes. Some noted the power of mission groups such as those in the Church of the Savior. They did many different things: a yoga and worship group, feeding the hungry group. They felt it would be possible to do virtual groups. Community calls out from different places and connects in different pathways.

Mike --- Perhaps mission groups could be combined with spiritual nurture and care. I am led to work with immigration issues now. I feel like that movement is where the Civil Rights movement was in the 1960s.

The question was raised if a covenant group could work if the participants were not centered around theological differences.

Glee --- I have experience in forming such groups and can describe my sense of it.

Susan --- Our group didn't feel that we know each other well enough to enter into a covenant now, but we agreed on a commitment to write to each other for six months about our callings.

Dan --- In the Jeremiah text we come to know that one will need to teach their neighbor to make it possible. Perhaps we must be stripped naked, and laid bare before God.

Maurine --- That reminds me of the video made by John Watts where the young people in a Quaker meeting stripped naked. This group is charging the WCTS Editors to complete the Epistle, which will be shared with all the participants and widely among Friends using Friends Journal, Quaker Life, and Western Friend.

Donne --- I gave the initial queries to Friends in Wilmington Yearly Meeting for their responses and wondered what I would bring. I think we should come back to these queries.

Michael --- The covenant is a vertical one which starts with God and then extends to the people. We are talking away about the inward work. The challenge is to hang in there with Monthly Meetings. Sometimes I can't. I left for awhile, but I came back. I never left my membership, only attendance. To allow the power of God to leave.

Susan --- I want to talk about plans for another meeting. I have a burning concern about building bridges. I want us to meet again next year around this theme.

Maurine --- There were lots of people who would like to have been here this year. Perhaps they would be able to make it next year. Some examples are Colin Saxton, Noah Baker Merrill, Judy and Johan Maurer.

Maurine --- Paul, Dan, and Fernando, you now have the task to write your presentations.

Judy --- I was making notes, which I can send to you. For the Proceedings, I would like to invite everyone to send reflections. You have my email address in the contact list.

Greg --- I have a housekeeping question. Is there a deadline for reflections?

Judy --- I like to allow two weeks. More than that makes people think they have plenty of time and put it off. Shall we say November 1st as a deadline for the Proceedings.

John --- biblical citations, or Q sayings digital Quaker collections will send reports

Maurine --- Pamela Richards called from the Emergency Room with severe foot pain and couldn't come. Those who were here showed tremendous generosity. How wonderful that Paul Buckley was willing to step in. Jennifer Elam got a message that God said, "Be there!" We have all the gifts we already need.

Stephanie --- There are opportunities at Earlham, full degree programs, but also 2-week workshops and some that are online , as well as videos on the website, conferences and gatherings. We can send folks to your meetings. We hope you can see ESR as your Seminary.

Maurine --- I am going to pass around the feather now and ask everyone, "What are you taking with you as you leave this Colloquium?"

Fernando --- I have a confirmation of being with Friends. At the beginning it is difficult. I feel like I don't belong. Then as we spend time together and listen to Spirit, strangers become friends, struggles become a common struggle, in spite of our differences. I am not naïve; I did not find Friends yesterday; I have a long history with Friends. But I am still in love with the Religious Society of Friends. It is an image of romantic love, such as the love of spouse. The covenant of marriage is very difficult, laborious, but it can be well done in a way that enriches life. We speak about the church as the bride of Jesus. We must not forget, in beginning God created man and woman.

Marcia --- I am taking home reflections and queries from spiritual authors and the wounding of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Bill --- Although it is not easy, it is always wonderful to come together face to face. That is missing in the world today. I discovered much about eldering and ministering. I am not an elder, but a teacher. I once eldered someone, but maybe the person is not ready to hear the message. This has meant a lot to me.

Tom --- I am grateful to the leader who encouraged me to come. All my expectations were exceeded. I am impressed with the commonality of Friends from diverse backgrounds.

Elizabeth --- I liked the Star Trek reference, the raising and lowering the shields, which makes me think

of centering prayer, consenting to the presence and action of God within. Consent is same thing as lowering the shield when not on red alert.

Susan --- I have a full heart, a heaviness from what I have heard, and deep gratitude for everything that was shared.

Greg --- I am taking home a sense renewal of a call to ministry.

Thais --- I am grateful for the kind hearts here, and open and honest communications. I was touched that people are praying for us. We were held in a wider world of prayer.

Helene --- I felt like we were taking our fears and washing them away.

Michael --- I feel blessed to be part of a couple of covenantal groups. We are working on a call, when and how, both new friendships and renewed acquaintances.

Donne --- I have a deep feeling of being blessed by all of you extraordinary people. I will write my name on your hearts and know that you are written on others' hearts. A Friend of mine was supposed to be here. I feel her absence. She more fully represents programmed Friends than I do: Nancy McCormick. I hope she can come next time.

Stephanie --- I feel a mix of brokenness and giftedness, doors closed and opened, and not knowing what to do with all that. I ache for those who feel isolation and uncared for. I don't think I have the energy for a covenant group, But I will hold that in prayer. I will ponder the relations of elder, minister and teacher. I feel a leading toward Greg to provide him with support and encouragement.

Mike --- I want to thank Maurine and Pam, the organizers for all their work in planning this. They are called to be angels of God's mercy. I was especially impressed with Marcia drawn to taking that pilgrimage

in Spain. I am also feeling a lightness because I am not led to be Registrar for next year. That frees me to focus on the immigration work.

Jason --- I am still processing the whole experience.

John --- I am feeling more gratitude than I can express. I am taking away a deepened lightness and a desire to go forward to whatever work Jesus Christ has for me with renewed diligence, a great appreciation for brilliance, light and beauty.

Maurine --- I am grateful to all the helpers who enabled me to get through this weekend with this disabled body. Jason made it possible for me to come, being always at my elbow, carrying my bag and my plate. I am feeling both wholeness and brokenness in the midst of a broken world, which includes the Religious Society of Friends.

Interest Groups

What Canst Thou Say?

A group of Friends interested in the mystical journal, *What Canst Thou Say*, met to consider future themes and guest editors. Two attendees suggested themes and agreed to Guest Edit for that theme. From this discussion, a schedule was established into 2020:

2018 Feb - Nudges, Earl Smith (Deadline Nov 15, 2017)

2018 May - Other Lives, Rhonda Ashurst with Judy Lumb (Deadline Feb 15, 2018)

2018 Aug - Angry with God, Mike Resman (Deadline May 15, 2018)

2018 Nov - Buried Treasures: Insights from My Ancestors, Berry Brody with Mariellen Gilpin (Deadline Aug 15, 2018)

2019 Feb - Being with the Dying, Susan Greenler with Judy Lumb (Deadline Nov 15, 2019)

2019 May - Eldership, Alison Levie with Earl Smith (Deadline Feb 15, 2019)

2019 Aug - Discernment, Marcia Nelson with Mariellen Gilpin (Deadline May 15, 2019)

2019 Nov - Young Adult Friend Spirituality Greg Woods with Judy Lumb (Deadline Aug 15, 2019)

2020 Feb - Healing - Susan Greenler with Mike Resman (Deadline Nov 15, 2019)

2020 May - Gratitude - Marcia Nelson with Earl Smith (Deadline Feb 15, 2020)

Queries for these themes are published on the *What Canst Thou Say?* website <whatcanstthousay.org>.

Early and Modern Friends Meet in Chicago to Discuss Scripture

***John Jeremiah Edminster,
Clear Creek Monthly Meeting (OVYM)***

On Sunday evening nine Friends watched a demonstration of searchable online resources designed to ease access to writings of early Friends. John Jeremiah Edminster, an M. Div. student at Earlham School of Religion and now custodian of the still-uncompleted Quaker Bible Index (QBI, esr.earlham.edu/qbi), is engaged in a year of Supervised Ministry dedicated to giving wider publicity to the QBI, to the Digital Quaker Collection (DQC, esr.earlham.edu/dqc), and to other online sources of early works like the extensive library of early Quaker texts available at the Quaker Heritage Press website, whose “Catalog of Old Quaker Writings” (www.qhpress.org/catalog/index.html) links to other collections such as the Quaker Homiletics Online Anthology and that maintained by the New Foundation Fellowship.

To spread this knowledge, John prepared a half-page “how-to” handout: “The Meetinghouse Library You Might Not Have Known About.” He hopes to launch a blog in 2018 showcasing the uses of these resources, “Keys to the Kingdom.” His grander hope is to help the Holy Spirit speak to Quakers and seekers of our own time through the often-luminous words of early Friends.

John had asked conference participants to submit 3x5 cards with favorite Bible verses or “Quaker memes” written on them. From the submissions he selected two memes – “Give over thine own willing,” and “What canst thou say?” – and one scriptural passage, beginning “Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?” (Ps 139:7-12 KJV)

With the memes, John showed how to search for the source using the Digital Quaker Collection, a gathering of hundreds of old published works scanned and digitized

in 2003 by Earlham School of Religion. Once users click the DQC's "Enter" button they're given the choice "Search Collection" or "Browse Collection." Once on the "Search" page, John keyed in "Give over thine own willing," clicked the "Search" button, and found the source, Penington's "Some Directions to the Panting Soul," in his Works: vol. 2, p. 241 of the 1784 edition. There the highlighted words appeared in bright red.

Searching for "What canst thou say" called up the Journal of George Fox, an 1885 biography of Margaret Fell, and a 1679 work by William Penn that happened to use the same words. The Fox and Fell sources both told the same story, how at Ulverston in 1653, George asked "What canst thou say?" and Margaret, conscience-stricken, cried out in her spirit, "We are all thieves!"

Doing a search in the Quaker Bible Index (QBI) proved more complex than the more straightforward searches in the Digital Quaker Collection. The QBI is a brainchild of Esther Greenleaf Mürer, who spent decades developing it before letting Earlham School of Religion become its web-host in 2007. You select a chapter and verse from the King James Bible, and then your screen displays quotations from it and allusions to it made by early Quaker writers.

For example, Calling up Psalm 139 in the QBI's "Summary Indexes" and scrolling down to the seventh verse, searchers find the following codes and the QBI's "Key to Sources" deciphers the codes for them:

(Ps 139:7-10) WPT 303

(Ps 139:7) GF8:270 [398]; MFU 377; RBA 34...

(Ps 139:7f) IP3:89, 248

For example, "GF8:270 [398]" refers the user to a passage on page 270 of Volume 8 of George Fox's Works, occurring in his Epistle No. 398. Fortunately, the New Foundation's 1990 reprint, which graces the shelves of many American meeting houses, retains the pagination

of the 1831 edition, which is the one kept in the Digital Quaker Collection. Fox's epistle sends a message of hope to Quaker prisoners of 1684 – and also to anyone today in the stinking dungeon of a bad relationship, toxic employment situation, or hopeless diagnosis:

Now, dear friends and brethren, if it doth please the Lord to try you. . . in stinking prisons and dungeons, Bridewells, houses of correction, and suffer you to be put in such places, who are his sheep and lambs, plants and branches; I say, the Lord can sanctify all such places for his people, his children, his sons and daughters, and make all pleasant to them: for his sheep and people cannot go any where from the Lord, for the Lord and his presence is with them [Psa 139:7] . . . and therefore . . . if the Lord do try, or suffer his people to be put in such places, yet his people are all . . . under the wings of Christ, and he can sanctify all such places to them.

“IP3:89” directs the reader to page 89 in Volume 3 of the Works of Isaac Pennington, the modern Quaker Heritage Press (QHP) edition.

Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? said David (who had the Spirit of God). If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, thou art there, &c. Psal. 139:7-8. And do not I fill heaven and earth saith the Lord, Jer. 23:24. But L.M. hath affirmed contrary to these testimonies, that God is not in this world at all.

The question of whether God is present in creation is both ageless and urgently timely today. We may jokingly (and perhaps blasphemously) call a desolate place “godforsaken” and think nothing of it. The idea that nature itself might be God's body, God's property, or at least God's beloved creature, eternally indwelt by its Creator, has long vanished from our mainstream civilization. It may be up to the Bible-reading Quaker remnant, fortified by old writers like Pennington, to bring the idea back to the mainstream. How say you, Friends?

Reflections from Participants

Jennifer Elam

I got the invitation to go to the 2017 Ministers and Elders Colloquium in Chicago months before it happened and decided to go. Then I decided not to go. I was having ups and downs with my health, had been caring for my aging parents and just thought it would be too hard and cost too much money.

The week before the gathering came and on Tuesday morning, I woke up and knew I HAD to go. I said, "Oh, there are no reasonable flights this late." But, there was. I emailed Mike Resman and knew it was too late to get a room. But, he emailed back that there had been a cancellation and there was a room available. I emailed Maurine Pyle and told her I was coming. She said, "Oh, Holy Spirit is up to mischief. I know it for sure now."

I got to the gathering and she was so happy to see me. That was nice. But, there was an agenda too. Some of the leaders had gotten sick and she needed me to lead an Arts and Spirituality activity. In The Art of Eldering session, Paul Buckley agreed to fill in and talk about eldering and I agreed to do the clay activity (with a few changes of my own). With a few minutes of preparation, we did it. And certainly the Holy Spirit was present. Maurine (one of the leaders who had gotten sick) kept saying over and over that God had sent me there. I think she was right and I was glad to be involved in that kind of Holy Spirit mischief! (*Originally* published as "Holy Spirit Mischief" in the February 2018 issue of *What Canst Thou Say?*)

Kathy Kovalick

The phrase “See the Light, turn toward the Light, follow the Light” comes back to me regularly. The amazing group of individuals present also continues to follow me: The richness of fellowship.

My tears throughout have not yet fully been understood. At some point though these may have been identified as pain. But in the beginning they began from a deep source of profound thanksgiving of what my Lord has given to me. Of where he has placed me in this universe. Of the Quaker family he placed me in Quaker community. God is in the tears. Where tears are, God is there.

Diane Reynolds

“If the only prayer you said in your whole life was, thank you, that would suffice.” Meister Eckhart

I came across that Eckhardt quote in a book a Friend lent me. As I read Eckhart’s word, I became grateful to that friend for lending me the book. I thought of Ken and Katharine Jacobsen, and their lives of gratitude, a theme of a recent Friends Center weekend. I sent the quote to the Friends Center participants, and received a thank you from Ken. I felt grateful again. Now I feel grateful remembering the Ministering and Eldering meeting in Chicago. Gratitude is an ever-widening virtuous circle.

I don’t remember much of a factual basis about the Chicago weekend, though I do have notes. I do remember feeling grateful to be there, grateful to see old friends and meet new ones, and grateful to feel part of a remarkable community. I remember discussing whether we should have covenant relationships with each other. I believe we didn’t decide anything, but I think we are nevertheless in covenant with each other, without having to make a verbal promise or go through a formal ritual.

In what can seem like hard times, it was both lifting and deepening to spend a weekend with spiritually like-

mindful (like-souled?) people from all over the country. To me, the people I saw that weekend made hope possible—not as a cliché, but truly so.

Like many, I increasingly find peace as I shed expectation, such as the idea that “things” have to be “a certain way” before change can come. Things never are a certain way. Things weren’t a certain way when Jesus came. We spend Advent getting ready for the arrival of a prince of peace, even though nobody at the time was ready for him when he came. But he came all the same. Change followed.

Beyond things being a “certain way,” I used to think too we needed more young Friends. Now I am utterly at peace with most of us being older—and also with some of us being younger. God works with what is at hand. Sarah and Abraham did not have to be a certain age to have a son, and one son was enough. Older people can be the vessels for miracles, as can the young. Whoever we are, we are what God has and wants, and that is good.

I used to believe as well we needed more Friends, greater numbers of us. But then I remembered that God is a God of abundance: what we are is enough. I am grateful for everyone we have.

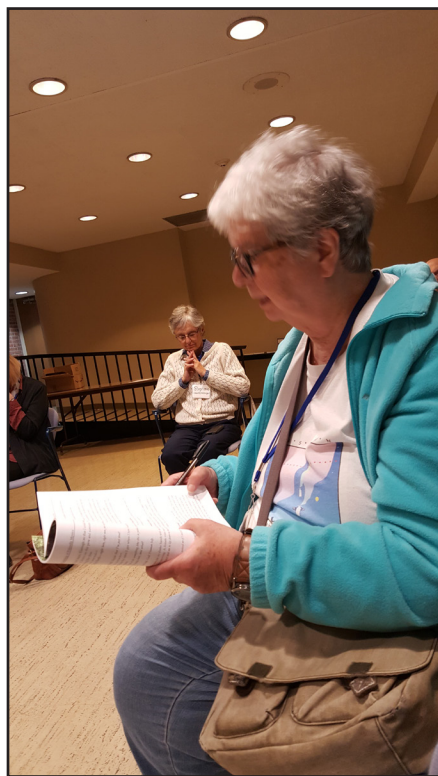
This year, I have been leaning into Vaclav Havel’s long 1978 essay, “The Power of the Powerless.” Havel spent ten years in prison for being dissident. Whatever the dominant society might impose, he wrote, the answer lies in people entering into caring and genuine human relationship with each other. Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Thomas Kelly said the same. Havel called this creativity and relationship building a Second Culture. We did that in Chicago for a weekend: worked on a Second Culture.

Havel wrote, ““There are times when we must sink to the bottom of our misery to understand truth, just as we must descend to the bottom of a well to see the stars in

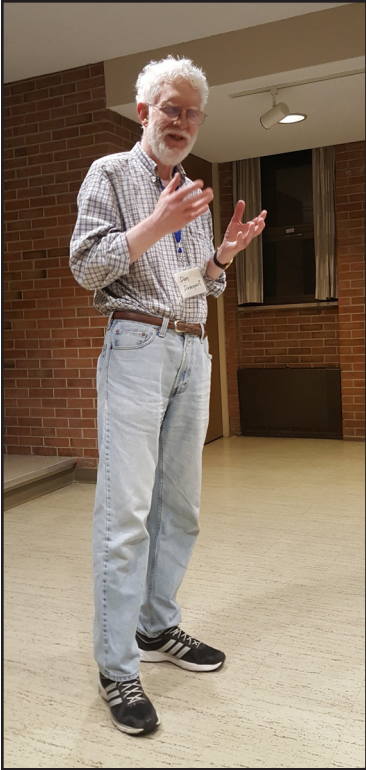
broad daylight.” Right now, I am not at the well’s bottom. But I am grateful that he wrote those words. And I know we sometimes, during the weekend, glimpsed that well’s bottom as we recognized the situation our world is in.

I am grateful for having had the wonderful weekend with Friends. I am grateful because we acknowledged both the good and the bad. I am grateful for the beautiful weather we had in Chicago. I am grateful that we will meet again.

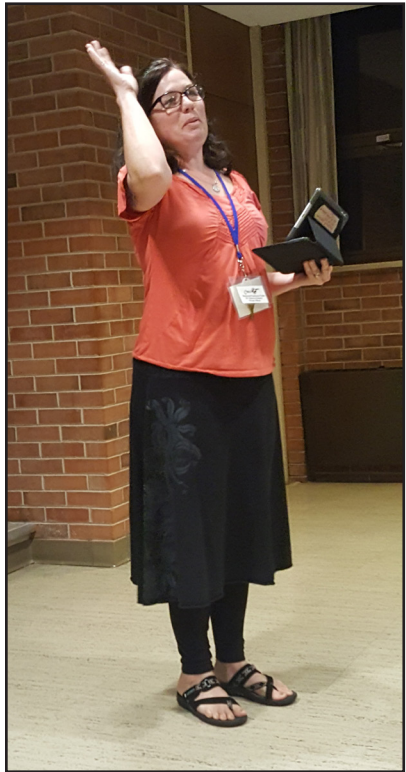
Open Mic Night



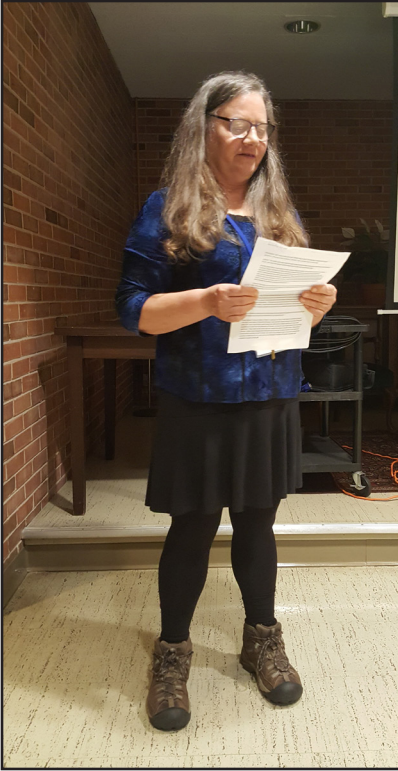
Organized by Mariellen Gilpin



Dan Davenport



Glee Lumb



Elders I have Known and Loved

*Maurine Pyle
(Read at Open Mic Night
by Jennifer Elam)*

Nowadays among the Friends we seem to think that elders are old fashioned. But I know that I could never have come this far without these wise ones who shaped my path. From my first day attending a Quaker meeting I saw their quiet leadership as essential for my spiritual and emotional growth. Coming from a Catholic background where there was only a rigid catechism to follow, I knew I had entered an open space

where the rules were not evident. Did I know how much I would be leaning on my Quaker elders? Probably not. I was an arrogant 20-something back then and cocksure about my ability to find my own way. Little did I know that the elders were lurking about, sizing me up to become an elder myself twenty years down the road. I just want to share a few stories of crones and sages whom I have known and loved and a few lessons they taught me along the way.

When I first attended a Quaker meeting, I was in my early twenties, and like most people at that stage, I was sure that I had all the answers. A challenge was awaiting me there in the form of my first Quaker mentor, an engaging gray-haired artist with sparkling blue eyes named Alice Ayres. Alice had a rather careless way of dressing. Her

clothing was purely functional, never stylish. While I had my whole life mapped out in advance, Alice had no plans. She loved to tool around town on an old rusty bicycle festooned with a yellow ribbon, which she claimed kept thieves away. I loved her, but secretly I thought she was crazy. Alice was magical in every way, seeming to live in a somehow unconnected sphere of reality. Little did I know that Alice would become my greatest teacher for learning how to let go.

Alice firmly believed in healing through the connection of mind, body and spirit. She subtly taught me about the healing energies which surround the body. Here is a typical Alice lesson which was almost always in the form of a story. One day, she told me, she had stumbled into a ground level bees' nest and was enveloped by a swarm of angry bees. Calmly she walked to her car praying over and over, "God bless me. God bless me." She received nary a sting. "Try it!" she encouraged. "Love the bees, and they won't hurt you." I was thinking "Oh, sure, Alice." But somewhere inside of me I was intrigued. At an outdoor gathering of Quakers a few weeks later the yellow jackets were out in full force. Many people got stung, but not me. I loved the bees, and they gently crawled up and down my arm without harming me. "Alice must be sharper than she looks," I thought.

Then she did something that really blew my mind. Alice called together a group of Quaker healers to speak about spiritual forms of healing at our next quarterly meeting. Now these were Quaker heavy-hitters like Barry Morley, whom I greatly admired for their left-brained abilities. They told dramatic stories of healing experiences through visions, laying on hands, and other psychic phenomena. I was stunned. My sense of a common reality was being deeply disturbed. I asked myself, "What have I been missing with my narrow view of God?" It was time to let go and become more experimental with my spiritual gifts.

Now I look upon Alice as one of my greatest teachers.

Her wisdom can be symbolized in the way she traveled through life, riding on a rusty bicycle with no planned route. At every intersection, she would stop and ask “Which way, God?” To this day I follow her simple guidance, following God’s wisdom, as best I can, at every turn in the road.

Lesson: The elder you seek has her eyes open to the hidden treasures around you. She lets go of her own way and allows God to lead her in new and surprising ways.

Another great elder I met early on was named Virginia Sutton, who was the clerk of our yearly meeting. Quietly she led our often fractious Quaker business sessions through difficult decisions, both acknowledging our smartness but turning us always to the Spirit for the final word. I watched her from afar admiringly yet I had no idea that she was also watching me. As a very young newcomer to Friends, I was serving in the role of monthly meeting clerk. Observing Virginia was my schooling in this art form. Other quiet elders began showing up to talk with me. When I look back at these stars in my firmament, I am awed at the tenderness and guidance they showed me without saying a word about it.

Lesson: The elder you seek looks out for the young ones and sizes them up for their potential gifts. She will seek to nurture incoming leaders by nudging, pulling, pushing and showing us the way and by letting her own life speak.

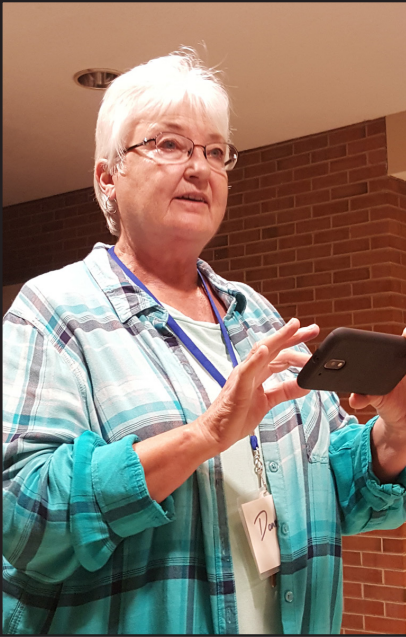
As I moved along the path as a yearly meeting leader and a traveling minister I had access to elders beyond my region. They shared the same quality of overseeing my gifts and nudging me along to develop them. One person that I met much later on was Marge Larrabee. Many people will recognize this name. She was a classic Quaker crone, sort of like the old crow who perches on the fence and caws loudly in your ear. I recall at one FGC ministry weekend I spoke out of the silence about my yearly meeting being in dire straights. Afterwards

Marge cornered me and in a croaking voice demanded -- "What are you gonna do about it?" Now that was classic elder talk -- direct and truthful. I went back home and started to volunteer my community development skills to my yearly meeting. Marge was right that my complaining without doing was not helping the situation.

Lesson: At times an elder has to be very direct, at times salty of speech. We cannot always get the message across subtly. Sometimes we just need to say it.

Elders stories? I have a million of them. I could go on and on with tales of gratitude because now that I have been a Friend for 40 years I can say that I know a thing or two about being an elder. Yet I see a vast empty space where the 20th century elders used to sit. If you have benefited as I have from the eldership of Friends, it is time for you to give back to the incoming generation. They need us the same way we needed the elders of earlier times. These days, I wonder if elders have disappeared because we are too shy to step forward in our culture of independence among current Friends. So, here is my charge to you. If you ever received the benefits of eldership as you were joining the Religious Society of Friends, consider your obligation to pass on the gift.

Mauring Pyle: *I had brought this published WCTS story (May, 2017) to read on Saturday night but I was ill and in my room, too sick to come. But angelic Jen Elam arrived at my door and offered to read it for me,*



Donne Hayden read “The Footwashing at Marlborough” from *Gospel Order* by Sandra Cronk, 1991, Pendle Hill Pamphlet #297

The story happened in Chester County, Pennsylvania. It took place around the time of the Revolutionary War. Two Quakers lived on neighboring farms. One was Richard Barnard, an elder, who was a war tax refuser. Not able to support military endeavors because of religious conviction, he refused to pay all taxes directly related to war.

His neighbor was Isaac Baily, a strong supporter of the Revolutionary War. His neighbor was Baily, a strong supporter of the Revolutionary War. Baily was known in the area as a contentious man, often involved in disputes with his acquaintances and even with his meeting. It would have been hard to find two more unlikely neighbors than these two Friends.

A waterway ran between the Baily and Barnard home. As part of a dispute about property rights and water use, Isaac Baily dammed up the waterway.

God’s call to peacemaking and reconciliation was very important to this Richard Barnard. He tried every conceivable method to work out a satisfactory solution with his neighbor. Following the advice of Matthew 18, he went to talk to Isaac, but to no avail. He took other Friends with him to speak with Isaac. The matter of the dammed waterway was put to arbitration. Friends decided Richard

Barnard was in the right. But nothing would induce Isaac Baily to remove the dam or be reconciled to this neighbor.

The situation was a great burden to Richard Barnard. Not only was he without the use of the water, but he suffered much inward discomfort as the result of the broken meeting; he was supposed to be a counselor and guide to others. Yet he could not solve his own dilemma.

One day a travelling minister came to visit. Richard Barnard opened his heart to the minister and described his problem. When he finished, the minister said simply, "there is more required of some than of others." Richard was struck by this response. He considered what more could be required of him. He had done all that seemed humanly possible to find a solution to the problem.

Richard held up the problem to God for direction and guidance. The answer that came was beyond all "techniques" for conflict resolution. It required giving up claims of being right and going to his neighbor in humility and forgiveness. Richard felt that God was calling him to wash Isaac's feet. The idea was so unusual, he kept trying to push it away. But in the end, he realized he would not have an inward sense of being faithful to God's leading unless he was willing to surrender his notions and be obedient.

Therefore one morning he filled a bowl with water from the waterway that divided the two men and went to Isaac Baily's house. It was so early that Isaac was still in bed. But Richard went up to his bedroom and explained that he had come to wash Isaac's feet. He described how painful the strained relationship had been for him. He was here now, following God's leading, hoping they could be reconciled. Isaac sputtered and fussed, refusing to participate. But Richard persevered and began to wash his feet. Gradually Isaac became quiet and let Richard complete the washing. Then Isaac dressed and accompanied Richard to the door.

Later that day Isaac took a shovel to the waterway and dug away the dam. The water flowed again between the two farms. In the afternoon Isaac and his wife came to pay the Barnards a friendly visit, the first in a number of years. Richard was very grateful for the restored relationship.

The friendship between the two men remained deep and vibrant for the remainder of their lives. Some while after the problem with the waterway, Richard Barnard broke his leg in a lumbering accident. Isaac took care of him during his recovery. When Friends decided to build a new schoolhouse in the vicinity (a building which may also have functioned as a meetinghouse), the two friends contributed one hundred dollars and adjoining land at the juncture of their two properties for its construction. It was a fitting memorial of God's healing work in their lives.



Jennifer Elam reading of her book *Hillbilly Rising*

For about a year, people in my circles who know a bit of my Appalachian heritage, encouraged me to read *Hillbilly Elogy* by JD Vance. I did not know what the word *elogy* meant and did not want to look it up. Well, that was my excuse. Really, at some level, I knew there would be things in that book that I had no desire to hear or deal with. After all, I have spent my life running as hard and fast and far as I can get from my Appalachian heritage.

My father tells the story that when I was 8, one day I was in the tobacco fields, raised my arms toward the sky, and screamed at God, “I don’t know what it is, but I want to go to college.” My prayers were answered but it required a lot from God and me. I wanted out of the tobacco fields and I wanted possibilities for my life. So, I learned to speak without an accent when I did speak, get through my selective mutism, and adapt in at least a million ways so that I did not lose 30 IQ points in the ears of the listener, as soon as I opened my mouth.

In early June, I finally broke down and read *Hillbilly Elogy*. Once I started reading it, I could not stop; I stayed up all night, til 6 am reading. And I was not wrong. I loved and hated that book. Many of the events in his life are parallel to events in my life; well, mostly the parallels were between my life and his grandmother’s life. I am 32

years older than him. I grew up in extreme poverty and my family moved to a working-class town northwest of Chicago when I was 12 so that my parents could work in factories. We did not deal with opioid addiction but the effects of incest in my grandfather's generation tore my family apart. So, for tabloid material, I can probably tell a story at least as compelling as JD's. My family's trials and tribulations have many parallels to Vance's. On my paternal grandmother's side of the family, my great grandparents' had cousins named Vance so there is a good chance we are even related.

My paternal grandfather came directly from the mountains to the bluegrass. He and my grandmother fought their whole lives. They even divorced and got remarried at a time when people did not get divorced. I now wonder if the incredible differences between the mountain and the rural bluegrass cultural norms and expectations may have been part of the reason. Well, his views on who to have sexual relations with probably didn't help their marriage. They surely never seemed to know why they were throwing the dishes across the kitchen at each other.

I have been obsessed with writing my own version of this migration and my working title is *Hillbilly Rising*. My first reading from it was at the Ministers and Elders Colloquium. It seemed well-received. Greg Woods told me that he had been in communication with JD Vance. I told him that I wanted to ask JD for a public dialogue. I have no problem with the book as a memoir, just relating his experiences. But what has been done with this book to advance political agenda and to embolden the stereotype of hillbillies, making life for people like me trying to break out of poverty and get educated, even harder. Now, that goes to the core of my bones as just WRONG. Greg said that Berea College was the perfect place to ask for support for this dialogue. Wow! I lived in Berea for 5 years, became a Quaker in Berea, and am still a member of Berea meeting. OH MY! Coincidence?

I go back to KY often because I have elderly parents that need a lot of help. And I am my father's power of attorney and manage the family farm that has been in the family since 1794. I have to tell you that hanging on to a small family farm these days is not easy. I never in a million years thought I would end up managing that farm that my grandparents lived on when I was growing up. Ohhhh!!!! The mischief of Spirit never cease to amaze me!

In November, I went to Berea to a traditional music concert. The best of my heritage is the music and dance – banjos, fiddles and clogging cannot be beat! I went with my friend, Amy who came down from PA and my friend, Laura who became a Quaker the same week I did in 1991. I walked Loyal Jones, an Appalachian writer for whom the Appalachian Studies Center is named. I went up to him and said, "I used to live in Berea and always wanted to meet you." He said, "OK, and introduced me to his daughter and two men who turned out to be the director, Dr. Chris G. and associate director, Chris M. of the Appalachian Studies Center at Berea College. I told them what I was up to in writing my response to Hillbilly Elegy and Chris G says, "Go sister."

A fella there says, "I already know you." "You do?" "Yes, aren't you a psychologist and didn't you have clients in Berea?" "Yes, but no, I worked in Georgetown," "You had one client in Berea." "Yes, you are right, I did have one." "That one was my son. You saved my life. Not only did he start doing great in school, but he went to camp in high school and the kids started coming to him when they were afraid, and he told them what to do." OK, I better sit down now. Greg, you were onto something.

In that moment, it felt like the universe had created a very special moment for me. There was Amy, representing my PA life, Laura, representing my Quaker life, another man, Frank J was there who had been a caller when I was a founding member of the O Contraire Dance Association, Deborah whom I had known in many Berea contexts and

is now Frank's wife, and she was mc-ing the concert. Then there were these ASC folks very interested in Hillbilly Elegy and one of them had a son who had been a client when I was working there as a psychologist. Only God could orchestrate THAT!

In the 1990's, I spent a lot of time with Parker Palmer who came to Berea College for a Lilly professorship. He joined Berea Friends Meeting. I didn't know he was famous or I would never have had the nerve but I constantly asked him if we could talk about something he said in meeting that I thought was especially for me. He talked about the undivided life. My life has always been very divided. For one moment, in November of 2017, I lived the undivided life.

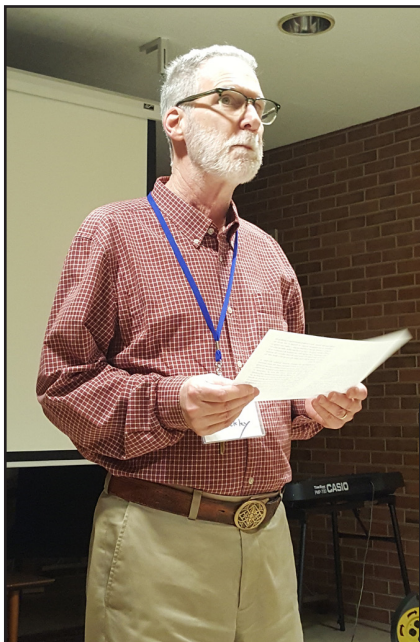
Last week, I went to Lexington Friends Meeting and a professor of geography at the U of KY is as passionate about this as I am. I met with Chris G and Chris M and they are all now my cheer leading squad for the co-creation of a work intended to support hillbillies. Could that be the beginning of a "ministry?"

I got back from Kentucky on Wed and on Thursday, I felt called to preach an unprepared sermon on forgiveness at the worship group I go to. I have done vocal ministry but NEVER even thought of getting up and preaching a sermon of some amount of minutes – time seemed irrelevant. I have always deeply disliked sermons. I say, "I had enough sermons before I was 15 to last me the rest of my life." I have no idea what I said but I think some things I have been writing in my book were in there. I heard a lot of "Amens" and "Hallelujahs" that I have never heard at Quaker meeting before. Praise God! Co-creation with God is always a mystery to me and makes me smile when I recognize that co-creation has happened again!!

One thing I have learned from this project already is that when I lose 30 IQ points just by opening my mouth, that is an issue between the listener and God, not a fault of mine...or anyone else of Appalachian heritage. That

is called bias and prejudice. And that is a new way of thinking about it, for me.

Stay tuned...more Spirit mischief coming...anyone feeling led to be my elders?



Paul Buckley



Stephanie Crumley-Effinger

It's Not Heart Surgery

Marcia Nelson

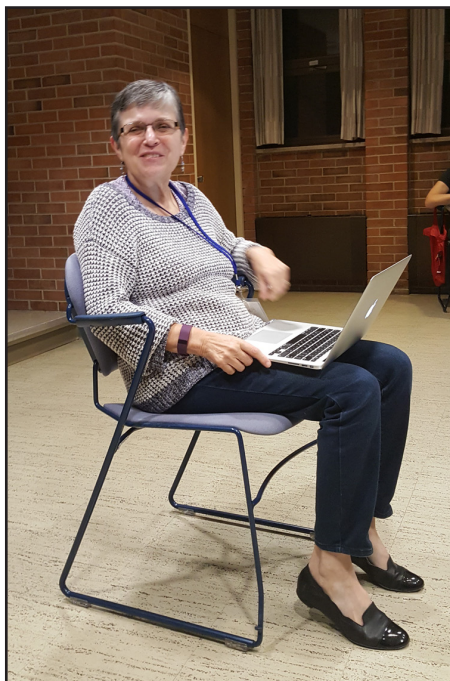
Last-minute preparations: stop the newspaper, clean the cat litter box, pay bills in advance, finalize lawn-mowing arrangements, fill the bird feeder. Everyday living has lots of details to it that have to be handed off or sloughed off during an absence from home. I told my husband, whom I am joining in Europe, that I feel more like I am going to prison than going to Spain.

I have been paying more attention to little things I enjoy: the flash of the red cardinal in the yard. Cats snoozing in sunny spots in the house. Will those peonies open before I leave, and will they still be in bloom when I return? (The latter is very likely.) Morning sun through the windows. These are good things, being traded in for the unknown rain of Spain, which looks as miserable as

rain anywhere else if you have to walk in it. Walking pilgrims have no choice.

The pilgrimage may be in Spain, but it's not Club Med. It's Club Camino, for walkers along the Camino de Santiago staying in inexpensive albergues where it is possible to encounter bedbugs, though Bill has made no such discoveries.

I don't know what I'll discover, besides how quickly I will adapt. This pilgrimage right now strikes



me as extreme retreat, with lots of walking meditation required. I am discovering a combination of travel anxiety + pilgrimage anxiety + being away from home anxiety. On the other hand, it's not open heart surgery, which I had last summer. There's perspective. There's anxiety.

I know what I will miss here. I think of the prophets called by God in the Hebrew Bible, and a number of them said: Why me? This is not a calling by any means, but I can relate to the foot-dragging reluctance before a new vista opens up.

Shifting to gratitude and prayer always works. Bill was fortunate to get a blessing for his journey from a chaplain colleague at his hospital. I worked last night, and my duties included blessing of the hands of nurses, a sweet ritual that many really appreciate. At the end of my shift the two chaplains who came on blessed me for the road, including my reluctant pilgrim feet.

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We finished with some singing, including the Gerooge Fox Song.