



SPARK

New York Yearly Meeting
The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

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May 2021

Eldership and Spiritual Accompaniment

Guest-edited by Lu Harper and Anne Pomeroy

Introduction

Lu Harper
Rochester Meeting

We understand elders as Friends who hold a deep concern for the spiritual life of the meeting, and who carry gifts of prayer, discernment, recognizing & naming spiritual gifts, voicing hard truths, listening, teaching, a ministry of presence, spiritual accompaniment, and an understanding of the spiritual basis of Friends' faith & practice. In traditional or indigenous cultures, "Elders" are named to reverently acknowledge the wisdom of the elderly. Our Quaker understanding of elders differs: while not excluding respect for the wisdom that comes with age, it does not limit acknowledgment of wisdom or spiritual depth by age. In this issue we hope to expand our collective understanding of eldership through the experiences and stories of Friends across the yearly meeting.

In this understanding of eldership, which can be exemplified both within and without Quaker circles, someone who is called into eldership or spiritual accompaniment:

- practices deep, respectful listening;
- cultivates relationships based in mutual learning;
- provides practical support for another's work;
- carries a concern for the well-being of the body;

- is open to unexpected opportunities;
- creates space for "way opening";
- creates structures of integrity & mutual accountability;
- serves the community as led;
- is grounded by both history & experience; and
- provides opportunities for witness and testimony in a meetinghouse of ideas.

The Quaker understanding of eldership developed in the first generation of Friends, when "public" Friends were traveling and spreading their experiential understanding of the possibility of unmediated access to God. As these ministers helped establish local meetings and then moved on, early Quakers became aware of the importance of identifying steady Friends to ground and settle fledgling meetings. These Friends were recognized as elders.

The work of early elders as described in the Balby Epistle of 1656 was largely that of pastoral care, care of the meeting for worship and overall care of the functions of the meeting: caring for families, the poor and imprisoned; recording marriages, births, and deaths, etc. The Epistle's postscript emphasized the importance of following the Spirit rather than rules, an emphasis that is still at the root of eldership.

In the Quietist period that followed the persecution of the first generation of Quakers, organizational structures solidified, and

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Untitled watercolor of Silver Bay by Randall Stoltzfus, 2019.

Letting Go of the Term 'Elder'

Anne Pomeroy
New Paltz Meeting

As a practice, continuing revelation asks each of us to tend the spiritual condition of the body and of ourselves. We are asked to listen to how we are led. Continuing revelation provides a framework for understanding that the qualities that help us be more faithful will change in us, both for ourselves and for our community. Our understanding and practice of eldership will also change with our faithful attention to Spirit's leadings. It is important to tend the existing and emerging functions of eldership without being bound by previous

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SUMMER SESSIONS

July 25-31, 2021

BECOMING A SANCTUARY

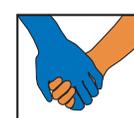


WHERE SPIRIT DWELLS

Welcome to Summer Sessions 2021. Our virtual gathering in July will look different than it did in 2020. Many Friends let us know that having Summer Sessions over two weeks was taxing and the Sessions Committee responded with a different schedule that is only a week long. Our core activities, grounded in worship and prayer, are still at the heart of Summer Sessions.

As in 2020, there are no committee meetings scheduled. Interest groups, which many Friends enjoy, will be offered over the three weeks prior to Summer Sessions, starting July 5. Watch the weekly email from NYYM and the website for the call for proposals and, later, for the

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Eldership
pp 4-9



Summer Sessions
pp 9-12

Notices

New Members

Claudia Ansoorge — Poughkeepsie

Marcia Clark — Poughkeepsie

Christopher Brandon Fisher — Housatonic

Diana Jensen — Brooklyn

Nichole Lynn Nettleton — Ithaca

Kristina Sibinga — Chappaqua

Rebecca Swan — Amawalk

Transfers

Dan Bell, to Rochester from Broadmead Friends Meeting (Lake Erie YM).

Mathilda Navias, to Rochester from Broadmead Friends Meeting (Lake Erie YM).

Deaths

Barry Allen, member of Morningside, on January 21, 2021.

Dolores Gifford Applegate, member of Manasquan, on March 9, 2021.

Gretchen (Gay) Berger, member of Purchase, on January 6, 2021.

Nicholas Boyce, member of Brooklyn, on March 24, 2021.

Linnea Capps, member of Brooklyn, on April 19, 2021.

Carol Coulthurst, member of Rahway-Plainfield, on March 27, 2021.

Charles Mohler, member of Ithaca, on April 1, 2021.

REPORT FROM SPRING SESSIONS

NYYM Friends gathered online April 9-11, 2021. The weekend began with a joy-filled Friday night event led by Marissa Badgley. On Saturday, two sessions of worship and business were held. In the beginning of afternoon worship Friends got a sampling of Meeting for Feelings with Joy Meikle and her delightful puppet friend, Aura. "Social meals" at lunch and dinner gave Friends the chance to go deeper into a topic with other Friends or to simply socialize. Sessions ended with a meeting for worship and business on Sunday afternoon.

In addition to hearing reports and endorsing travel minutes, the body (i.e., the Friends who had gathered in worship for the business meeting) approved several minutes. Two minutes endorsed

Around Our Yearly Meeting

bills on parole reform, advocating for more widely available timely parole and making parole available to incarcerated people ages 55 or older who have served at least 15 years in prison. Two other minutes addressed the climate crisis. NYYM agreed to support the enactment of federal carbon pricing legislation. And, after some prayerful discernment and revision, NYYM approved the Earthcare Minute, below. Please share it widely.

You can read all of the Spring Sessions minutes and reports at nyym.org/content/minutes-spring-sessions-2021.

EARTHCARE MINUTE

Human activity is causing catastrophic effects including habitat destruction, pollution of air, soil and water, resource depletion, species extinction, global warming, and new forms of disease. With reverence and respect for all Creation, Friends are called to bring the full weight of our heritage of engagement with the world to help stop and reverse the effects of climate disruption and ecological damage in order to leave a habitable planet to future generations of all species.

These compounding crises call each of us to discern what we can do individually and corporately in light of our gifts and circumstances. Our daily choices matter. However, as important as personal witness is, it is not enough to safeguard our planet for future generations. Therefore, Friends are urged to act collectively and quickly to protect and restore our beloved planet.

Friends can help create community initiatives such as community choice aggregation (an affordable, ecological source of electricity), protection and planting of trees and other forms of carbon sequestration, watershed protection, community gardens and composting centers, and stations for collecting and reusing refrigerants.

Friends are urged to stay informed on Earthcare issues including pending government legislation at all levels and to contact our elected representatives regularly to express our opinions. Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), Quaker Earthcare Witness and Climate Crisis Policy are valuable resources.

Friends are called to advocate that institutions and businesses shift their investments and change their practices so that climate solutions can be implemented rapidly and at the scale needed to truly slow and then reverse global warming. A respected source of scientifically and financially validated climate solutions is "The Drawdown Review," available at www.drawdown.org.

Opportunities for further work for change include climate marches, non-violent direct actions, and other ways to publicly advocate for ecological and just policies and practices.

In contemplating collective actions, care should be taken to work with and receive guidance from those people most impacted by the climate crisis, environmental degradation and injustice. We must also support a just transition for workers who may lose their livelihoods in the transformation to an Earth-friendly economy.

Friends, may we come into right relationship with all Creation.

NEWS

Bible Study with Powell House

Join Regina Haag and Emily Provance as they read through Genesis on Wednesdays, 5:30-7:00 p.m. Email regina@powellhouse.org to join the mailing list and receive each week's reading and Zoom link.

New Edition of *Faith and Practice* Available

\$10.00 per copy suggested. Large print version is also available. To order, contact office@nyym.org or write to New York Yearly Meeting, 15 Rutherford Place, New York, NY 10003.

Projects to Support Children, Youth, and Parents

A Call for Proposals

Do you have a creative idea for engaging teens or children, or connecting parents with spiritual support? NYYM has funding available for projects that support NYYM youth and parents in 2021. Visit nyym.org/pks to find out more and to submit a proposal.

Quaker House at Chautauqua Institution

The Quaker House at Chautauqua Institution has just opened and is accepting reservations. Visit quakerschq.org. For more on the

Chautauqua Institution, a sort of "summer camp for intellectuals," visit chq.org. Send questions to Sue Tannenhill at info@quakerschq.org.

Calling All Playwrights!

The 15th Street Meeting (NYC) Arts Committee is seeking scripts based on people or events from Quaker history or the current Quaker community for production in 2022. Please send scripts or inquiries to stevecapra@pipeline.com.

ONLINE EVENTS

NYYM Summer Sessions

Online, July 25-31, 2021

Interest groups will take place during the three weeks starting July 5. See pages 9-12 for more.

Friends General Conference's 2021 Gathering

Online, June 27-July 3, 2021

The Virtual Gathering offers a wide variety of programs and events throughout the week. You can register to attend the full event, or just the parts that fit with your schedule. Standard registration opens May 6. Visit www.fgcquaker.org/connect/gathering

Events for Young Adults

The Interim Young Adult Field Secretary, Marissa Badgley, con-

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212-673-5750
info@nyym.org
www.nyym.org

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communications@nyym.org
Editorial Board:

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NYYM Staff

Marissa Badgley: yafs@nyym.org
Chad Gilmartin: web@nyym.org
Callie Janoff: arch@nyym.org
Steve Mohlke: gensec@nyym.org
Walter Naegle: walter@nyym.org
Helen Garay Toppins:
office@nyym.org
Sarah Way:
communications@nyym.org

tinues to support and organize virtual gatherings, workshops, and worship designed for young adults (ages 18-35-ish) but open to all. Visit bit.ly/NYYM-yafca1 for all upcoming events.

Virtual Powell House Workshops

Powell House is the retreat and conference center for NYYM. The buildings at Powell House are available for sojourners. There are also online workshops being planned frequently — go to poho.org to see the full list of upcoming events.

EVENTS FOR CHILDREN & TEENS

Upcoming IN PERSON Powell House Youth Conference!

Earthsong 2021, for 7th-12th Grade, August 13-15, 2021. Join us for a weekend of fun and celebration! This is the time of year to celebrate our seniors as they get ready to go out and do good in the world. We will also celebrate our whole community and the love we've shared throughout the year. There will be workshops, games, crafts, a fancy dress-up dinner, and a boisterous cabaret.

Upcoming ONLINE Powell House Youth Program Conference

www.powellhouse.org/youth-program

Upcoming virtual youth weekends:

Just Make it Up! for 9th-12th Grades, June 11-13, 2021.

Here at Powell House, we are working on creating a completely non-violent role playing game. During character creation, instead of asking questions like, "What weapons does your minotaur character carry?" our game asks, "Now that you are a minotaur, what kind of jelly would you want on your PB&J?" Join us for a weekend of playing and discussing the world of fun and interesting tabletop role playing games.

Friends General Conference (FGC) Year-Round Youth Program

FGC offers several online programs for youth. Visit fgcquaker.org/connect/gathering/programs-and-events/year-round-youth-programs

Family Devotionals for Younger Children

These daily Zoom calls are designed for adults and children participating together. The audience primarily in mind is kids in elementary school

and preschool. There's singing, a story, and a query with a chance for discussion, either as a whole group or in smaller groups. Find the link to register at quakeremily.wordpress.com/connection-in-a-time-of-covid-19/familydevotionals/

Meeting for Feelings

Meeting for Feelings meets each Friday morning at 10 a.m. ET. It's a safe space for young Friends to learn about and understand their emotions. Joy Meikle and her puppet buddy, Aura, look forward to experiencing connection, peace, and fun with fellow members of their Quaker community. This offering is designed for ages 3-5 yrs old, but all ages are welcome. For more info and to register, visit nyym.org/content/meeting-feelings.

ONLINE WORSHIP

Many of the local (monthly) meetings in the New York Yearly Meeting area are holding online meetings for worship every week. Visit nyym.org/online-worship-opportunities for the full list.

Powell House Online Worship Saturdays at 6:00 p.m.

Powell House holds a meeting for worship via Zoom every Saturday at 6:00 p.m. Contact Regina at regina@powell-house.org for information on how to join.

Friends General Conference (FGC) Online Worship

FGC offers general worship and worship for BIPOC and others every week. Find all details and links at fgcquaker.org/resources/online-worship-opportunities

Pendle Hill Worship in the Barn

Members of the Pendle Hill community gather in the Barn for worship every day from 8:30 to 9:10 a.m. Connection information is at pendlehill.org/explore/worship/join-us-online-for-worship-in-the-barn/

FWCC's Worldwide Worship List

Friends World Committee of Consultation (FWCC) has compiled a list of meetings holding worship online around the world: fwcc.world/kinds-of-friends/online-worship

OPPORTUNITIES

Multiple Job Openings at Pendle Hill

Pendle Hill, the Quaker retreat and conference center outside of Philadelphia, PA, is now hiring for several associate and administrative positions. Visit pendlehill.org/

[explore/employment/](#)

Job Opening: General Secretary, Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC)

FWCC (www.fwcc.world) provides the connective tissue for the world body of Quakers. Can you see yourself providing leadership and organizing this work? The applicant must be a member of the Religious Society of Friends who speaks English proficiently and is willing to live and work in London, United Kingdom. Please read the full job description at fwcc.world/about-fwcc/general-secretary-search. Applications should be submitted to search@fwcc.world by midnight in London on June 4, 2021.



Editor's Note

Many thanks to Anne Pomeroy and Lu Harper for guest editing this issue on Eldership and Spiritual Accompaniment. Both have deep experience providing spiritual support to individuals and communities. I am grateful to them for that work and for their help with this issue.

If you aren't receiving the weekly NYYM email, but would like to, please send a message to walter@nyym.org.

Please consider submitting your writing or images for future issues of *Spark*.

Upcoming Spark themes:

September: Open issue. You are encouraged to write and submit articles inspired by our time together at Summer Sessions, or by anything else that inspires you.

Please do write and share. Deadline for the September issue is **August 9**. Email article, letter, photo, poetry, and drawing submissions to communications@nyym.org. Please limit yourself to 400-600 words.

You can also send news or events to that email address so they can be shared in the weekly NYYM email or in the next *Spark*.

Find NYYM on **Facebook** ([NewYorkYearlyMeeting](https://www.facebook.com/NewYorkYearlyMeeting)), **Twitter** ([NYYMTweets](https://twitter.com/NYYMTweets)), and **Instagram** ([newyorkyearlymeeting](https://www.instagram.com/newyorkyearlymeeting)).

—Sarah Way, NYYM
Communications Director
communications@nyym.org

Women Behind Bars Matter

Historic March 9th Rally and Press Conference Outside Bedford Hills Correctional Facility Held in Honor of Women Behind Bars

"The most disrespected person in America is the BLACK WOMAN..."

— Malcolm X, 1964

In commemoration of International Women's Month, the People's Campaign for Parole Justice relentlessly and tirelessly advocates for the rights of women behind bars.

The female incarcerated population stands over seven times higher than in 1980, according to Bureau of Justice statistics. With more than one million women behind bars or under the control of the criminal justice system, women are the fastest growing segment of the penal state. Oddly, the theater of Black men's pain obscures and overshadows other horrific realities in the criminal justice system's violence against these marginalized and vulnerable women (i.e., the new "Jane Crow:" women's mass incarceration).

Malcolm X warned that America was a racist prison state. Suffice it to say, fifty six years after his tragic death, it still is.

The trip to Bedford Hills took approximately 45 minutes by car. The weather was unseasonably warm for this time of the year, a beautiful sunny day ideal for a family picnic. To be honest I was, in fact, a bit reluctant at first; the thought of visiting a prison, after serving almost four decades behind bars, was indeed a harrowing experience to say the least. I enjoyed the scenic view as we drove along the beautiful Hudson Valley and made our way to the notorious women's prison in upstate New York. A phalanx of correction officers forming a perimeter in front of the facility, ominously greeted us like praetorian guards. The small group of women organizers were not distracted or unnerved. They continued to whip up the crowd into a frenzy...shouting into a megaphone "who is she?" "I am she!"

The hit song by the Staple Singers, "Let's Do It Again," could be heard blaring loudly in the background. Yes, let's do it again!

— Gregory Thompson, Member of the Prison Worship Group at Green Haven Correctional Facility; Released in December 2020.





Eldership and Spiritual Accompaniment

Introduction

Lu Harper
Rochester Meeting

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ministers and elders became associated with structural power that was subject to abuse. "Eldering," historically used to describe one function of eldership—gently admonishing in love the ways, habits, or thoughts of a Friend or attender after serious consideration by or consultation with respected members of the meeting—became a byword for structural abuse of power among Friends, and in the liberal tradition the naming of elders fell into disuse by the beginning of the 20th century.

Throughout our history, Friends have carried the gifts of eldership and concerns for the spiritual life of the meeting. We continue to experience these gifts working among us, whether or not we name them as such. Friends carrying gifts of eldership are called to serve on clearness committees, committees of ministry & counsel or pastoral care; they are the Friends you turn to for guidance or for a listening ear. In meeting business sessions, they will be "holding space," holding the gathered body of Friends in the Light or in prayer. And so much more.

In this issue, we will hear a variety of Friends' experiences of elders and eldership and explore what eldership might look like in a renewed vision of the Religious Society of Friends.

— Lu Harper, Rochester Meeting

Letting Go of the Term 'Elder'

Anne Pomeroy
New Paltz Meeting

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understandings of the term "elder."

Prophetic eldership is one function to tend. The prophetic function in a spiritual community may be thought of as feeling/sensing/seeing below the surface words—to identify and support what God/Spirit is trying to manifest in a particular moment. Prophetic eldership can name and

disrupt the status quo. Disruption of the status quo is often met with resistance, which is a natural response.

As more Quakers experience the call to the functions of both elder and minister, let's move beyond those terms to *faithfulness*. Being faithful means listening to Spirit/God. The way we listen and what we listen to are individual and collective. This listening may be limited when we identify with the role or term. Let's listen for what Spirit is calling us into.

Both eldership and ministry tend the spiritual condition of the community and/or the individuals in the community. Aspects of eldership include: spiritual accom-

Prophetic eldership can name and disrupt the status quo. Disruption of the status quo is often met with resistance...

paniment (of individuals and the community), prayer, teaching, voicing the condition of the body, and tending the movement of the spirit in the gathered body or in an individual. Eldership has an element of listening for emerging ministry and therefore is a part of the communal support of continuing revelation experienced either by individuals or by the community. The actions of the elder are generated by and manifested through love and tend the wholeness of the community.

The motions of eldership support the spiritual growth of individuals and the community. Thus, when the gifts of eldership manifest, people feel seen and supported on their journey; there is a collective sense of spiritual community; resources are made available to support the spiritual deepening; and the community can sense and move toward collective action. The faithfulness of the community is enhanced by the function of eldership.

Without faithful listening, the shadow side of the gift of eldership can emerge. The shadow side of eldership is evident when the actions of an individual support the enforcement of the status quo and structural biases.

Actions referred to as 'eldering' often encode racism, power, and exclusivity. In these instances rules (overt or unwritten) may be enforced that create an in/out sense in the faith community. This disrupts the fabric of the community causing personal and collective pain. In some instances the misuse of the role of elder has caused people in our communities to leave. Other individuals stay but are wounded. When the shadow side of eldership emerges it may reflect an underlying conflict in the community, an instance of ego, the use of personal or institutional power, or resistance to change. The occurrence of the shadow elements of eldership require a deep faithfulness from the community to tend the aftereffects of this behavior. A timely intervention can help the community heal and become more deeply connected spiritually. The community will need to tenderly navigate its way—seeking the guidance of Spirit throughout.

Our forms of worship and our practice of discernment help us listen. This faithful listening requires that we not bind ourselves by our previous understandings, our biases, and the stories we tell ourselves. So much has changed and is changing. New things keep emerging.

Can we embrace the functions of the care of the spiritual condition of the body that both elders and ministers carry? Can we release the terms of minister and elder? In these times of collective increasing awareness of structural racism and colonization, are we willing to let go of forms from the past and deeply listen to what is being called for now? Can we let go of terms, roles and behaviors that keep our vision of ourselves individually and collectively small, powerless and separated? Holding on to existing beliefs and behaviors (a form of confirmation bias) keeps us from being open to the promptings of Spirit and to continuing revelation. The power of Spirit for transformation is immense. What new is emerging? How are you/we experiencing Spirit moving? Are you ready? Let us do this together.



Holding Space

Beth Kelly
Brooklyn Meeting

I have agreed to sit as an elder for this Quarterly Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business, praying and holding the Body as we discern around an issue about which there is pain and misunderstanding. For much of the meeting I am hunched over, hands folded in prayer against the bench in front of me, head bowed. At the rise of meeting, a Friend I don't know well approaches me and says, "I could see how hard you were praying for us. Thank you."

This patient has coded twice and his family are out in the hallway, crying. They ask me to pray over the patient (though not with them—it's complicated). When I see the doctors and nurses are starting to clean up, I ask

"I know you," I say. "You bring blessing to every patient, every family you touch. You are doing God's work."

if I can come in and pray over the patient. I pray for him, for God to hear the prayers of his heart, and for the family and the medical team to care for him with love, compassion, steady hands, and the wisdom to know how best to help him. I pray, knowing that my prayer is being witnessed by the medical team. This space is sacred, and they are a sacred part of it.

A Friend asks to schedule some time to talk to me about an issue she is discerning about. It's nice to be seen as someone who can help. We've known each other for a long time. I can remember things she has asked me that I thought came from great wisdom. I ask my own questions, but I also repeat her own back to her.

A patient speaks of alienation from his family and faith community, so I ask about alienation from God. "No, I've never felt God has abandoned me!" he says. He tells me that he has experienced God calling him to specific ministry in the world, though he keeps running away from it. We talk about Moses and about



Jonah, and I ask him what God is calling him into. "Who will you do this with?" I ask. "Because God will not call you to do all that by yourself."

A Friend is disillusioned by her experience of racism in the Religious Society of Friends. "Do you feel led to give this concern to me and other White people so we can address it? Is that enough? Or do you feel led to engage with the meeting more directly?" I feel led to be an advocate if she wants, a harbor if that's better.

In the height of Covid, a respiratory therapist friend of mine finds me in the hallway. He is weeping. "I think I am killing them," he says. "We don't know what we are doing." I look him in the eye and, social distancing be damned, take his hands in mine. "I know you," I say. "You bring blessing to every patient, every family you touch. You are doing God's work. You are still a blessing, even when the patients don't make it. It is not your fault, and they are blessed to have YOU."

The thing about holding space is that once I started, it became a habit. (Clerking meetings rather than chairing them is another habit that happens for me.) If I believe that God is present in each person, and that God is present in each situation, then I am empowered to name it, to demonstrate the belief, to remind people that their lives and the spaces they occupy can be sacred even in their ordinariness or times of disaster. In this way, eldering a meeting for business is not dissimilar from showing doctors and nurses that they are included in my prayer; discernment is led by how Spirit moves in the person and how they relate to their communities; the experience of disillusionment with one's faith community and one's career speaks to how our hopes for ourselves and those around us are diverted.

I hold space. I hold it in the same ways at work and in the meetings. I trust that Spirit/God/Christ moves in us and I remind people by my presence, which is grounded in the Presence.

Beth Kelly is a chaplain at NYU Langone Hospital-Brooklyn.

The Gift of Traveling With Each Other

Angel Ramos
Rochester Meeting

"Being a Quaker is hard," I often find myself repeating as I learn to walk in the Light. I suppose it can be said of anything worth pursuing. Yet becoming, transforming, learning and eventually being is what Quakerism has become for me.

I find myself engaged in welcoming the formerly incarcerated home, especially those that attended worship services while inside. Trying to keep them connected to Friends and meetings is something I would like for them because it has enriched my life. I see Quakers as family. Former prisoners need good families to teach that which they have never known: an appreciation of life and the people in it. This lesson on family is reinforced whenever I go to Sessions at Silver Bay. I volunteer to drive people around so that I can be with them and learn that which they wish to share. In those small moments I listen, practicing an open heart, always with the hope I will take that with me when I leave. I suppose it is one place I can practice being my best self. When I come back home, I feel invigorated and that much more committed to my spirit. What a gift.

In a world tied up in the quest for material things it is often the spiritual life that needs tending. I chose to practice with my Quaker family because they have taught lessons that lead to the life of the spirit and the happiness of the soul. Like I said, being a Quaker is hard because it demands I be my best self in all situations with all people. Not an impossible task as I am no more broken than the next person, yet I feel like I am always struggling to catch up with my spirit.

As a convinced Friend, when I travel with others and help them remain faithful to their calling by listening to them, praying with them, and helping them move along their spiritual quest, I am engaged in eldering of a sort. I am modeling a behavior taught by my Quaker family; allowing my best self to thrive in the moment. I suppose I fail a lot, yet I keep practicing in the hope I get it right.



The Amawalk Meetinghouse in early Spring, 2021. Photo by Robin Alpern.

On Being Accompanied

Callie Janoff
Brooklyn Meeting

Over the years that I've been working for NYYM and the ARCH (Aging Resources, Consultation, and Help) Program I've always worked closely with the Committee on Aging Concerns (CAC). Before I started this job the CAC had sorted out that they wanted the relationship between committee members and staff members to follow an "eldership model" which I don't think I fully understood at the time, but I've grown to appreciate.

Over the years the CAC has rotated through some incredible Friends that I've had the good fortune to count as elders in the work I have done to support older Friends in New York Yearly Meeting. My first experience of being accompanied by a spiritual elder was while I was acting as a co-facilitator for the ARCH Visitor Trainings. We have usually offered this training several times a year since I started working for ARCH in 2012. Each time one or two members of the CAC has served as an elder for the retreat training. One of the things I have loved about this is that each time the elder brings their own spiritual gifts to the experience.

Sometimes that looks like hospitality, like making sure the temperature is comfortable or that everyone has a pen. Sometimes it looks like deep worship in the back of the room that feels like an intentional and embodied divine connection and presence with us. Sometimes it is someone sitting right beside me when I'm anxious or ungrounded,

reminding me with their presence that I'm not alone. Other times it is a whispered noticing of something I've missed, or a debrief afterward of a dynamic they saw or felt in the experience of the participants. Sometimes my elder has left chocolates on my pillow after a long day of work, or an encouraging note for me in the morning before facilitating begins.

All of this feels very connected to how we think about what we "do" as ARCH Visitors. We can't always fix the problems we encounter, or remove the pain from those who are suffering in something related to their journey with growing older. So instead we focus on what we can do, and how we can be with each other. We can make sure people are comfortable, or that they have a pen when it is time to fill out an important form. We can worship together, to bring our experience of the light to each other when our bodies can't do what they used to. We can go together into challenging medical situations or when we are anxious or ungrounded. We can tell each other true things about what we see happening in one another and in our relationships. We can send encouragement and affection to each other to celebrate important milestones along our paths. No two ARCH Visitors do this accompaniment thing the same way, because we each carry different spiritual gifts to share.

One of my favorite things about being a Quaker is that we have a way of practicing ministry that is reciprocal. I receive accompaniment, and as I do, I find that I'm able to offer it too. The ministry I experience of eldership is never a one way street.



Eldership and Spiritual Accompaniment

Thoughts on Eldering

Mary Foster Cadbury
Bulls Head-Oswego Meeting

I grew up when elders were formally appointed, although that was changing because eldering had become very judgmental and harsh. We realize now the need for eldering as gentle counsel.

Two instances of eldering stick in my mind. As a child I attended my grandparents' meeting when we were visiting in Ohio. It was a big old meeting house with the ministers and elders sitting on the raised facing benches. I watched a pleasant looking old woman sitting there in the Quaker plain dress, similar to my grandmother's. After a while she took off her bonnet, laid it on the bench, and rose to speak. Immediately her manner changed. Her face became red and contorted. Her voice was loud and harsh. It was frightening. I learned later that elders *had* spoken to her; she had been eldered. Her reply was always, "That's the way the message is given to me." How does an elder handle that!

May appointed elders, or any of us who act in counsel to another, speak out of God's love.

The most excellent piece of eldering I've encountered took place decades later in our small meeting house in New York State. On this Sunday morning the building felt full—30 or 35 people, children and adults. Friends had gathered and were settled for worship. Soon a little 2-year-old began chattering. It began to appear that she was not going to stop. Finally her older brother, 6 or 7 years old, said to her, in a kindly and friendly voice, "Katherine, the Meeting needs silence." And she gave it to us. It was the sort of quiet we always aspire to, comfortable, expectant, grateful, healing.

May appointed elders, or any of us who act in counsel to another, speak out of God's love. 

Eldership in the Healing Center

An Interview with
Kathy Slattery

Lu Harper & Anne Pomeroy

In an interview, Kathy Slattery reflected on the intersection of eldership and healing during her 18 years as co-coordinator and greeter at FGC Gathering's Healing Center. She spoke about spiritual hospitality, creating a safe space, feeling energy flows, a community of practice, and mystery—all elements we've experienced in eldership as well.

I had a sense very quickly on that this was a practice of spiritual hospitality. And what was called for was to meet people and greet people and to listen at a heart level...once I listened to people and had some basic understanding of what they might be looking for, there were two additional steps... one was trying to discern what modality or which practitioner... might be the best connection for them and that's a tricky part. And I can't even explain to you how that worked. But I had a sense for it. And the next part was the ebb and flow. Because sometimes there would be a lot more seekers, looking for work...than there were practitioners. So...when there was a crunch, it was kind of like spiritual triage. And that again is a... challenging place to be, and how to be there, without judgment, but trying to stay listening at a heart and a soul level.

It was a very experiential eldering...an affirmation of a gift for being able to pair seekers and practitioners well, to the benefit of both.

So, the intersection of healing and eldership kind of came from my growing understanding of healing, especially healing in a group setting. That's much different than someone's individual practice. So understanding how the Body ministers through healing. And I feel like I was the one being eldered. And it was a very experiential eldering...an affirmation of a gift for being able to pair seekers and practitioners well,

to the benefit of both...For healing to work...both the seeker and the practitioner had to benefit. Otherwise, it was not sustainable

The Healing Center as safe space

We took care to prepare the room so that it started off being a clean and safe space that we could make sacred with both intention and the work and being grounded by people holding space and holding the work and holding each individual...It was powerful and entering into it ...people could sense, just walking into that space...They felt like they were walking into meeting for worship...But that sense of being in that space. That is the space where healing can happen. It's a very invitational space, invitational to open ourselves, our hearts further, but also that door is open for spirit, not just for exploration or curiosity.

On feeling energy flows, individually and collectively

With hands on healing, the closest I can come in describing it is an almost low charge electrical flow. That's an exchange between myself and the person working with me. In the Body, it's more like air currents, or yeah, it's more like currents on a bigger scale, whether it's wind or wave or water... In the bigger room, in the corporate sense, it's not just all around us, but it's permeating us. With distance or remote healing, there's a different sensation to it. And maybe on zoom, it's a different sensation...an even bigger energy, but more diffuse.

On the community of practice among the Healing Center volunteers

When the practitioner experienced something totally outside their frame of reference for their modality...[something] outside their experience in healing as ministry too...it was all okay because the community held and built such a big container that that could be absorbed—it wasn't understood, you know there's some of that might have taken months to unfold. For that practitioner, as well as the seeker perhaps. And it was okay not to have words for it...it was perfectly right that it should rest in mystery. That we were operating in a space that sometimes was beyond our understanding. And because of that, maybe things worked so well,

because we weren't limited by our understanding, it could go places that we didn't even imagine. And almost invariably for the good.

And intention grows...when we start out on something...just to be kind to ourselves we set a lower bar. But pretty soon, you know we're already approaching that and we can see over it, and there's another hill beyond that one and another. And then there's mountains and... There's always more. And I think the more that's grown...the call, or the ministry, morphs and changes.

And if gifts...really belong to community, then why shouldn't they show up, bigger and better and grow in that community of practice, especially when the community of practice takes care and pays attention to care of each other. 

Faith Journeys of our Elders

Sue Tannehill,
Buffalo Meeting

"Each time an elder dies, it is as if an entire library had burned to the ground."—*African proverb*
"You are a unique edition of the universal story."—*James Finley, Christian Meditation*

These two proverbs have shaped my thinking for the past few years, leading me to help elders preserve their stories. Many individuals and organizations help our elders with physical challenges, downsizing, loss, and diminishment. I felt called to seek out the stories of these elders before they were forgotten though I had no experience with video or recording people's stories. Through an attendee at our meeting, I found Jesse, a gifted videographer who works with me in people's homes. I do the interviews, he does the video work, and we do the final editing together.

Despite the challenges of COVID, opportunities opened in ways I could not have envisioned. In July of 2020, my home meeting created a Stewardship Committee that, among other things, wanted to preserve the stories of our meeting's elders for future generations. I leapt at the chance to videotape these faith journeys. First, we developed a list of questions we could ask and presented it to business meeting for



additions and approval. Our interviewees could also add questions they wanted to be asked or delete questions they did not feel clear to answer. We also suggested that they might find photographs depicting the milestones in their lives that they wanted to talk about.

Jesse and I began filming, using COVID-19 protocols from our local PBS station. Friends in the meeting donated the funds for Jesse's time (filming and editing), and the meeting created a budget line to pay for one film.

To date, we have completed and shared two of the films. Comments from our meeting, as well as other meetings and family members, have been universally positive. The comments that express delight and surprise at all the experiences that an elder has had are particularly satisfying. We are also excited that the films have caught the interest both of Rebecca Levi-Hamilton of QuakerSpeak and Friends in a neighboring meeting.

Many new attenders feel at sea when they come to meeting, not sure of what to do. Videos of our elders talking about how they came to Friends, how they followed a leading, the choices they made, their doubts, crises along the way, and most importantly how they found themselves sustained by the Inner Light can personalize the experience of being in meeting for worship. We ask about what each elder actually does during meeting for worship, and the answers offer ready-made experiments for others to try.

As the pandemic restrictions loosen, Jesse and I look forward to working with other individuals and/or meetings to create these films. If you are interested, contact me at sue.tannehill@gmail.com and I can send you a link to view the two completed videos we have done of our elders and discuss the process. We are open to travelling.

If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it is that work like ours is both important and urgent. One of our most cherished elders had a fall and passed away in August before we could film her. We will have a video booth at her memorial service and record others' memories, but it won't be the same. Truly, an entire library of wisdom and stories has been lost.



Chaplaincy as Eldership

Astuti Bijlefeld
Central Finger Lakes Meeting

Early one morning during the year that seemed endless, a chaplain colleague and I walked over to acute care. Exhausted and worried, the nurses had asked for a blessing. On the way, we quickly reviewed the practical details: who would say what and when. Everything else we carried with us: tiny individual bottles of anointing oils, a few prayers and affirmations. What I had not done was pause to prepare myself to hold the space and those crowded into the small break room.

The nurses, in gowns, goggles and respirators, could only be away from the unit for a few minutes, but they all found a seat. The talk slowed and stopped. Some eyes closed, some tears welled up, some shoulders eased back a little, breath in, breath out as the space and the group became still. The chaplains said what they had planned, the anointing oils were quickly claimed, someone taped the affirmations to the fridge and the nurses went back through the sealed double doors plastered with warnings to stay out.

Friends' faith and practices continue to shape and guide the ministry to which I feel called. The learning continues daily. This issue's focus on spiritual accompaniment is challenging me to become intentional about holding a space, a group, another person. I am only beginning to see the discipline required for this spiritual practice and to imagine some of its potential. At the same time, occasions such as this blessing remind me daily that another power is at work in these encounters. In the break room gathering, the sense of being held came to me from the group. Francis Howgill's image continues to serve me well: this power "did gather and catch us all, as in a net." Reflecting with Friends on the practice of "holding the body" is giving me a whole new appreciation of Howgill's next words as I see more clearly that my assignment includes coming "to know a place to stand in and what to wait in."

Astuti Bijlefeld is a chaplain at a VA Medical Center.



Elderly Beauty, charcoal drawing by Sybil Perry, Bulls Head-Oswego Meeting.

Recording as a Form of Eldering

Karen Reixach
Keene (NH) Meeting

Eldering has three aspects:

1. spiritual nurture,
2. offering discipline/accountability, and
3. practical support.

The role of recording clerk does not at first glance seem to be connected with eldering. Having attended countless meetings for business at the local, regional, and yearly meeting levels that allowed me to observe recording clerks in action and having served as recording clerk for Rochester Friends Meeting, Farmington Scipio Region, and New York Yearly Meeting, I have learned that the recording clerk can be of support to the clerk and the body in several ways: perhaps most important, the recording clerk needs to come prepared with draft minutes of routine items and an open heart to assist the clerk in discerning the movement of the spirit as business is considered and decisions made, what may be called "listening in tongues." I can remember one Summer Session in which the body struggled mightily for some time over an item with countervailing expressions and rising tension; the recording clerk at that time was Walter Haines, a gifted recording clerk, who modestly offered a draft minute that captured the underlying unity that the body had been unable to articulate and was joyfully approved. In less happy instances, the recording clerk needs to have the humility to receive help from the body, when the draft minute does not serve (and the discernment to hope that the clerk

will resist ill-considered revisions when the minute as presented does capture the sense of the meeting). More often, the recording clerk simply stays centered, modeling for the body the spirit in which business is best done and holding the clerk, those presenting business, and the body of Friends in love.

Being presiding clerk can be strenuous, challenging the most spiritually robust individual. Having individuals accompanying them who can tell the truth, affirming the positive and offering areas for reflection, is not necessarily the role of the recording clerk. But before or after the session, the recording clerks may serve as a sounding board and even help a clerk who is struggling with a particular item or individual. Tenderly done, perhaps with some humor, this can support the work of the presiding clerk.

Recording is also a specific skill. Lee Haring and Sharon Hoover, both seasoned recording clerks, offered interest groups on recording that were helpful in understanding this role and the required gifts. They also named and nurtured my gifts, which is clearly a function of eldering. Newton Garver supported Vicki Cooley by inviting her to draft minutes in the body as she listened to the meeting for business proceed and then by reviewing that work and offering suggestions.

In fact, every role in a meeting calls for the gifts of eldership, of a loving, truthful, courageous, humble care for the spiritual well-being of individuals and the entire meeting.



Untitled watercolor of Silver Bay by Randall Stoltzfus, 2019.



Eldership and Spiritual Accompaniment

Eldering From the Body

Heidi Kelly

Old Chatham Meeting

Elder clerking

Before we ended the initial session of my first weekend as a member of the Powell House Committee, the clerk suggested that we each consider what gifts we had to contribute. After a cool visit to the pond, I came back to the common room and pondered what I could offer. The first thing which came to mind was how I listen to rooms full of people, not only to their words, but their meanings, the feelings and energies associated with the words, and what the room “feels” like as words are spoken and processed.

Another thing I realized I bring are the energies which move through me when I participate in worship. Though it made me feel awkward, others had been connecting my name to the word “elder” for a while. If anything, I was a “younger” because my elder work has a bit of youthful spring in its step. Spring, the season of rebirth, birth, and youth, because even as I am aware of my aging, I see myself as young with more to learn than teach. Springs are also one of the many moving forms of water which sustain life and ground me in loving energy. And, springs store energy until it is needed to help get work done. As I contemplated these offerings to the committee, I saw the clerk’s table and I mumbled something like “oh no” to myself.

Much discernment and a year later I was sitting not really at, but crossed legged in a big comfy chair next to, the clerks’ table. The first few weekends I served as clerk were a bit rough for us all. My clerking style would obviously be different from the previous clerk’s, as everyone has their own way of serving in that role, and I struggle with convention. My biggest concern was that while I was more likely to have something that wants to be said regarding specific agenda items, I’d never been prone to speaking from worship—something which was now a required part of my role.

I can still feel the delicious silence we were sharing during that first session I clerked, and the terror

I felt when I suddenly realized that the room was feeling antsy because we’d been quiet overly long—and I was expected to be saying some official committee meeting welcoming-type words. I felt sad and disoriented at being wrenched from deep and beautiful worship. The committee members and staff were extremely generous with their promptings and other assistance, and together we made it through the night and weekend. Over the next four years I got a better feel for how a group can do joyous and challenging work together. I started to find balance within myself regarding how deeply and long I could melt into the communal worship, what parts of me needed to stay aware of clock time, agendas, what was being said, and what needed to be heard and held. With practice I also gained a better feel for when and how to state my impression of the group’s developing Sense of the Meeting. On a few occasions I was even able to name out loud things like fear or excitement which I sometimes sensed were affecting our worshipful work together.

Just as I can not fathom how to give or receive a massage without noticing the interplay of energy between myself and another person, I can’t imagine serving as clerk without my elder tendencies informing the work. I hope to continue learning how to sense and use the flow of the dance between the two in service of our corporate decision making process. And maybe someday I’ll even manage to remember to use “accept” and “approve” in their proper contexts!

What I “do” during worship

My personal theology consists of two parts: from second grade Sunday school class, “God is love,” and from time spent sitting on my own for 3 days in a river in Utah, “God is everywhere in everything.” I tend to identify as a non-theistic Friend not because the label is a perfect fit, but because my philosophy feels different to me than the text and deity-based theologies I am familiar with. During my first retreat at Powell House we were asked to organise ourselves in a line by how we identified our beliefs, from non-theistic to theistic. I requested to make the line a

circle as I fit best in the place where non-theism meets poly-theism. I don’t think of God as an entity but rather as a force of life and love, an energy which flows within and between all life, so my concept of God is simultaneously no one/nowhere and everything/everywhere.

If I have been asked by an individual to hold them in eldership...(I) open myself to loving them as I see them in that moment, and invite the energy moving through me to support them as it sees fit since it is far wiser than I.

How does this relate to my experience of eldership? Well, at that first Powell House conference almost 15 years ago, a Christian Friend asked me what it is that I did during worship if not pray or listen for the voice of God within. I told them that I smile. It took me a couple of years and attendance at another conference to start to put more words to this concept of smiling worship. In a small group discussion, someone described part of their eldering gift as radiating God’s love. The image of a steam radiator helped me to understand that while what I “do” during worship looks on the outside like smiling, inside what it feels like is letting myself trickle down into the earth to the water which sustains and connects all life, and invite the energy to flow through me, allowing love to radiate.

Sometimes the energy flowing through me calls for a little direction and I send it into the room (or across the state) with a gesture of my hands or an invitation to find its way to where it belongs, but more often there is the comforting, and sometimes a wee bit scary, radiator feeling. If I have been asked by an individual to hold them in eldership, I may think of how that person “feels” to me at that time (often this feeling appears to me as a plant or animal of some sort, though occasionally people have felt like forms of fire or boats on water), open myself to loving them as I see them in that moment, and invite the energy moving through me to

support them as it sees fit since it is far wiser than I.

Thoughts on, or rather not on, the facing bench

A few years ago I was invited by some seasoned elders to sit on the facing “bench” at sessions if I felt led to do so. Despite having a sense of my experience as an elder for a few years, I had never considered perching on those chairs near the clerks’ table, but being encouraged to do so made me wonder why not.

While I have been asked by people who know they will be presenting to the body in different sorts of Meetings for Worship with Concern for Business, proximity to that individual is not critical. Since my general practice is to welcome loving energy into the process of worshipful business, my physical location is irrelevant, and sitting in the midst of the group feels central and comfortable. I acknowledge and respect that elders and those they serve have many different experiences and needs, so for some sitting on a facing bench is the perfect fit. I also wonder if seeing elders in that traditional position puts people at ease as they worship? Knowing that the people and the process is being held in the light can help the group enter more fully into worship whether or not everyone is consciously aware of the interplay of energies in the room.

It is probably a good thing that I don’t feel drawn to sit on facing benches. I prefer to sit on the floor, or even lie down, during worship as this helps me remain grounded—literally. Also, sometimes I find that I get extra wiggly during worship. For instance, I’ll start feeling a pattern of spaces around me where the energy needs a bit of help moving, so my hands go to those places and give small tugs or pushes. Sometimes a ball of energy will collect in my hands and I’ll invite it to go where it is needed or dance free. To others this can look like I’m playing a strange harp, conducting a piece of chaotic music, or perhaps juggling feathers. I think I might feel self-conscious if everyone could watch this, and these sorts of motions would likely be visually distracting if I were sitting in the front of the room facing the group, which isn’t exactly the intention.



Holding Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business in the Light

Nancy Gabriel and
Nancy Riffer
Ithaca Meeting

Ithaca Monthly Meeting's current practice of holding meeting for worship with attention to business in the Light (use of the word "elder" has not gained currency here) began in the first years of the twenty-first century. In 1961, the meeting approved a minute to begin searching for a meetinghouse. For decades, discussion of this issue had hardened into painful factional dysfunction in our business meetings.

Meanwhile in NYYM and wider Quaker circles, interest was growing in restoration of disused Friends' practices of clerking and eldering. Serious, refreshed discernment brought clarity to Ithaca's clerking teams. We began in the late 2000s to introduce different practices into our decision-making.

- A moratorium was called on all further discussion of properties the meeting had inherited as part of financing a new home.
- The meeting agreed to hold two "business meetings" per month, with distinct purposes, for a limited period.
- "Worship-sharing" was a relatively new practice in our meeting. Queries were developed and published to encourage Friends to express their emotional responses within the format of sharing without fear of rebuttal or dismissal. There were no decisions pending or outcomes sought.
- Before "decision-making" meetings, committees or task forces were charged with organizing practical and factual aspects of any proposal, and publishing them for all to consider.

It was into this context that we introduced the practice of "holding the meeting in the Light." "Holders," for lack of a better term, were recognized by the clerk at the beginning of each meeting for business. At first there was some explanation of this, e.g. these Friends are acquainted

with the agenda or queries but will not be addressing them. They enter into a still openness, listening for the Presence of Spirit among us.

A member of the Ministry and Worship Committee undertook to establish a list of Friends willing to serve in holding the meeting in this way. No criteria or guidelines were ever written down. Some Friends were familiar with seeing a person stand in silence, or ask the clerk if we could take some time to recenter ourselves in silence. The core of the practice is to have "no horse in the race," i.e. to have no topic one wants to speak to and no attachment to outcomes, and to be committed to creating and holding a space where that of God in every one may be heard and answered. It calls for faith that in such a space, way will open for the community to arrive where no one person could direct them.

Some who were asked to serve were surprised, thinking themselves not seasoned or weighty enough. One wrote after a few turns, "For myself, the deep listening has become far more valuable than expressing my own ideas; feeling the care for the whole meeting far outweighs the satisfaction of producing a result. Part of the joy of it is to experience how true it is that what needs to come, comes."

It needs to be said that it takes stamina to hold the meeting through an entire month's agenda. It is a workout to focus loving attention on each speaker, on the feel of the room; to keep asking God's help for the clerk and the presenters, to witness the work of Spirit in "real time"—and to discern when the group seems to be significantly moving away from following Spirit and to know when a word or a motion from the holder is called for. (This has been rare, in our experience.) Whenever possible, we've had two people holding the meeting. A trusted Friend to share the high and low points with reinforces the inimitable feeling of being well used.

As Ithaca Meeting has grown into these practices, the clerking and ministry team has felt an almost palpable shift in the tenor of meetings for worship with attention to business. The pace is gentler, the discipline is humbler, love and care for each other outweighs brilliant articulation.

Anti-racist Practices to Share: Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness

Last month, a group of New York Yearly Meeting Friends attended a workshop via Zoom held by the Center for the Study of White American Culture. The workshop, "Transforming White Organizational Culture," helps organizations which are predominantly White take steps toward confronting racism in their workplaces. The workshop provides space for participants to look critically at institutional conventions familiar to educated White people. In church-affiliated organizations, these may range from closely governed scheduling and the assumption that everybody finds technology accessible and comfortable (like the web-based app with which this article was written) to valuing tangible gifts such as administrative and financial competence over less quantifiable spiritual gifts such as healing or empowerment.

The workshop also focuses on the small, daily interactions ("microaggressions") that can seem insignificant to those who are White, but stay with those who are Black and Brown—interactions that cause repeated harm and can build up to intolerable levels. Casual asides, teasing, and remarks that assume that everybody in the group shares a common experience—a college education, a savings account—can have the effect of excluding, and even shaming. So can awkward questions asked of new people ("But where are you from really?").

Friends mean to be kind. Friends mean to be inclusive. More White Friends are becoming aware of the way that their good intentions do not mean that their words do no harm. The speaker may not have meant harm, but it is the listener who gets to say where the harm is, not the speaker.

Friends are perpetually rediscovering and redefining what it means to extend grace to others. Older Friends may have grown up in an era where brusque language and jokes from parents, coaches

and bosses were considered normal, to be shrugged off. But language changes, and behavior changes. Now it must change again.

Within the Society of Friends, these practices are not about politeness. Though they may seem political, the concern is deeper than that. This is work that is rightly ordered in the Spirit. When Friends are excluded, it is not just those who are excluded who suffer damage. The excluders also suffer harm. When we exclude others, we cannot be fully in community with a body that reflects Spirit's infinitely loving embrace.

In breakout rooms during the CSWAC workshop, Friends from NYYM shared experiences that taught them to look at these interactions with new attention. This gave rise to a conversation about how to bring anti-racist awareness and practices to the larger body. How do we make Friends aware of these moments respectfully, without putting them on the spot?

In 2018, New England Yearly Meeting united with the following minute: "Develop a practice to appoint people who will observe, name, and reflect back to us long-standing, (unseen) patterns and practices that result in our complicity in oppression." During yearly meeting gatherings, Elders for Noticing Practices of Oppression and Faithfulness (neym.org/news/noticing-patterns-oppression-faithfulness) listen for moments in which Friends are erased, ignored, or not heard. Elders notice ways that their own bodily sensations and connection to Spirit led them to be able to call other Friends "in" rather than out, to name their own experiences and reactions to exchanges. At the end of the gathering, they are given time to read out observations they have made. A passage from an article by one of these Elders (neym.org/sessions/news/noticing) gives a sense of the kinds of noticing they do:

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Summer Sessions

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separate registration for interest groups.

Meetings for worship and for business will alternate between afternoon and evening sessions to enable those with different schedules to participate. During the week of Summer Sessions, there will be an opportunity for in-depth work and prayer around dismantling racism in our communities.

Please encourage Friends in your meetings to participate in Summer Sessions. This is a chance for those who are new to Quakerism or who have not tried a yearly meeting event to be part of this gathering, and to keep our Blessed Community thriving as we look forward to the day when we can meet face to face.

—Dawn Pozzi, Clerk of Sessions Committee



Dawn Pozzi, Clerk of Sessions Committee

Anti-Racism and Becoming a Sanctuary Where Spirit Dwells

Do you hold a vision for our yearly meeting as a place of healing and nourishment for all? Are you curious about a vision to become an antiracist faith community? Do you grieve racism as an obstacle to community within our yearly meeting and beyond? You are invited to bring your concerns to two sessions facilitated by Friends who carry similar concerns around antiracism. The first session will be on Tuesday (1-5 p.m.) and the second on Thursday (1-5 p.m.) Both sessions offer a selection of themed breakout groups that address a variety of concerns. Each breakout group will prayerfully consider a query rising up within our body. On Wednesday, in between these two sessions, the meeting for business will likely include consideration of antiracism concerns. Thursday's program will adapt to



Angela Hopkins, part of the Anti-Racism planning team

needs that arise from the preceding discussions and also include an outline of next steps. Expect openings as we worship together and ask collectively what it means to be in right relationship, what it means to become a sanctuary, what it means to work toward becoming an antiracist faith community. All are welcome!



Judy Meikle, part of the Anti-Racism planning team

“To become an antiracist faith community the key question for a white majority community is not how do we get people of color to join our faith community, it is how can we make a prolonged, spiritually rooted, engaged commitment to uprooting white supremacy within our community and to take on collective action within our society.” — *Chris Crass, organizer, educator, and writer working to build powerful movements for collective liberation*

Are you interested in being part of the planning? Write to antiracism-sanctuary@nyym.org

An Invitation from the Clerk

Dear Friends –

What a year this has been! Days have blurred together, we have been separated by the virus, we have been united by concern for what is happening in the streets, in the prisons, in the hospitals, and we continue to learn how to live in love for one another.



Elaine Learnard, Clerk of NYYM, at Fall Sessions 2019, Powell House

I look forward to welcoming you to Summer Sessions in virtual gatherings again this year. I long for the time when we can be together in person. I rejoice that we can have times to hang out for fun, times for deep worship, times to gather for business

and earnest listening, times to be with Friends.

Please let me know how I can help you be part of Summer Sessions and part of all the work and fellowship that goes on in NYYM all year. Email me at clerk@nyym.org.

—Elaine Learnard, Clerk of NYYM



Chad Gilmartin, NYYM Digital Communications Director; Helen Garay Toppins, NYYM Associate Secretary and Summer Sessions Registrar; and Bronwyn Mohlke, Summer Sessions Registrar, at Silver Bay, NY, in July 2019.

What are "NYYM Sessions," anyway? Three times a year, for a weekend each in fall and spring and for a week in summer, New York Yearly Meeting (NYYM) Friends gather to worship, conduct business, and form a community together. NYYM is the organization that gathers together the Quaker congregations in New York State, northern New Jersey, and southwestern Connecticut. These sessions are open to anyone in the NYYM area who is interested in Quakerism and experiencing Quaker community.

Anti-racist Practices to Share: Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness

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"I heard 'weighty' Friends make hurtful jokes about things like getting consent before touching another; about people who have hearing loss; about the inconvenience of Spanish language translators. I watched Friends who hold powerful positions in the Yearly Meeting falsely deny their own power. I saw Brown and Black Friends hurt by comments that said "we" this and "us" that, that didn't actually include them and their experiences. I heard repeated assumptions of financial and educational privilege that were hurtful to Friends from working class backgrounds, and those whose experiences were not reflected in these assumptions. I heard people talk about the safety and sanctuary of our Quaker community in ways that do not reflect the experience of a Black Friend who felt the need to leave Sessions rather than endure another day of the micro (and macro) aggressions that White Friends deny or downplay or excuse. I learned during the week that noticing is like a muscle, in that the capacity to do so increases dramatically with use."

Can New York Yearly Meeting Friends develop these practices of observing and noticing? Can we adopt the practice of Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness, or something like it? Join us as we begin this conversation.

—Antonia Saxon, with Cai Quirk & Sarah Way

Check the Summer Sessions website for updates:
nyym.org/summer-sessions-2021

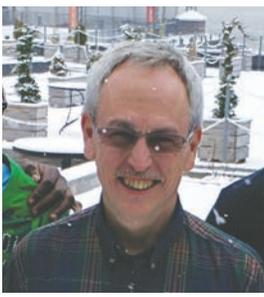


Worship at Summer Sessions

Several forms of worship will take place during Summer Sessions. They vary in size and structure:

- **Worship Sharing Groups.** These small groups meet regularly during Summer Sessions. Usually, a query or theme is provided. Participants are given the chance to explore the query in a sacred, worshipful space, and to share with each other in a deep and spiritual way. This year, worship sharing groups will meet during one of three one-hour-long time slots, starting at 8, 9, or 10 a.m. You will get to choose your preferred time slot on your registration form.

- **Business Meetings,** also known as Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business. At business meetings our Quaker practice is put into action. Everyone present is part of the decision-making body, which goes through discernment and the finding of the way forward together. Reports on the recent activities of committees and individuals are also heard.



Robin Gowen, Assistant Clerk of NYM

Business meeting is a great way to find out how Spirit is moving in the New York Yearly Meeting area.

- **Meetings for Worship.** Periods of worship, usually unprogrammed, with Friends from all over the NYM and guests from all over the world. Business meetings will be preceded by an hour of centering worship. Come and center down in expectant silence, over Zoom, with a large group of other Friends.

The Plenary

The plenary will be brought by **Emily Provance**, a traveling and ministering NYM Friend. Her travel minute says, "As Emily travels globally among Friends, she explores how diverse communities embody the Quaker spirit....She encourages people to see and know each other while embracing differences. She accompanies them as they discern their spiritual gifts. She sees herself as a teacher and learner; she invites us to nurture the spark at the heart of our meetings."



Emily Provance, Plenary Speaker

Emily regularly posts to her blog, **Turning, Turning, Holy Experiments Among Friends**, at quakeremily.wordpress.com. Since the beginning of the pandemic Emily has organized online Daily Devotionals for young children and families, and she is currently co-facilitating a weekly Bible Study on Genesis with Regina Baird Haag.

Interest Groups

Interest groups are a good way to introduce yourself to a topic or to dive deeper, to learn and to share, and can consist of a presentation, slide show, film, discussion group, or other activity. This year, interest groups will be held during the three weeks prior to Summer Sessions, starting on July 5. This schedule is a big experiment. It is hoped that spreading out the interest groups over three weeks, and not holding them during Summer Sessions, will make it easier for Friends to access and participate in them. Interest group facilitators will be able to choose how many times, on what days, and at what times of day their group will meet. Please consider whether you might have knowledge, experience, or Spirit to share with others in this kind of format. The form for interest group proposals is now available online at nym.org/IG-proposals. Facilitators will be asked to provide a title and description for their group, as well as how the topic may



Martha Gurwich, Interest Group Coordinator



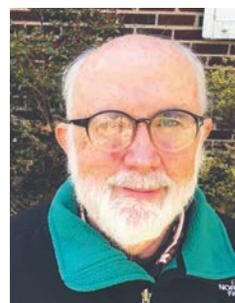
Fred Dettmer, Interest Group Coordinator



Mary Eagleson, NYM Recording Clerk

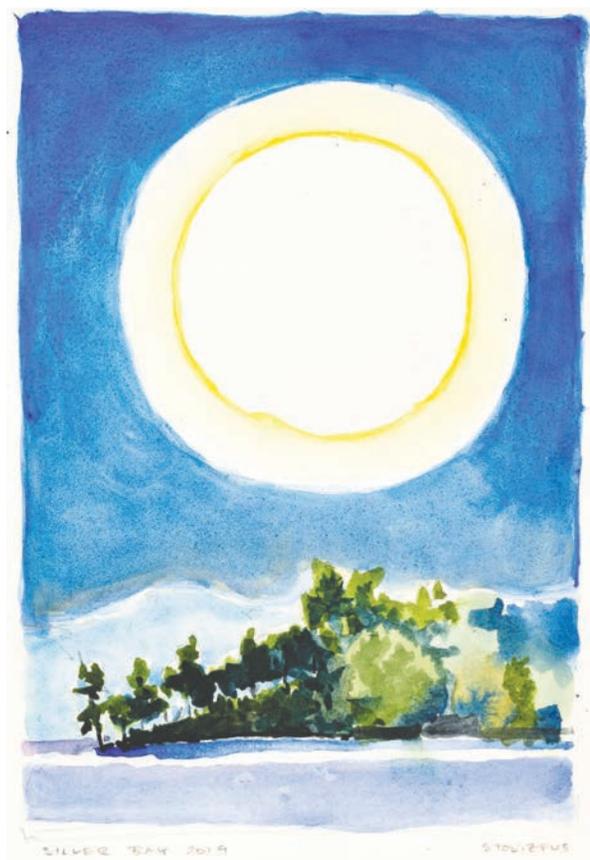
relate to the Sessions theme (Becoming a Sanctuary Where Spirit Dwells.) Interest group proposals should be submitted by May 31. Email interest-group-coordinators@nym.org with any questions.

Meals with Meaning are somewhat similar to interest groups, though they can be more casual. They are mealtime presentations or discussions on a topic, and can be either programmed with a facilitator or open for conversation with anyone who drops in. Sometimes committees will facilitate a meal as an introduction to their work and to answer any questions Friends may have. Participants in Meals with Meaning are encouraged to bring and eat a meal!



Matt Scanlon, Assistant Clerk of NYM

If you'd like to have Summer Sessions updates sent directly to your inbox, you can join the NYM email list by emailing your request to walter@nym.org



Untitled watercolor of Silver Bay by Randall Stoltzfus, 2019.

Junior Yearly Meeting for Children and Teens

Junior Yearly Meeting this year is not to be missed, even—or especially!—if you or your children have had your fill of virtual Zoom meetings.



Sarah Way, NYM Communications Director, and Callie Janoff, Aging Resources Consultation and Help (ARCH) Coordinator, from 2018

We plan to gather materials that will be fun and interesting to work with for grown ups and children and that will nurture the life of the Spirit among the entire family. We hope families will join us virtually to share their experiences

with the activities and what they will carry forward, but this is certainly not required to enjoy the fun, spiritually nourishing activities we are preparing.

We eagerly welcome all children and families — those who have not participated in JYM before as well as Silver Bay regulars. We also hope our JYM activities will support monthly meetings in restarting their in-person children's religious education programs in the fall.

We are looking for Friends to join us in preparing materials that will delight, inspire and connect us. If you would like to participate in planning, please write to jym-coordinators@nym.org to contact Susan Stillman, JYM Clerk, and JYM Coordinators, Adria Gulizia and Ellie Rosenberg.



The Annotated Week at a Glance (WAAG) Schedule

The schedule and events are subject to change! Updates will be announced via email and will appear on the nyyym.org website.

Meeting for Discernment: An extended period of unprogrammed worship, usually focused on a specific query.

Bible study: A facilitator will lead an exploration of an aspect of the Bible.

Meals with Meaning: a mealtime presentation or discussion on a topic, or an open time for socializing.

Closing Worship: This will be a semi-programmed meeting for worship.

	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
8:00 AM								
8:30 AM					Worship Sharing 8-9 am			
9:00 AM					Worship Sharing 9-10 am			
9:30 AM	Meeting for Discernment, 9-11 am				Worship Sharing 10-11am			Closing Worship
10:00 AM								
10:30 AM								
11:00 AM					Bible Study 11 am-12 pm			
11:30 AM								
12:00 PM					Meals with Meaning			
12:30 PM								
1:00 PM								
1:30 PM		Welcome and Orientation 1:30-2:30 pm						
2:00 PM	Meeting for Discernment, 2-4 pm		Meeting for Worship 2-3 pm	Antiracism and becoming a sanctuary where spirit dwells 1-5 pm	Meeting for Worship 2-3 pm	Working toward becoming an antiracist faith community 1-5 pm	Meeting for Worship 2-3 pm	
2:30 PM								
3:00 PM		Meeting for Worship 3:30-4:30 pm	Meeting for Business 3-5 pm		Meeting for Business 3-5 pm		Meeting for Business (Epistles) 3-5 pm	
3:30 PM								
4:00 PM		Meeting for Business 4:30-6 pm						
4:30 PM								
5:00 PM								
5:30 PM								
6:00 PM				Meeting for Worship 6-7 pm		Meeting for Worship 6-7 pm		
6:30 PM								
7:00 PM	Meeting for Discernment Reflections, 7-9 pm		Plenary 7-8:30 pm	Meeting for Business 7-9 pm		Meeting for Business 7-9 pm	Celebration 7-8:30 pm	
7:30 PM								
8:00 PM								
8:30 PM								
9:00 PM					Hang Out Time			
9:30 PM								
10:00 PM			12-step 10-11pm		12-step 10-11pm		12-step 10-11pm	
10:30 PM								
	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

Plenary: Emily Provance, a traveling NYYM Friend who is gifted in ministry, will be giving a plenary presentation.

"Hang Out Time:" Still being planned at press time, this may take the form of an open Zoom room or a social gathering using another online service.

Celebration: An interactive presentation and sharing in celebration of the time we spent together this week.

Notes on Registration

NYYM staff and volunteers are currently working on the registration forms for Summer Sessions and for interest groups. Because interest groups will be held the three weeks before Summer Sessions, interest group registration will be a separate process. The interest group **proposal** form is now available at nyym.org/IG-proposals. The deadline

for proposals is May 31. **Registration** for interest groups will open around the second week of June. Interest groups will take place during the three weeks prior to Summer Sessions.

For Summer Sessions, registration should be open around the time you receive this issue of *Spark* in the mail. Check nyym.org to see if registration is open, check your email for a message

from NYYM, or call the NYYM office at 212-673-5750. On the registration form you will be able to request a worship sharing time (8, 9, or 10 a.m.) and choose to be with an affinity group or in a general worship group. You will also be able to sign up for volunteer opportunities, including ways to join the tech team that makes these sessions possible.

Updates will be posted on the Summer Sessions webpage: nyym.org/summer-sessions-2021