

New York Yearly Meeting Religious Society of Friends

InfoShare

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Drawing Out Gifts Series

The Powell House series Drawing Out Gifts, sponsored by NYYM's Ministry and Counsel Coordinating Committee, will continue on May 12–14, 2006, with **How Can I Keep from Speaking?** a workshop on vocal ministry, facilitated by Deborah Fisch, clerk of Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative).

September 15–17, the fourth workshop in the series will be on the **Ministry of Presence**.

Other Powell House events include:

- an intergenerational women's gathering, Earth, Air, Fire, Water, April 21–23, 2006
- Quakers United in Publishing (QUIP; www.quaker.org/quip; register directly with QUIP)
- Experience Spiritual Healing, with several spiritual healers from various yearly meetings, June 2–4, 2006
- Living from the Divine Center: A Contemplative Retreat, with Linda Chidsey, June 16–19
- a workshop for newsletter editors and those who would like to start a newsletter for their meeting or committee, led by Melanie-Claire Mallison of Ithaca Meeting, August 18–20, 2006.

The Powell House Youth Program continues to rock, with such events as:

- Gifts We Bring to Swing (4th–12th grades), April 7–9
- Promises (4th–6th grades), April 28–30
- EarthSong XXIII (7th–12th grades), May 26–28

For further information or to register, contact Powell House, 524 Pitt Hall Rd., Old Chatham NY 12136; 518-794-8811; info@powellhouse.org; www.powellhouse.org.

Spark Issue on Youth

The May 2006 issue of *Spark* is devoted to young people. How do we transfer our Quaker faith to children? How do we keep them with us as they grow up? How do adults nurture and support young people's spiritual lives?

And of course, this issue will contain information about annual sessions at Silver Bay, along with registration forms, room rates, etc.

We remind Friends that attenders may receive *Spark* in the mail, if they so request. If you are an attender who wants to receive *Spark*, send a request to office@nyym.org, call 212-673-5750, or write to NYYM, 15 Rutherford Pl., New York NY 10003.

We are also looking for appropriate photographs and other graphics for *Spark*. You may e-mail your items to paul@nyym.org or mail them to Paul at the above address. Note that resolution of artwork must be at least 300 dots per inch (dpi).

Clerk and Committee Guidelines

The Transition Working Group (TWG) is the next step in the renewal process for New York Yearly Meeting. This renewal began in 1999, with the Ad Hoc Committee on the function of NYYM, followed by the Ad Hoc Committee on Staffing and Structure and the Committee on Committees.

TWG has developed NYYM Clerk and Committee Guidelines, which are available on the NYYM Web site at www.nyym.org/committees/twg. These guidelines are to be included in the next edition of the NYYM *Handbook*.

Purchase Quakers' First 322 Years

Friends are invited to an exhibition, Purchase Quakers' First 322 Years, to be held at the Harison Historical Society (HHS), Sunday, April 30, 2006, from 2:00 to 5:00 P.M. at Harrison Town Hall, 1 Heinemann Pl., in Harrison. The exhibit features a facsimile of George Washington's 1789 Letter to the Quakers, a 19th-century dollhouse, and historical clothing, photos, maps, and artifacts from Purchase Meeting's collection.

The event is sponsored by Purchase Meeting, HHS, and the Town of Harrison.

For information contact Marlene Piturro, mpiturro@aol.com; 914-478-1199.

Quaker Conference on Torture

Guantanamo. Abu Ghraib. "Extraordinary rendition." This is the terrifying language of "legalized," routine torture.

This dreadful vocabulary, and the practice it conceals, has to be stopped.

We can help stop it.

Has your meeting selected someone to send to the Quaker Conference on Torture? We are urging meetings to take up this concern, and hope to hear from your meeting about it soon. The conference is set for June 2-4, 2006, at Guilford College, Greensboro NC.

The conference will mark the formal beginning of an active Quaker witness to end this terrible scourge. This will be a long-term work. Through workshops, speakers and networking, Friends will be informed and equipped for this labor. Then they will return to their meetings to "spread the word."

Together we can add some new phrases to the torture discussion. Phrases like TORTURE IS IMMORAL, TORTURE MUST END, TORTURE VIOLATES HUMAN RIGHTS, and REPLACE TORTURE WITH JUSTICE.

Numerous monthly and yearly meetings have endorsed this conference, and we hope your meeting will join them soon. (You are also welcome to attend the conference on your own.)

But the clock is ticking. Space at the conference is limited. Late fees apply after April 28.

This conference is being organized by QUIT, the Quaker Initiative to End Torture, with major support from the Friends World Committee for Consultation Section of the Americas.

More information and a registration form is at our Web site, www.quit-torture-now.org. You can also contact FWCC at www.fwccamericas.org.

We hope you'll join us. And please pass this message on to others.

John Calvi, convener

Memorial for Thor Rhodin

Ithaca Monthly Meeting will hold a Memorial Meeting for Friend Thor Rhodin on Sunday, June 4th, at 7 P.M., at the Hector Meetinghouse on Perry City Road, off Rt. 96, five miles northwest of Ithaca. For further information contact Melanie-Claire Mallison, mallison@cnf.cornell.edu.

Powell House Reunion 2006: Celebrating the Last Four Decades of "Quaking" in the ACC

Bring yourselves and bring your families (back) to Powell House July 13-17 for the biggest reunion ever! Celebrate with friends at the biggest event in the history of Powell House and help ensure the future of the place that changed all our lives

Registration is now open. For registration, donations and volunteer opportunities, please visit:

www.PowellHouseReunion.org. Payment may be made with personal checks or through PayPal. Donations (tax deductible) may be made either upfront (in entirety or with deposit) or at the door. Please make checks payable to the Powell House Reunion Fund and mail to 243 Jennie Ln., Eliot ME 03903

The Web site will also contain other useful information including message boards to assist you in organizing car pools and with other travel needs. Registration is encouraged for full attendance, partial attendance, and the special events on Saturday

JYM alums are welcome (it wouldn't be the same without you). Childcare and youth-specific activities are available. Car pools and travel assistance are also available

This is a fundraising event, so donations and/or volunteering are required. This is primarily a camping event

Housing priority to people with infants and people with disabilities. (Please note that if you have infants and small children, housing is available only on a first-come, first-served basis so you want to register ASAP.)

Volunteers needed to perform on Friday night, to take photos, to shoot videos, to give rides, to help get the word out, to raise money and sell merchandise, to help in the kitchen and around meal times, to assist in registration, to assist with childcare, to set up/clean up, to run activities, and more

Do you have a skill or resource that could help make reunion even more memorable? If so, please e-mail us and let us know

Please note that the special events on Saturday (huge BBQ and Bill Staines concert) are open to absolutely everyone who feels a connection to Powell House, regardless of whether they are alums. Further information is available on the Web site or from info@powellhousereunion.org

A Message from the Treasurer

Friends' expenses are posted monthly, except January on the NYYM Web site. If you have specific questions on expenditures, please contact the clerk of the appropriate coordinating committee. I am willing to reply to general questions.

A report of income by monthly meeting is sent monthly regional/quarterly/halfyearly meeting treasurers. Beginning this year the monthly meeting treasurers will receive several times a year a report of what our records show their meeting has given. Questions on these reports may be directed to Helen Garay Toppins or me.

Harold J. Risler, treasurer, New York Yearly Meeting

AVP in the Andes

At the end of last October Jens Braun and Newton Garver facilitated an AVP (Alternatives to Violence Project) mini-workshop in Spanish in La Paz, attended by some 20 interested Quakers from three yearly meetings and spanning a wide range of ages. The response was enthusiastic. Five volunteers immediately formed a committee, which reported in ten days with dates and budget for two full workshops to be held in mid-January 2006.

Despite the time pressure, funding was arranged and the workshops took place under the leadership of Jens Braun and Val Liveoak. One of the workshops was a basic, with 15 participants, the other a training for facilitators, with 13 participants. Again the group immediately set a date for the next workshops, which are to be an advanced and then two simultaneous basics during the last week in June 2006. The newly trained Bolivians will serve as apprentice facilitators in these two basics.

There is still a way to go before the core group has enough experience to proceed on their own, and they will always appreciate having other lead facilitators come down and work with them, but these five workshops in six months mean that AVP (PAV in Spanish) is off and running in the southern Andes.

AVP in Bolivia is under the aegis of the Bolivian Quaker Education Fund (www.bqef.org) office in La Paz, Bernabé Yujra coordinator.

*Newton Garver, Buffalo Meeting
president, Bolivian Quaker Education Fund*

Workers in Mexico Learn to Manage Their Own Company

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is working with a group of workers in the border town of Piedras Negras, Mexico, helping them navigate the treacherous terrain of starting their own company. The workers/owners launched Maquiladora Dignidad y Justicia (Dignity and Justice Maquiladora Company) after they were fired or laid off from their jobs in maquiladoras, the foreign-owned factories along the Mexico-U.S. border.

Dignidad y Justicia was launched in March 2004 with help from the Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s (CFO, or Border Committee of Workers), a long-time AFSC partner organization. The CFO organizes and educates workers on their human and labor rights. It is a part owner of Dignidad y Justicia and shares office space

with the company.

For further information, visit the Maquiladora Dignidad y Justicia Web site, www.cfomaquiladoras.org/dj.english.html and the Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s site at www.cfomaquiladoras.org/english%20site/index.en.html.

Grants from Bob Bacon Memorial Fund

The Bob Bacon Memorial Fund of Old Chatham Monthly Meeting has made grants to four organizations nominated by Friends from contributions and interest income received in 2005/6. The groups and projects selected are the Quaker Initiative to End Torture; Monteverde Friends U.S., Inc., for the work of Monteverde Friends School; the Guatemalan Tomorrow Fund, for Project Ak' Tenamit; and the Quang Ngai Rehabilitation Center in Vietnam.

A fifth project, a theater performance sponsored by the Outreach, Peace and Justice Committee of Old Chatham Monthly Meeting, will receive a similar grant when it goes into production.

The late Bob Bacon, well known to members of NYYM, committed his personal and professional life to furthering the increase of peace and justice in our world, and the Fund established in his name seeks to continue his mission. Contributions to the Fund, c/o Old Chatham Monthly Meeting, are always welcome, as are suggestions for future recipients of the small grants made each year to individuals and groups whose work is consistent with Bob's ideals.

Elisabeth Grace, for the Bob Bacon Memorial Fund Committee.

Voices of African Mothers at Scarsdale

On March 26, Scarsdale Friends' Peace and Social Concerns Committee put on a "Sandwich Seminar" featuring Nana-Fosu Randall, founder of Voices of African Mothers (VAM; www.vamothers.org). Randall, a native of Ghana who worked for the United Nations for many years, spoke and showed a video about her work with VAM, a nongovernmental organization that seeks to empower people, particularly women, to provide a culture of peace in Africa and worldwide. The organization resulted from her professional observations that violent civil conflicts always left in their wake widespread destruction of social and economic infrastructures, with a greater impact on women and

children. These include poverty, disease, and lack of access to education.

Nana-Fosu Randall has seen much suffering in her years as a chief financial officer or chief administrative officer for the United Nations. During her 30 years of service, she has worked in Tanzania, Namibia, Ivory Coast, Israel, Lebanon, Ivory Coast, and Liberia, and in Kuwait and Iraq during the first Iraq War. She commented that even though there is so much oil in Iraq that one can drown in oil slicks in the desert, some women and children go hungry. Everywhere, it is the women and children who suffer most in wars, but it was Saturday's Child, in Liberia, who crystallized Nana's resolve to do something about it.

While she was working for the UN in Liberia, Nana came to dread her Saturday trips to the market, because the war-crippled beggars would crowd in front of the shops and she had to walk past them on her way to buy groceries. All of them tugged at her heart, but she wept for days over one teenager, to whom she privately gave the name "Ama," or Saturday's Child.

Ama, who could not have been older than 14, had no hands or feet, but she was caring for a baby. Nana asked her driver to find out what had happened to the girl. He learned that soldiers from the group known as Taylor's Army had descended on Ama's home in the night, and had dragged the entire family out into the bush. There, they were given a choice: join the military group or be shot. Ama struggled with them but was raped and shot, and her hands and feet were injured. Two weeks later, she managed to crawl to a hospital, where her gangrenous limbs had to be amputated. There, also, she discovered she was pregnant. There was no one to help her, as all her family was dead, but she decided to keep the baby. Without hands or feet, she was now begging for food to keep herself and her child alive.

Another story that haunted Nana was that of a mother of three daughters. The mother was locked into one room, from which she could hear her children screaming and screaming in the next room. Finally, the screaming stopped. The mother learned that it was only when they had been raped to death did her children fall silent.

In response to these women, mothers and daughters, Nana and a group of her friends founded Voices of African Mothers. Their purpose is to give hope, courage, and trust to some of the

teenage refugees who are pouring into Ghana, Nana's native country, from the Sudan, Chad, Mali, Congo, Liberia, and other countries. These children are homeless, and when they sleep under the trees, they often are raped. Pregnancies follow. They work for about 1 cent per day, selling things in the markets.

VAM has recently bought 100 acres of land in Ghana. They will put about half of it into cash crops, using these as a way to teach farming and marketing of crops, as well as a source of income. They hope to open a clinic and to teach about AIDS and simple hygiene. Their most important contribution, though, will be education. Young women will be taught to sew, so that they won't be dependent on the cast-off clothes of others. They will learn to read and write, and perhaps most importantly, they will be taught that they do not have to do whatever their husbands order them to do. They will learn to say no to war and oppression.

Scarsdale Friends listened deeply to this telling.

Mary Eagleson, Scarsdale Meeting

Exhilarating Meetings for Business

Why do most Friends speak about meeting for business as though they were going to the dentist? Where is the enthusiasm for what is our most distinguishing characteristic? Can we expect the Religious Society of Friends to survive if we don't change our attitude to business?

I'm a Quaker because of business meeting. It was held on Sunday evening at someone's home and followed the fellowship of a potluck meal. Out of the Stillness a query was read as the first item of business. It was answered and Friends took it seriously, waiting for the clerk to form a minute in response. From there we went to the other business of the Meeting. It was directed worship, and for this fresh Friend it was how I learned to worship.

Since then I've been in some terrible business meetings. Usually this is because the Meeting was being asked to make a decision without adequate preparation. There are too many unknowns for the Meeting to have a clear sense of direction and typically there is an urgency that doesn't allow seasoned reflection. Some Friends seem addicted to the adrenaline rush of making important decisions in a hurry. On rare occasions this is necessary, but usually it's because of sloppy preparation or something that could

wait if we were so concerned about “never making a decision.”

I’ve been in meetings where some Friends were focused on the unknowns, always looking for what had been left out. In Truth there will always be unknowns; that is why we are a *faith* community. Meetings need to seek the point where a decision *can* be made. A proposed minute can help to clarify the sense of the Meeting and enable it to reach the peace of a good decision.

How many meetings for business are really meetings for sharing information that could have been distributed in written form? Good business meetings are about questions/queries that require Friends’ prayerful attention and discernment.

Good clerks make sure that all items brought to the meeting have been properly prepared and are ready for consideration. They define the questions and may even—with the assistance of the submitting clerk—prepare a possible minute. In setting the agenda they need to be mindful of the Meeting’s capabilities, to set priorities, and to be mindful when Friends are no longer able to give the attention required for good and lasting decisions.

A good meeting for business is an exhilarating experience. Together we can have more of them and the day may come, as it surely should, when Friends will look forward to meeting for business, not as something to be endured but as a treasured part of what it means to be a Friend.

Roger Dreisbach-Williams, Rahway & Plainfield Meeting