



SPARK

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

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November 2019



Light Behind the Walls: Quaker Worship in Prison

Introduction

Welcome to this special issue on “Light Behind the Walls.” I’ve been grateful for the opportunity to collect articles from inside and outside the walls to highlight the powerful ministry that happens for us when Friends worship and connect with one another in prison. Many thanks to Sarah Way, communications director. We hope this issue is widely circulated inside and outside the walls so please pass it on after you read it.

—Jill McLellan, Prisons Committee



Attendees gather in a circle during the 40th anniversary celebration of Quaker Worship at Auburn Correctional Facility in 2014.

Quaker Prisms

Michael Rhynes
Attica Worship Group

Quaker worship in Attica is on Friday nights. The week-long trek to return to our safe haven of worship is a strange and perilous journey through the abyss of correctional madness.

As insiders, we travel long distances within restricted spaces. We bring with us family problems, prison-related stress, relationship issues, the dust of institutional hatred, and particles of hope.

Outsiders who travel to Attica

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Volunteers and inmates involved in the Auburn Quaker Meeting gathered for a group photo at the group's 40th anniversary, 2014.

Attica Quaker Worship Group: *With, Not For*

Karen Reixach
Ithaca Meeting

At a distance of 40 years, with all my papers on Attica sent to Friends Historical Society, and with most of the outsiders involved in Attica in the late 1970s and early 80s having died, this account may have things out of order and things omitted. But here are some of my memories.

Our first worship was held in the school on a Friday evening from 6-9 in 1978 or 1979. To get to the school, we passed through 14 locked gates—clang, clang. The hallway to the school had a wire fence from floor to ceiling at each end. To get out from the school that night, the guards had all the incarcerated men collect in that fenced space and the volunteers walk through the crowd in what seemed to me to be an invitation to hostage-taking. (Remember this was less than 10 years after the Attica uprising in 1971.) I went home that night and considered rather melodramatically what I was willing to die for and decided that

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Light Behind the Walls

Yohannes “Knowledge” Johnson
Green Haven Prison
Preparative Meeting

When we open the door, the room is dark. We flick on the lights and confront an empty room, chairs stacked and lined up one next to the other along the walls. One solitary heavy wooden table sits in the far corner waiting to see who would come and utilize its service.

The thought comes to mind, “We must get ready before the volunteers come.” The room this particular evening is hot and stuffy (July 19th). In the winter we make sure the windows are closed. With no radiator in the room, we must depend upon the body heat of those present to ward off the chill therein. Now, we seek to cool the room off. Our volunteers are elderly (like most of our group) and we are thankful for their service to humanity, volunteering their time to worship with us. A practicing Buddhist suggests we close the windows and put the lonely fan on high in an effort to cool off the room. We do, and it has a noticeable cooling effect.

We set the chairs in a circle with enough spacing between so a person can walk through comfortably without having to turn sideways or bump into someone sitting down. We are a small group, a membership of eight and a general attendance of five in average. As an “unprogrammed group” we generally

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Edward Stabler speaks to a group of Quaker volunteers and incarcerated Friends about his experiences as a Quaker volunteering at the Auburn Correctional Facility, 2014. *All photos on this page courtesy of the Auburn Citizen.*

Prison Worship

Edward Stabler
Syracuse Meeting

In the late 1960's the news was filled with stories of the Freedom Riders and the restaurant sit-ins. I saw people who looked like me behaving in ways that made me weep with shame.

In 1971 incarcerated men at the Attica State Prison demanded better living conditions, more humane conditions, and political rights. Their demands included improved prison health care with additional medical personnel, legal representation at parole board hearings, expanded visiting facilities, greater access to publications including

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More Inside:



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Notices

New Members

Ramal Davis—Genesee Valley Executive Meeting.

Irene Corsaro—Wilton

Joseph (Indio) Soto Maguey
—Morningside Meeting

Deaths

Priscilla DeVeer, member of Bulls Head-Oswego, on May 17, 2019.

NEWS

New Pathway to Membership in New York Yearly Meeting

Friends can now apply to be a member “at large” in NYYM. From the revisions to *Faith and Practice* approved at Fall Sessions: “An adult who applies for membership “at large” in the body of New York Yearly Meeting is expected to have been actively involved in the yearly meeting business, committees, communities, worship, events, or sessions. Sometimes life circumstances make it difficult or impossible to join or regularly attend a monthly meeting. Applicants may be incarcerated, living in remote locations, frequently traveling, working as caregivers, or simply not finding a spiritual home in a nearby monthly meeting....

A commitment to enter wholeheartedly into the spiritual and corporate activities of the Society and to assume responsibility, as way opens, is expected.”

The Committee to Revise *Faith and Practice* is finalizing the details of applying via this new path.

Young Peacemakers Week in Albany

Albany Friends Meeting hosted another successful Young Peacemakers Week (YPW) during the week of August 19-23 this past summer. 36 children attended from 8:30 to 3:00 every day, participating in a wide variety of activities created to bear witness to our Quaker Peace Testimony. The young



Participants in the Young Peacemakers Week at Albany Meeting hold a discussion after a peace march, August 19-23, 2019.

Around Our Yearly Meeting

people wrote skits, participated in non-competitive games, sang peace songs, and spent a day at a nature preserve. They filled a huge jar with “gems of kindness”—each small stone representing a good deed observed during the day. Opportunities were presented that included daily yoga, Zentangle, drumming circles, peace marches, and making solar ovens. YPW was strong again in diversity, representing children from a variety of countries, differing religions, neighborhoods, skin colors, and genders. Our end-of-the-week celebration for family and friends was enthusiastically received, with a sense of unity, joy, and peaceful thoughts and deeds.

Guns Into Gardening Tools

Wilton Meeting, partnering with the Norwalk Police Department and Mayor’s office and working with people from the Newtown Foundation and the Episcopal Church, ran a Gun Buyback event on Oct. 19. They received a total of 42 guns. The Norwalk Police praised the effort and its success and hopes to repeat the project in the future. Gun and rifle parts that were collected will be transformed into gardening tools by the Swords into Plowshares team using an old-fashioned forge! It is inspiring and symbolic to transform a weapon of death into a tool of life. Thanks go to all who made this event possible, to Diane Keefe for getting the ball rolling, and to those who donated funds through GoFundMe to pay for this project.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Young Adult Activities

For a full list and more info about upcoming programs for young adults, visit youngadultfriends.weebly.com

Retreat on Eldering and Healing December 6-8, 2019, at Powell House.

This weekend will be devoted to learning about eldering and healing within the Quaker tradition. Facilitated by Friends with gifts of eldering and healing, we will explore the history of these practices while building our skills and capacity to use our gifts in these areas. There will also be ample time for community building, rest and renewal, and fun on the beautiful Powell House campus.

Powell House Conferences

Powell House is NYYM’s retreat and conference center in Old Chatham, NY. Upcoming adult and family conferences include:

Quaker 12-Step Weekend, Nov. 22-24.

Led by facilitator Juliet Wright, the weekend will include many 12-step activities

including 12-stepping a problem, the patterns of codependency and characteristics of recovery, meeting in a bucket, gratitude boxes, individual sharing, writing and sharing on program literature from your 12-step program, singing and more!

The Winter Solstice: Light on the Longest Night. Saturday, December 21, 2019, 2:00-8:00 p.m.

What—or who—brings you light in this darkness? Can we find Light? Join us at Powell House for music, art, worship, community; capped with a luminary walk to our bonfire! **Cherish Friends and Family—New Year’s Celebration.** December 30, 2019–January 1, 2020.

This annual, multigenerational conference is one of our most popular. There are workshop slots for YOU to offer an activity. Bring your instruments, a song, story, poem and/or skit to share with everyone at Cabaret! Celebration concludes with brunch on January 1st. Come and be part of this intergenerational celebration.

Dwelling Deep, a Contemplative Retreat with Linda Chidsey and Carolyn Moon, January 17-20, 2020.

(Through Monday lunch) During this extended weekend, Friends are invited to enter more fully into the silence and to experience the deeper rhythms in which we might live. This retreat will include the opportunity for solitude, individual and corporate worship, silent meals, and “active” silence.



Part of a gun is shaped into a gardening tool by the Swords into Plowshares team as part of Wilton Meeting’s Guns into Garden Tools program. See story above. Photo by Sean Higgins



Peter Murchison surveys the 42 weapons collected during Norwalk’s Gun Buyback/Guns into Garden Tools program, sponsored by Wilton Friends Meeting. See story below. Photo by Sean Higgins

Upcoming youth conferences:

At the End of Your Line? Build a Bridge — 11th & 12th grade plus YOUNG ADULTS, November 22-24. Join us for a weekend of discussing what we can do with fear and anger in a nonviolent, productive way! **Winter Eyes** — 4th & 5th grade, December 6-8.

We will practice using “winter eyes” for these short cold days of winter: seeing color in gray days and practicing ways to bring energy and warmth into ourselves and others. **Wintersong** — 7th to 12th grade, December 13-15.

The annual two-house celebration where older middle schoolers join

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high schoolers to create a vibrant, joyful community.

Visit powellhouse.org for more!

OPPORTUNITIES

Powell House Youth Director

If you desire to be in a role where you are making a marked difference in the lives of young people, we invite you to apply to the role of Youth Director of Powell House. The Powell House Youth Program hosts approximately two weekend retreats a month for children ranging from 4th to 12th grade. The Powell House Youth Directors will be responsible for creating programming that is impactful and meaningful for attendees, manage logistics of the program and be accountable for programming enrollment and advertisement.

View job listing at powellhouse.org/seeking-youth-director

If interested, contact Regina Baird Haag at regina@powellhouse.org 

Editor's Note

Welcome to a special issue of *Spark* guest-edited by Jill McLellan and the Prisons Committee. Many thanks to Jill, the members of the Prisons Committee, and everyone who wrote. Extra copies of this issue will be printed and distributed to all of our prison worship groups.

Inspired? Consider writing an article for *Spark*. Aim for 400-600 words and include your full name and meeting with your submission. Don't forget to send in news from your meeting! Email articles, photos, and news to communications@nny.org.

The January issue of *Spark* is unthemed and will include news from Fall Sessions and updates from NYM committees. Submissions deadline is **December 1**. The March issue will be guest-edited by the **Indian Affairs Committee** and submissions are due by **February 1**.

Please send news and events to communications@nny.org for NYM's monthly emailed newsletter, InfoShare. Sign up to receive InfoShare or other NYM communications at www.tinyurl.com/nnymconnect.

Look for NYM on social media: @newyorkyearlymeeting on Facebook and Instagram and @NYMTweets on Twitter.

Giving thanks! —Sarah Way



Summer Sessions July 19-25, 2020


Registration will open on
February 1, 2020.

SAVE THE DATE! You are invited to join the New York Yearly Meeting community for Summer Sessions 2020. NYM gathers for Summer Sessions at Silver Bay YMCA, a conference and family retreat center on the shores of Lake George. Several hundred Friends of all ages, both members and attenders, from across the NYM region, gather to worship, conduct business, play, and create a community together.

This past summer, Summer Sessions was Pay as Led for the first time. This was a daring experiment that relied on people being led to pay more so others could pay less, making our summer gathering accessible to a wider range of Friends. It was a success! Summer Sessions 2020 will also be Pay as Led.

What can you do now to get ready for Summer Sessions?

- Save the date in your calendar: **July 19-25, 2020**
- Consider joining Junior Yearly Meeting as a group leader and help plan the week's program. Contact Dawn Pozzi for more: quakerdawn@gmail.com.
- Start thinking about whether you are led to lead an interest group
- Keep an eye out for more Sessions information in January!

Look for the details and plan on joining us July 19-25! 



Friends Girls School Sohagapur in central India celebrated World Quaker Day on October 6, 2019. The program started with silent worship, followed by religious songs and messages. Following the indoor program, eleven Jack Fruit trees were planted. Posters were made by 11th grade students. Photo from Dr. Sanjeev Shukla



Front of Version 1



Front of Version 2



Back of Both Cards

Outreach Cards Available!

NYM Youth Committee

Dear Friends,

The Youth Committee is sharing these sample Outreach cards for members to share with others as an introduction to our beloved community.


We feel it's important to share who we are with those seeking resonant community. We also consider it essential in these times, without proselytizing, to inform.

If your Meeting would like to receive 100+ of these cards, simply email the below info to the Treasurer of the Youth Committee, Don O'Keefe, at facethemusic3@yahoo.com. Please cc: Howard Gibbs-Hobgood at sendemailtohoward@yahoo.com.

Donations are welcome, but not required, by clicking "Donate" at nny.org, or by check to NYM, 15 Rutherford Pl, New York, NY 10003. Please write "Outreach Cards" in the memo.

In thanks,

The Youth Committee

1. Your Name, Address, Meeting
2. Quantity Requested of Version 1 (*That Which Is...*) or Version 2 (*Let Your Life Speak*)
3. What do you appreciate about your Monthly Meeting?
4. How could your Monthly Meeting better serve you?
5. How could your Meeting better serve Youth, Young Adults & Families?
6. What might inspire you to attend Summer Sessions 2020? 

For Young Friends (ages 13-18) of New York Yearly Meeting


At New York Yearly Meeting's Summer Sessions, some Friends noticed that while young adults have spent time and energy naming their needs, we haven't heard much directly from our youth (the folks around 13-18 years old) about YOUR needs. As NYM discusses the position(s) of Youth/Young Adult Field Secretary, it is important to hear from you! We have spent some time learning about what activities are available for youth connection and care at yearly meetings across the US and Britain, and have used these conversations as the basis of this (anonymous) survey: tinyurl.com/nnymyouthsurvey Please complete it, even if you don't go to meeting or Powell House (or perhaps ESPECIALLY if you don't!).

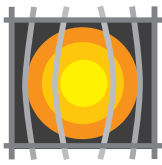
It will only take 2 minutes or so. If you prefer to talk to one of us directly, please email Beth (beth.r.kelly@gmail.com); also contact Beth if you would like to be added to a youth-only group text about hopes and needs. Also, if you have friends/peers you think we should hear from, please share the link to the survey. Thanks so much for being awesome. We are excited to hear from you!

In Friendship,

Beth Kelly, Emily Provance, and Corina Tulevech 

NYM CONNECT!

There is an easy way to connect with all that NYM has to offer! At www.tinyurl.com/nnymconnect you can sign up to receive news from NYM and Powell House and manage your email list options. 



Light Behind the Walls



Mary Cadbury, Yohannes "Knowledge" Johnson, and Dare Thompson visiting together at Green Haven. Photo courtesy of Dare Thompson.

Light Behind the Walls

Yohannes "Knowledge" Johnson
Green Haven Prison
Preparative Meeting

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schedule our agenda to include whatever contributions our volunteers may have to offer.

One volunteer offers a very potent program on spirituality. Another offers one on "self reflections." Still another offers a program on "self introspection" on one's present. Should volunteers not be able to attend we offer Queries for discussion on ways of looking at issues or situations. We are always mindful and guided by our Quaker Testimonies (Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality and Stewardship) to follow in our discussion.

On this night, our volunteer arrives, and as happens on all other nights like this, our volunteer brings Light (life) to recharge and energize the group. We greet with a warm welcome our evening's volunteer and begin to settle down in preparation for our service to begin. Our volunteer notices how much cooler it is in the room compared to outside the room and we all take pleasure in knowing our small but significant act has had a positive and welcoming effect. We are pleased to see we are able to offer such a degree of comfort.

After Worship Service we hear of the upcoming gathering to be held at Silver Bay, wishing we could be there but grateful knowing prison worship groups shall be represented, and in that way, our Spirit joins in the collective Spirit of all who shall attend.

At meeting's end, we do not necessarily wish to part. Our

volunteer is given our individual blessings, and with smiles of appreciation and handshakes of goodwill, we hold on to the Light brought and experienced for the few moments we had to share.

When we leave, we bring the Light with us to get us through another week.



Attica Quaker Worship Group: With, Not For

Karen Reixach
Ithaca Meeting

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the odds were low of actually being taken hostage and once I knew the insiders who attended the meeting, they would likely watch out for us.

This worship culminated a careful discernment process because the request for a Quaker worship group at Attica came from Winston Moseley, who wrote to Janet Lugo of the Quaker Information Center (located at Syracuse Meeting in the late 70s). Winston had raped and murdered Kitty Genovese, a notorious crime, and had escaped from prison and raped another woman. But I don't remember anyone saying no simply on the basis of who requested the worship group.

Farmington-Scipio Region was already supporting the Auburn Prison worship group, so there was some experience both in discernment and how such a worship group might go.

My recollection is that a group from Farmington-Scipio Region met at a chapel at UB Amherst to consider this opening. Newton Garver from Buffalo Meeting who had served time in Danbury Prison for draft resistance in the early 50s; Mike Farrell of the Amherst worship group who had attended the Auburn Prison worship group, as had I; Ann and Franklin Mesler, an older couple from Hartland Meeting, and perhaps a few others were there. Mike and I offered to go to Attica and meet with Winston Moseley as soon as that could be arranged.

So called "contact" visits, in which the visitor and the person in

prison can sit at a table together, had not yet made it to Attica. So Mike and I sat on a bench with a heavy screen between us and Winston. Over the time together, we got acquainted and discovered a man who knew that he would likely die in prison and was looking for ways to help himself and others to grow. And he was probably taking our measure to see whether we were up to sustaining a worship group in the harsh conditions of Attica.

We recommended that the Region proceed with the worship group, and the next step was to get the prison to provide time and space. The superintendent summoned some of us to meet with him, which required driving through a heavy snowstorm to have a few cordial words with him (and for him to assess us, I suspected.) Soon afterward we began holding worship every other Friday because that was what we could sustain. Sometimes in the early days, only one insider would show up, the others having been refused release from their cell. But we persisted.

Recruiting Roland Warren, Clarence Klingensmith, and eventually Suzanne Blackburn from Alfred, as well as other faithful outside attenders from Rochester—especially Fred and Judy Halley—eventually enabled a weekly time of check-ins, worship, program on Quaker topics, and a period for relaxed conversation.

The Region established an Oversight Committee, which met monthly for a number of years at a bar/restaurant in town prior to going in to the prison. The Committee was an essential element in sustaining our presence and a source of deep connection among the outsiders from urban and rural, pastoral and unprogrammed meetings.

Attica remains a harsh place, and the "one religion" policy, instituted by Albany in the 90s requiring prisoners to register with a single religion and barring them from attending other services, has kept numbers low in the worship group at Attica. But the worship can go deep, and those from the outside are not there for the men behind the walls but rather with them, united in Spirit.



Attica Prison Worship Group

2018 State of the Meeting
Approved 3/22/2019

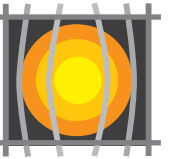
The beginning of 2018 started off at a low point of attendance. Three of our four volunteers were no longer able to come in due to suspensions or health conditions. We only had two inside members due to transfers or schedule conflicts. But our one outsider and two insiders kept the faith and things picked up by the end of the year. We now have 3 inside members and 3 outside volunteers.

As a very small group, we grew to know each other better. We were greatly enriched by a visit from members of the NYYM Prisons Committee. The ARCH workshops of the previous year continue to work in us and some of our outreach has fostered new connections. We share of our families, our legal work, our poetry. We ask questions and challenge each other to grow. The people that have come and gone from the group over the year are keenly missed and we deeply feel their Spirit in our group when they are not with us. We all care about each other.

As we considered the spiritual health of our meeting for the year 2018, we considered the question "How does one stay Quakerly in an unQuakerly environment?"

The relationships between incarcerated Friends and outside Quakers who come inside are very important. A person in a prison can come to believe they *are* the environment they are in. We are conditioned to believe certain destructive ideas. When we interact with outside volunteers, it is humanizing. We know we are still alive. You could live in prison for years and not realize what has happened to you, to your spirit. But here in meeting you have an opportunity to be human. Meeting is our sanctuary.

Inside and outside Friends provide each other with a certain type of balance. We offer each other insights about the two worlds—how they differ and how they are the same. Meeting for worship is a sacred place where we share things we would not otherwise share or maybe not even think of at all.



Is it worth it, to keep striving to be Quakerly in this environment? Or should we just give up?

Meeting allows us to recognize the balance between solitude which is healing and reflective and solitude which breeds unhealthy anxiety; a silence which is introspective and a silence which comes from oppression. There is a power to transform that which is forced upon us to something that we can accept and use for bettering one's self.

In an oppressive environment, the Spirit in us can break down and die. We can become bitter. But the Light within cannot be extinguished. In our circle, we offer affirmation—a reflection of how far we have come as individuals and as a community. Our meeting is family. We challenge each other in a way to bring out our better selves. At this moment, we would not want to be anywhere else.



Illumination

Dean Faiello

Cayuga Worship Group

Friday nights, twice a month, I attend Quaker worship meetings at Cayuga CF. However, at the end of the work week, I am often tired, cranky, and irritable. Even though it is a prison program, my job at the Transitional Services Center requires many hours. By Friday night, I just want to take a nap. But I think about the outside volunteers who are preparing to leave their homes and their families, travel here, and deal with correction officers and processing to gain entry to a prison. My trip to the worship room takes less than five minutes. But their trip here, and back, requires hours of driving, waiting, and selfless dedication. When I think about the volunteers—their smiling faces, their empathy and compassion—I change my attitude and do what I have to do to get ready for the meeting: shower, shave, make my dinner in advance, prepare a cup of coffee for the next morning, which begins at four a.m.

I spent many years sleeping late, and being late for work, because I was up all night—partying, selfishly thinking of only myself, my needs, my wants, my whims and desires, doing just about anything I felt

like doing. Eventually, that deluded thinking ruined my life, and the lives of those around me. My family and friends suffered. Greatly.

Change did not take place until I went to prison. After two years on Rikers Island, the first bus stop was Attica. It was an ugly, dark, depressing place. But I made the best of it—learning to write, teaching prison programs, attending college classes, and finally, after ignoring my family for forty years, communicating with them. I wrote them letters, explaining my ignorance, my failures, my sorrow for what I put them through.

I explored Catholicism, Buddhism, existentialism, just about any “-ism” I could find. Eventually, at Attica, I attended a Quaker meeting and listened to a registered nurse talk about her work with the terminally ill, caring for them, and helping them “pass over.” I realized that empathy and compassion were missing from my life. I felt so small, so sad.

That meeting, that experience, that realization, finally changed me. So now, when I feel like just thinking about myself, I think about the Quakers who are on their way here, who care about me, and prisoners, and helping others. And I get up, and shower, and put on a clean, ironed shirt, and get myself to a meeting. Afterwards, I feel so much better, and am so grateful for Quakers, volunteers, and prison.

I don't like change. It's stressful. But I am so glad I am no longer the person I used to be. My family, and Quakers, are glad too.



Green Haven Prison Preparative Meeting Lawsuit

Fred Dettmer

Purchase Meeting

At Summer Sessions 2018, Friends approved a minute (2018-07-46) to support legal action by members of the Green Haven Prison Preparative Meeting against the New York Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (“DOCCS”) in pursuit of their religious rights under the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act. Green Haven Prison Preparative Meeting

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Quaker Prisms

Michael Rhynes

Attica Worship Group

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for worship bring with them family problems, job-related stress, and relationship issues. After entering the prison they leave bread crumbs of hope, as they navigate dimly lit, foreboding corridors in order to reach worship service.

As both insiders and outsiders reach the classroom where services are held, we cross into a prism of spirituality, where the refracted light of our individual existence becomes a Mobius strip of awareness. We have arrived at the exact place where our weary bodies relinquish their worldly burdens to the respite of silence.

Our souls come forth to speak in their native tongues, in a spectrum of yellows, greens, blues, and violets. Illuminating an epiphany of joy, there are no insiders or outsiders. It's just us.



Prison is a place...

Zontiell Gordon

Sing-Sing Worship Group

... where the mind has created the concept of 'good' crimes; I wonder what the 'bad' crimes are. Harsh experience has made me acknowledge that I'd rather have a 'smart' enemy than a 'dumb' friend. But friendships here are shallow anyway, so what's the difference?

...where your sentence is like a job—both have retirement, both conclude in your closing years. But I've never met anyone who wanted to do a 'good' sentence and then die here. A black man's life span averages 65 years, the age of retirement.

...where a high percentage place more emphasis on how to get new sneakers than how to get a new trial. I understand, because here you lose respect for the law; you see it raw and twisted, disrespected and ignored and blown out of proportion to fit the needs of the ideals of who enforce it.

...where years pass and you do not feel a human touch; where a kind word could be missed for months; it's a place where we learn

to be smarter than the parole board because we know which men will walk 'straight' and which will not. We're wrong sometimes, so are they, but neither admit it.

...where you understand that nobody needs you because the world outside moves on without you. It's a place where you get false teeth, glasses, and then stronger glasses; where you feel aches and pains you thought you were too young to experience. Where you find your hair disappearing or turning gray in surprising places.

...where you write letters and cannot think of anything to say; where you gradually write fewer letters, and finally stop writing altogether. It's a place where you hear about friends' children graduating from school, but you didn't know they had children.

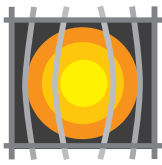
...where you wait for a promised visit, and, when it doesn't come, you worry about an accident. When you find out the reason they didn't come, you're glad because it was not serious, and disappointed that such a little thing could keep them from seeing you.

...where you see men you don't admire and wonder if you're like them. It's a place where you strive to stay civilized, but lose ground. Where, if you're married, you watch your marriage die. You understand that absence does not make the heart grow fonder; you stop blaming your wife for wanting to live with a real man, instead of a fading memory of one. It's a place you go to bed before you're tired. Where, when you're not cold, you pull the blanket over your head. It's a place where you escape by reading, playing cards, or by going insane.

...where you'll swear you'll live a better life when you leave, but forget to do what's needed to assure that. It's a place where 'goodbye' isn't as painful as it seems, because most of the time, it's for the best. Where life becomes easier when you learn to accept an apology that will never come. Unfortunately, it's a place where some people want to be, and fortunately, it's a place where one day, you'll be freed.

Zontiell is an AVP facilitator and a student in Mercy College. He has regularly attended Quaker meetings for three years.





Light Behind the Walls

The Walls and the Light

Darrell Dumblewski
Orleans Prison Worship Group

As I think about “The Light Behind the Walls,” I am so thankful for the ones who have brought the “Light” behind the walls and of the numerous ways they shared their messages.

Over 25 years ago, I started my current incarceration period. Life for me was one of deep confusion and utter despair. I felt shattered, totally worthless, and just so purposeless. Guilt, shame, and loss are a few of the feelings of emptiness and darkness that had become my life.

Then, on a Saturday night in the fall of 1995, I attended a Quaker meeting at Auburn Correctional Facility. A friend invited me to go, so I did. That is where I first met Quakers.

Meetings were not like church. The attendees were unlike any congregation I was involved with before. The Quakers were different in ways I really needed in my life back then (and still today). I would discover over the course of many years the special hearts the Quaker volunteers have, and how they so openly share their faith, their hearts, and their thoughts with us behind the walls.

Most importantly, I discovered that these Quaker volunteers brought more than Light. These dear, patient Friends also enabled me to realize I had created numerous “walls” inside myself that isolated me from my heart and from everyone else. Through the building blocks of lies, self-centeredness, drug use, gambling, pain, guilt, a very judgmental personality, and many other faults and wrong-doings, I had laid the foundations and barriers that would separate me from an essential part of my own being. I discovered that I was not so kind, understanding, or even as loving as I thought I was. I had become a person who was totally self-centered, and sadly did not even know it.

Nowadays, and most likely for a long time, it will hurt, knowing all the people I’ve used or hurt through

my faults, lies, and wrong-doings, especially those who loved me so.

I have described what “the WALLS,” in “The Light Behind the Walls” means to me, so now I’ll share what “the LIGHT” has meant and means to me.

The “Light” is more than can be seen with open eyes (that’s for sure).

The “Light” is simply the truth, with a willingness to understand and listen to it.

From Quakers, I’ve discovered that I am in some ways a Seeker. I seek to discover “that of God in everyone,” which is the fundamental truth that Quakers believe.

I look back into my past a lot. I remember the many people that showed and shared their dear, special “Lights” with an uncomprehending me during my life. I’m both humbled and grateful that I’m now able to view their “Lights” with an understanding of “that of God.” Over a decade ago, I discovered that “that of God in everyone,” a “Light,” may be revealed to me in many ways. It’s mind blowing when I realize the countless ways God does speak to me, through the many “Lights” of so many people in this world.

And so what the “LIGHT” means to me is learning to be more receptive to hearing and understanding what God is sharing. It is listening with an open heart and open mind to an all-loving God.

Thank you to all the Quaker volunteers and to the many others behind the walls who help bring and share their “Lights.” Thank you so much to everyone who has or who had to put up with me. I’ve been so truly blessed with your care and love. And most of all, Thank You, God, for your love and understanding, and for being an all-loving God, and such a constant “LIGHT.”

Thank you for reading this, and I hope that you may each discover what God may be sharing and showing to each of you.

May God Bless You Always.



AVP Facilitators at El Porvenir Prison, Honduras, 2019. Read the story on page 7, “AVP in a Honduran Prison.” Photo from Shirley Way

Prison Worship

Edward Stabler
Syracuse Meeting

continued from page 1

educational and current media, and an option for a no-pork diet. Quakers hold up a testimony of peace, value all human life, and would have liked to have witnessed a peaceful solution. There were negotiations and it seemed a settlement would be reached. Unfortunately, the negotiations turned violent and over 40 people died. We still mourn their loss.

So, in 1974 I jumped at the chance to attend Quaker worship inside the walls of Auburn Prison.

How did this happen? One woman, Janet Lugo of Syracuse Friends Meeting, read in the newspaper that Native Americans in prison were required to wear their hair cut short. It seemed a small thing, but for Native Americans hair length has religious significance. She got really, really angry about this bullying by the State. The New York State constitution says prison inmates retain all their religious rights. Before restricting a religious practice, the State must show that allowing the practice will endanger security and safety in the prison. Of course, such a claim would be ridiculous when the supposed danger was hair length.

Now Janet was energized. OK, she thought, “What about the religious rights of Quakers in prison?” She didn’t know of any Quakers in prison, but she had quite a few Native Americans friends at this point. Soon there were about a dozen men in Auburn Prison who said they wanted to worship in the manner of Quakers. They wanted silent worship, in which all worshippers participated as equals. With no priest or minister appointed by the state.

There were long negotiations with the Department of Correctional Services (DOCS). One sticking point was that the Quakers insisted that women be allowed to attend the worship. But once again, the State was unable to show that the mere fact of a woman worshipping in prison constituted a security threat. Reasonable rules were developed for woman worshippers and

negotiations went forward.

Why did the Quakers insist on the participation of women? We were not trying to be difficult. Women are important! Look around you at any Quaker worship service. Women bring essential gifts and energy to our worship, to family, to society, and to everything Quakers value.

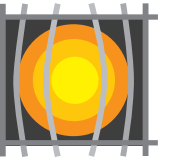
Another problem was our insistence that Quakers from outside had to be allowed to join the worship in prison. DOCS hires chaplains to serve the prisoners religious needs, but Quakers have no chaplains, nor anything similar. The Quaker negotiators agreed to provide a contact person and agreed that outsiders wishing to attend Quaker Worship in prison would register for the privilege, would undergo a brief training, and use a picture ID provided by the prison.

Let me say at this point, that I respect the DOCS representatives. You had the impression that they themselves were trapped, by an elaborate, often paranoid web of regulations. They were somewhat sympathetic but could not say so. This is understandable, and unfortunate. Prison officials are often criticized by people who want prisons to be all punishment and no humanity. Prison officials and guards are imprisoned too.

At the first Quaker worship inside Auburn Prison there were about 12 prisoners and a similar number from the outside. We could see a 30-foot-high wall out the window. After a very brief description of Quaker worship we began. There were helpful messages from both outside and inside worshippers. I remember a prisoner telling us, “the wall doesn’t seem as high as it was yesterday.”

After some years, the Auburn Prison Worship group asked the Farmington-Scipio Regional Meeting (FSRM) to allow it to become a Preparative Meeting under its care. This was unusual. The men at Auburn had never attended an outside Meeting for Worship. But after much discussion, the Regional Meeting agreed to the change. Friends responded tenderly to this unusual request, confident of the sincerity and devotion of the petitioners.

Men in prison are unused to requests being granted. Acceptance



of this request was a strong signal to prisoner worshippers of their significance and worth.


Afterwards many members of FSRM helped sustain Quaker worship at Auburn Prison. Several Auburn Prison attenders became full members of Syracuse, Poplar Ridge, and Ithaca Friends Meetings.

Our Meetings for Worship were usually on Saturday. After silent worship we got to know each other, and occasionally had visitors. FSRM Quakers attended regularly.

Each summer there was an outdoor party with music, food and, importantly, the prisoners' families, including children. Oh, Happy Day! It was so wonderful to see the men sitting close to wives and partners, and to see them playing with their children.

I attended Quaker worship in Auburn prison for 35 years. This worship experience shaped me and helped me deeply. Thank you, thank you, Janet Lugo and fellow Auburn worshippers!

My advice to all who read this is: find a way to attend Quaker Worship in prison.

Do Quaker worship practices succeed in prison? Indeed, they do! 

Green Haven Prison Preparative Meeting Lawsuit

Fred Dettmer
Purchase Meeting

continued from page 5

is under the care of Poughkeepsie Monthly Meeting and is part of Nine Partners Quarterly Meeting. DOCCS took two actions that eliminated important Friends programs at Green Haven Correctional Facility.

For approximately 35 years, Green Haven Prison Preparative Meeting hosted in Green Haven Correctional Facility one or two gatherings a year of Friends in Nine Partners Quarter. Comparable to Quarterly Meetings, these gatherings generally took place on Saturdays from around 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., and included worship, program, business, food, and fellowship. In 2015, DOCCS terminated these gatherings.


For approximately 30 years, participants in Green Haven Prison

Preparative Meeting met three times a week: once for worship; once for a study group; and once for meeting for worship with a concern for business. In July 2018, DOCCS terminated the meetings for worship with a concern for business on the supposed basis that it "does not appear to be a study group or a worship service and therefore does not appear necessary."

After lengthy, but unsuccessful, efforts to work with DOCCS to see these programs reinstated, Green Haven Prison Preparative Meeting, Poughkeepsie Monthly Meeting, Bulls Head-Oswego Monthly Meeting, Nine Partners Quarterly Meeting, New York Yearly Meeting and ten individual Friends filed a lawsuit in the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York (White Plains branch) on September 18, 2018 against DOCCS and its responsible officials. The lawsuit asks the Court to order DOCCS to reinstate Quarterly Meetings and meetings for worship with a concern for business at Green Haven CF on the same terms as previously existed. The legal claims are based principally on Friends' rights to practice our faith free from government interference under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution and under the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, which Congress passed to provide broad protection to the religious freedom of the incarcerated.

On March 29, 2019, we filed a motion for a preliminary injunction, which seeks to have the Quarterly Meetings and meetings for worship with a concern for business reinstated immediately by the Court, before the issues raised by the lawsuit have even been fully decided. The Judge can issue a preliminary injunction if he finds that we are likely to prevail on the merits in the case and will suffer "irreparable harm" if the programs are not reinstated immediately. "Irreparable harm" means injury that cannot be adequately compensated in money. Deprivation of religious liberty is typically considered to be "irreparable harm." At the time of this report, we are waiting to hear from the Court on the motion for a preliminary injunction.

Prison ministry has been a

central part of the practice of the Religious Society of Friends nearly since our founding. (See page 52 in the 2018 edition of *Faith and Practice*.) Prison ministry also is exhausting work. Some burn-out is nearly inevitable. While this lawsuit may enable incarcerated and free Friends involved with Green Haven Prison Preparative Meeting to resume important Friends' programs, it cannot assure the future success of Quaker worship in Green Haven Correctional Facility. Only the sustained commitment of Friends to our historical ministry can do that. We must find new ways to assist and support these Friends, to reinvigorate our prison ministry. Otherwise, DOCCS may grind us down; and Quakers are not given to being deterred by the powers that be. 



Allie Prescott leads the "Light and Lively" Animal Parade in the AVP Trauma Awareness and Resilience Workshop. *Photo from Shirley Way*

Alternatives to Violence (AVP) in a Honduran Prison

Shirley Way
Ithaca Meeting

In January, with funding from NYYM's Witness Activities Fund (which is funded by the Sharing Fund) and from Farmington Scipio Regional Meeting's Surplus Fund, Allie Prescott and I traveled to Honduras. Allie is the Communication Specialist for Friends Peace Teams and an AVP Facilitator from Los Angeles. Our faith tradition says ministers never travel alone. We need an elder to anchor us, to hold us to Truth. Allie was my elder and I was hers as we each ministered.

El Porvenir Prison is located near La Ceiba on the Atlantic coast of Honduras. The Alternatives to Violence program is anchored by strong women: Ondina Murillo and Judith Aguilar are Mennonite, and Coni Lustenberger, originally from


Sweden, moved to Honduras twelve years ago and is a yoga instructor. They, together with the inside team of facilitators, have trained more than half of the prison's 400 men in AVP workshops and it has changed the culture of the prison.

On a tour of the prison, we saw that the men sleep in tight quarters. Each "cell" has four beds that are each stacked four or five high, housing between 16 and 20 men. There is not enough space to sit up on the beds. They are "locked in" from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. every day. There is only a sheet of fabric for a wall between the "cell" and the lively communal space that is the corridor between cells. There are no guards on the floor of the prison. They stand in stations atop the walls that surround the scene. Incarcerated men with sticks keep the order, ostensibly. Meals are beans and rice three times a day. No vegetables; no fruit.

Allie, Ondina, Judith and I facilitated an AVP Trauma Awareness and Resilience Workshop with fifteen men. Five of the men are AVP facilitators. All of the facilitators and most in the room are former gang members. Many showed, or spoke of, signs of traumatic stress—shaking, hypervigilance, inability to sleep, nightmares, etc. No one wants to kill or torture or extort. It is a life they are forced into.

All of the facilitators gave video interviews for the Friends Peace Team's website. Luis spoke of his life as a leader in an international gang engaged in kidnapping, extortion and assassination. While at another prison, Luis led a revolt with eighty men armed with AK-47s. He was subsequently transferred to El Porvenir where he found AVP. He speaks of his life as having two parts: Before, and Now. During the workshop Luis was grieving the death of his nephew who had been drawn into gang life.

Rival gangs keep track of who is incarcerated where and they frequently wait along the long dirt road to the prison and kill family members coming to visit their loved ones. In the taxi, at that particular spot, Ondina, Judith, Allie, the driver and I pray together, hands on one another's shoulder or thigh.

It is truly a gift to do this work, to be a part. 



Light Behind the Walls

Support College Behind Bars

Black Concerns Committee

- Incarcerated individuals who receive a college education while in prison have improved reentry outcomes.
- Higher education is one of the most powerful deterrents to crime and re-incarceration. People who participated in prison education programs while incarcerated had a 43 percent lower chance of returning to prison than those who did not.
- Higher education in prison is cost effective. The U.S. Justice Department released findings that show prison education programs save taxpayer dollars and help formerly incarcerated people have a positive impact on their communities.
- Higher education in prisons is good for New Yorkers. New York's program will cost an estimated \$5,000 per year per student. NY currently spends \$60,000 per year on every incarcerated person.
- Higher education in prisons makes sense. Study after study has shown that prison education works: it prevents recidivism and saves taxpayers money.

A documentary series, **College Behind Bars**, will begin airing on public broadcasting stations on November 25, 2019. Ken Burns is the executive producer. Watch and discuss it with your meeting, family, and friends.

Kindling the Light

Ramal Davis

Genesee Valley Executive Meeting

Attica Correctional Facility has a black cloud that hovers above. Within the confines of these walls, the atmosphere is even darker. However, I am able to find a glimmer of Light behind these prison walls by corresponding with a friend on the outside who always inspires, motivates, and shares kind words to uplift my spirit. Also, worshipping with Friends both outside and in helps to kindle and nourish the Light within to illuminate my outer being.

A Note on Language

There is a movement afoot to be more mindful about the words we use. The goal is to remind us that all of us are people first. Any qualifiers come after that acknowledgement of someone's personhood. Rather than saying "inmates" or "offenders," we might say "a woman who's incarcerated," "a man in prison," "a person on parole." Folks leaving prison are often referred to as "returning citizens." Being deliberate with word choices helps remind us that the people in prison are just that: people. —Jill McLellan

Write to a Quaker Inside Prison

"For a good 16 years, I was transferred from prison to prison, and while at no time was there a Quaker worship group for me to attend, I held on to the faith of those who held faith in me....In all of those years, Quakers have been my breath of life. I arrived at the Auburn Correctional Facility and was overwhelmed to have finally found a Quaker prison worship group. After my first opportunity to meet with them, I cried in my cell that night."

—Yohannes 'Knowledge' Johnson, *Friends Journal*, March 2019

As Quakers within New York Yearly Meeting, we practice our faith inside and outside of prison. In eight prisons throughout New York state, incarcerated Friends gather to worship with Friends from the outside. Over time, people often get transferred to facilities where there is no worship group and they may want to maintain their relationship with the Yearly Meeting. Ongoing contact between Quakers on the inside and outside is critical and mutually beneficial.

The NYYM Prisons Committee is building a group of Friends inside and outside the walls who want to share their truth and their wisdom on their spiritual journeys. We seek people willing to write letters and develop relationships!

If you are interested in writing to a Friend inside prison, or if you are an incarcerated Friend who would like to join this peer to peer letter writing group, please write to Judy Meikle c/o NYYM 15 Rutherford Place, New York NY 10003



Opportunities to Get Involved with Prison Work

There is a historical precedent for Friends being involved in prison work. Not only were early Friends often incarcerated for their beliefs but the first recognized prison volunteer was Elizabeth Fry who started programs for women and children after visiting Newgate Prison in 1813.

Here are some ways to get involved:

Correspondence: Writing to someone who has attended a Quaker Prison Worship Group but is now in a facility with no Quakers. The idea is to nurture a spiritual Friendship. It is suggested that you use a meetinghouse address rather than your personal one so personal information is kept private. When you start corresponding, we suggest you have a mentor who is familiar with the prison system; your mentor could be a volunteer or another Friend who has corresponded or visited. People who correspond are permitted to visit people in prison but cannot also be volunteers for programs such as Prison Worship Groups or AVP. See a member of Prisons Committee to find out who is now in a prison with no worship group.

Greeting Card Ministry: Your meeting could send greeting cards several times per year to incarcerated Friends or AVP facilitators in a nearby prison. Cards have no personal messages but rather a general positive (often seasonal) greeting and is signed with first names only. Cards can be handmade (no glue, glitter, paint, or other unusual materials are permitted) or store-bought. See a member of Prisons Committee for more information.

Visits: Visiting a person who has been involved in Quaker worship is also a meaningful way to connect. We suggest going in pairs, at least at first. The Prisons Committees (regional and NYYM) can help identify men and women who would like a visit. If you make visits or correspond, you cannot also be a volunteer.

Registered Volunteers:

Becoming a volunteer can take a few months of forms, background checks, fingerprinting, orientation, and TB tests. Volunteers can attend a prison worship group in a NYS prison (Attica, Auburn, Cayuga, Green Haven, Orleans, Otisville, Sing Sing, Woodbourne and a Quaker study group at Elmira) which meet weekly or semimonthly. Volunteering with AVP (Alternatives to Violence Project) is a wonderful experience and in many more facilities than have worship groups. AVP also has workshops in NJ and CT and in federal facilities.

ARCH Visitors and Presenters: ARCH (Aging Resources Consultation and Help) is involved in prisons. Those trained as ARCH visitors (training now offered remotely through NYYM) may be invited to visit someone in prison who is wishing a visit to assist with end of life issues, housing. Visiting in pairs is suggested, at least at first. Registered volunteers can present ARCH programs inside the prisons to the Quaker groups and in some cases to a larger audience. The topic of the presentation is usually selected by the men in the worship group, and the ARCH program has outlines for a variety of programs.

Re-entry: Supporting those who have come home from incarceration is best done as part of a supportive group such as a meeting or AVP group.

Many people in prison have been Quakers and/or AVP facilitators for decades. We all have much to learn from each other. Even a few letters a year or a visit or two a year can be a great gift to somebody behind bars, and an opportunity for growth for the "outside" Friend as well. Be prepared to be transformed.

—Jill McLellan, Buffalo Meeting; also worships in Auburn and Orleans Prisons and Suzanne Blackburn, Genesee Valley Meeting; also worships in Attica Prison