

Report on Meeting for Discernment at Summer Sessions, July 20 & 22, 2015

At Summer Sessions 2015, Meeting for Discernment gathered over the query, *What can you say about the Truth you have found through your practice as a Friend?* Ministry which rose from this starting point spoke to the depth and gifts of our practice as Friends, and the role of our monthly meetings and worship groups in enriching our lives individually and in community. The ferment of our shared lives helps us to become more than the sum of our parts. This transformational experience offers up deepening worship, an increase in our capacity to live into what we are given, earlier recognition of nascent leadings, and more solid grounding for our witness; it teaches us to listen and lights our way. Rather than describe the ministry given to us, we offer an outline of what was brought forth in the form of some of the words we heard. May you hear in them the warmth and Life we experienced together.

meeting

community

covenant

relationships

world

learn

grace

Spirit

people

Truth

think

mindful

cottonwood

Friends gathered Monday, July 20th and again Wednesday, July 22nd for Summer 2015's Meetings for Discernment.

We explored the following queries:

What can you say about the Truth you have found through your practice as a Friend?

In a covenant community we are called together by Divine Grace because it's only in community that we can learn what God longs to have us learn. The transforming lessons of Love, Service, Humility, Compassion and Forgiveness.

How do the covenant relationships within our meetings and with the Spirit open us to grace, love and joy?

Excerpts from ministry heard in response follow on the next pages.

Way does open. Sometimes so slowly that I can't perceive it, sometimes with my getting in the way or seemingly going backwards when I want the process to be forward, but that absolute knowing of the truth within my heart that Way can, and does, open doesn't mean I will see the opening in my lifetime or in my current situation, but Way will open.

If we imagined the oppressions in the world as a big tangled ball of string, my experience, my truth, is that there is a way that the strand that we call racism is deeply in that ball holding it in place and so, for the sake of all of us, that needs to be part of our work and will help undo the other tangles.

I was drawn to become a Friend because of concerns about war and peace. A truth that I have learned is about the difference between working in secular groups and working in a group that is based on spiritual seeking. We are the same people with the same pluses and minuses but somehow the working together is a much deeper experience when we are based on seeking the will of God.

I think I am here because I represent in some way thousands of formerly young members of the Religious Society of Friends who are now spread all across the United States and possibly all across the world, who believe there is awesome power in the truth that there is God in every person and that the Religious Society of Friends has played an enormously critical role in recognizing that and advancing the causes of the less served by our society, by our world, whether that be by recognizing the spirit of God in Gays and early on performing marriages; whether that be recognizing that of God in prisoners in jails and prisons around the world. I

want to be a member of the Religious Society of Friends but I am still searching and thousands of us are as well.

There's a kind of double vision that is required to see that of God in the people who are shooting other people, who are killing them, and the double vision is to really look at the circumstances of the people doing that and both of the men involved there clearly came out of very difficult family situations. How do we look at people who do terrible things? We need to look at the structure, economic, social, cultural, we need to look at individual experiences. As Friends we need to look at our Peace Testimony and understand its importance in preventing trauma and violence that then creates more trauma and more violence.

I have learned through my practice how to love. And what loving a people asks of me; of what carrying a people asks of me to hold the beauty and the sorrow and the limitations and to continue in holding all of that to carry the hope.

There is an Inner Light in all and everything. It seems to transcend all of the questions, it transcends all of the pettiness of uncertainty; and it gives us a place for the conversation to begin.

I have often experienced transcendent joy and grace of covenant relations and meetings. Sometimes a lot of labor, pain, and misunderstanding preceded it. Because it's a covenant relationship, we stay with it until we get to the other side.

Spirit has not simply given us to one another, but to the world, connected to the natural world and to the many other calls to serve and live out God's peace.

Several years ago, our meeting had a small crisis. We had four teens who informed the meeting that they would no longer come to meeting and First Day School. They were bored and tired of it. I was clear that my leading to work with youth was filled by being a high school teacher. This was an opportunity to be open to possibilities I couldn't even imagine at the time. What emerged, and which I did not want, gave me spiritual depth in more than one way. A once-a-month coffee house; photography as a spiritual practice: transferrable and life-long. Covenanting with the four teens in an equal community to learn what was being drawn out of us by photography. Each year the teens said that there's still more to explore, so a new kind of community was born and sustained. Listening was key, especially when I was sure it wasn't my ministry. Now there are two groups. One is a monthly young adult discussion about issues in their lives. I was so blessed by this unexpected experience and its fruits.

I started coming to meeting when in a dark place. My young daughters and I just sat. The meeting didn't ask a lot of questions or judge, but built me up and made me brave. While I was getting divorced – breaking a covenant – I was being welcomed into another. By allowing love relationships to develop, by suspending judgment, these Friends provided a safe place for my daughters and me to heal and grow.

How beautiful the Lake as I came off the highway downhill;
and how beautiful the two flagmen who stood either side of a truck dredging the gully beside the road;
and how beautiful the man who came toward me as I left my car in the parking lot and called out,
“Do they have cottonwood trees here?”
And I said, “Why, because did you see one?”
And he said, “There.”
And he pointed at the Dining Hall
and I was quite sure that I didn't see a cottonwood tree there.
And he pointed again and he said, “I see a fluff from a Cottonwood tree but I don't think Cottonwood trees grow this far north.”
And I said, “But don't other trees have fluffs?”
He said, “It looks like a Cottonwood fluff.”
He said that he was from Northampton, the northern edge of the Cottonwood tree range, and so this fluff would have had to travel really far.
So my prayer is that we are as mindful as that man the first to whom I spoke today; to the leadings that drift past us from who knows how far, from the rare local Cottonwood or from a Cottonwood far south.
May we be as mindful.