



SPARK

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

Volume 50, Number 5

15 Rutherford Place, New York, NY 10003

November/December 2020

Articles Written by Friends

This issue is an eclectic collection of articles contributed by Friends. Enjoy!

College Behind Bars

NYYM Black Concerns Committee

After the murder of George Floyd, the Black Concerns Committee decided to try to support projects that addressed structural racism. In New York State, structural racism = mass incarceration. Our College Behind Bars Task Group recommended that we support expansion of the **Bard Prison College Program at Fishkill Correctional Facility**. The Black Concerns Committee and the Prisons Committee approved the recommendation and put their Sharing Fund dollars to work by contributing \$3,500 for the prison college program expansion. The advantages of expanding this program at Fishkill are tremendous: not only will BPI be able to double the size of its BA program, but the second site will also create opportunities for students to transfer to a medium-security facility without sacrificing their academics. They will no longer have to transfer to a maximum security penitentiary to attain their college degree.

Our Task Group researched approximately 28 prison college programs. What we found out was that many of the prison college programs the NYS Department of Corrections had listed on their website were no longer functioning. We initially thought that the

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The Four Types of Vocal Ministry

Donald Mick
New Haven Meeting
(NEYM)

This exploration of vocal or spoken ministry is based on observations made over fifty years of attending un-programmed meetings, mostly in the Northeast of the United States. My experience has been consistent in different places. The exploration is intended to be nonjudgmental. All types, at various times, have met the spiritual needs of a community in worship and have led to a deeper community experience of the divine.

Types of Vocal Ministry

I would like to suggest that the spiritual leading for vocal ministry arises in four forms:

- Prepared
- Faith- or Testimony-led
- Experience-led
- Numinous

Three types are left-brained

Three of the sources of vocal ministry are left-brained. In this context that means consciously crafted and often logical, analytical, detailed and fact oriented. Those three types are Prepared, Faith- or Testimony-led, and Experience-led.

One type is right-brained

The source of Numinous vocal ministry is right-brained. In this context that means the leading

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A new banner—Love Thy Neighbor (No Exceptions)—on an old meetinghouse, Shrewsbury, NJ. Photo by Steve Ross.

Ministry of Poetry

Frederick Drew Robinson
Otisville Worship Group

Many times I feel that I am carrying a heavy stone that I cannot put down. It feels eerily like the same stone my African ancestors carried when they first came to these shores. In my spirit I can hear them groaning under its weight.

This of course is both a past and a present day grief. I am dismayed that so many years later, and now with a terrible health crisis disproportionately affecting my people, we still find ourselves in a similar situation.

I have lost dear friends to COVID-19. Some died in prison, others did not. I felt helpless to find adequate words to comfort their surviving loved ones. I eulogized them in a poem, on page 4. The pandemic has made me intensely aware that my personal loss is miniscule compared to what the world is losing; the loss of human capital, the loss of decorum and

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Fighting Racism in Detroit

Marjorie Van Hoy
Bulls Head-Oswego Meeting

My name is Marjorie (Angell) Van Hoy, a long-time member of Bulls Head-Oswego Meeting, despite my physical distance from it. For 37 years my husband Jim and I lived in Detroit, MI, where we both completed our schooling and raised 2 boys. For many years Jim and I were very active in our Detroit neighborhood. Our experiences in combating some very pernicious racism led me to write this article.

“Race” is not a scientific concept.

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More Articles by Friends pages 4-7

News from Fall Sessions page 8

Notices

New Members

Patricia Bargher — Unadilla
Tom Hoppel — Poplar Ridge
Burk Ketcham — Schenectady
Inali Perseid Otsego Anh
Maylin — Genesee Valley
James Washburn — Unadilla

Deaths

Barbara Learnard, member of Bethpage, on September 26, 2020.

NEWS

Quaker Parent Mutual Support Groups

Quaker parents from all over can join support groups for Quaker parents any time before January 15, 2021. The purpose is to provide Friends who are currently parenting children with a space for mutual conversation and support. The project is supported by New York Yearly Meeting. To register, visit tinyurl.com/parentSG

Sojourn at Powell House

The larger building at the Powell House retreat center, Pitt Hall, is now available to be rented, including the use of its kitchen and common spaces as well as specific bedrooms and bathrooms for your group. For details visit www.powellhouse.org/sojourn-at-poho or call 518-794-8811.

Arrange an Earthcare Workshop for your meeting

Quaker Earthcare Witness is offering virtual workshops for your meeting on a wide range of earthcare-related topics. See available topics at www.quakerearthcare.org/article/quaker-earthcare-witness-presents-virtual-workshops-your-community and contact hayley@quakerearthcare.org to set one up.

ONLINE EVENTS

Winter Meetings for Discernment February 13, 2021

Meetings for Discernment are periods of extended, waiting worship designed to discern leadings and strengthen connections in our yearly meeting. The next one will be held on Saturday, February 13th, 2021. It will be held virtually, on Zoom. Registration

Around Our Yearly Meeting

information and queries are forthcoming.

Save the Date for Spring Sessions

Spring Sessions, a chance for the New York Yearly Meeting community to gather together for fellowship, worship, and business, will be held **online on April 9-11, 2021**. Please save the date.

Upcoming webinars from the Center for the Study of White American Culture

Visit www.euroamerican.org/ for details. The Black Concerns Committee offers some scholarship aid for NYYM members and attenders. Apply to Robin Alpern at robin.alpern@gmail.com.

Raising Anti-Racist White Children — Jan. 10, 17, & 24, 2021

An online, live, 3-part interactive workshop for parents and educators offering information and guidance on how to prepare white children to live in our increasingly multiracial society.

Events for Young Adults

The Interim Young Adult Field Secretary, Marissa Badgley, continues to organize a schedule of virtual get-togethers, workshops, and worship designed for young adults (ages 18-35-ish) but open to all. Visit bit.ly/NYYM-yafcal1 for all upcoming events and opportunities!



Powell House has gone virtual!

Powell House, the retreat and conference center for NYYM, offers **virtual workshops**, using the

Zoom conferencing technology, on a donate-as-led basis. Go to **poho.org** to see the full list of upcoming events at Powell House; new events are being scheduled all the time.

Upcoming virtual workshops:
The Winter Solstice, December 21, 4:00-8:00 p.m. This year's solstice is more mystical than usual—there is an amazing planetary event happening, the “Great Conjunction”! Jupiter and Saturn, the two largest planets, will be in alignment on December 21—which happens only every 20 years. This astronomical union gives us a chance to look at how our lives align with the interplay of dark and light in the world. Where are the great conjunctions in your life in this time of

upheaval and disruption? What is in alignment and what is not? You can explore those questions in this experiential retreat.

Please create a sacred space for yourself to participate in the Zoom retreat. Have a candle nearby. Gather up whatever art supplies you have. Also have a box that has at least one side open. It can be any size, but it should be large enough for you to arrange and possibly glue items in it.

Also, be prepared to spend some time outdoors, wherever you are.

We will enjoy supper together via Zoom as part of this retreat, so please have your meal ready so that you have minimal preparation when it is time to eat.

Powell House Youth Program is Holding Online Conferences

www.powellhouse.org/youth-program

Upcoming virtual youth weekends:

Wintersong, for grades 7-12, Dec.

18-20, 2020. Wintersong is an event of much joy as we bring light into our collective world. Join us as we dive deep into interesting conversation and build out into exciting, creative spaces. We will dress up in our fanciest clothes for Saturday dinner and share our talents in an expansive cabaret. This is a popular conference.

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, the conference and retreat center for New York Yearly Meeting, holds a meeting for worship via Zoom every Saturday at 6:00 p.m. Contact Regina at regina@powellhouse.org for information on how to join.

Friends General Conference (FGC) Online Worship

FGC offers general worship on Saturdays at 9 p.m.; for People of Color, worship on Wednesdays at 1 and 8 p.m. and worship sharing on Tuesdays at 5 p.m.; and a weekly Meeting for Worship for Friends of European Descent Confronting Racism and White Supremacy on Fridays at 12 noon. Find all details and links at www.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 a.m. to 9:10 a.m. Connection information is at pendlehill.org/explore/worship/join-us-online-for-worship-in-the-barn/

FWWC's Worldwide Worship List

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

OPPORTUNITIES

Quaker Voluntary Service

Young Adult Friends can apply for Quaker Voluntary Service, an 11-month experiment living at the intersection of transformational spirituality and activism. Young adults work full-time at community based organizations addressing a wide range of issues, while living in a cooperative house and worshipping with, and being mentored by, local Quakers. Applications and references for the 2021-2022 QVS Fellowship are due March 15, 2021. Visit quakervoluntaryservice.org. 

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Joy, Aura, and the Gratitude Tree that the kids made at Meeting for Feelings on Nov. 20, 2020. The leaves read: sunshine, healthy heart, gummies, meeting for feelings, my grandkids, pink leaves, my backyard, and my blanket.

Meeting for Feelings

What a joy Meeting for Feelings has been! Aura the puppet is a hit with younger and older Friends alike. Over the course of three meetings, we've sung and danced together, talked about feelings such as sadness, happiness, and calm, and explored Quaker practices like silent worship and holding others in the light. At our most recent show, we prepared for Thanksgiving by sharing what we are thankful for and creating a gratitude tree (seen in photo). Joy and Aura look forward to continuing Meeting for Feelings through the winter. We meet every Friday morning at 10:00 a.m. ET. The shows are designed for ages 3-5 but all are welcome!

This quote appears in the inside of Brooklyn Monthly Meeting's holiday card this year.

In the stillness of the quiet,
if we listen,
we can hear the whisper of
the heart
giving strength to weakness,
courage to fear,
hope to despair

—Howard Thurman



Quaker Day at Friends Girls School, Sohagpur, India. Photo provided by Dr. Sanjeev Shukla

Quaker Day Celebration At Friends Girls School Sohagpur

Dr. Sanjeev Shukla
Principal

While following COVID-19 safety guidelines, Friends Girls School Sohagpur celebrated World Quaker Day on October 3, 2020, in the graceful presence of God. Primary School Manager Sheela Jacob, Principal Dr. Sanjeev Shukla, and senior members Ganeshram Mandloi, Sunila Masih, and Strella Masih highlighted the Quaker Faith with songs and messages. We stated that we are all guided by an inner light. Dr. Shukla addressed everyone, saying that the Quaker faith is quite similar with the Indian belief "Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam" — the belief that the whole world is one big family and we are all brothers and sisters. Though people may be divided by the way they worship, we are united by God's spirit. The day's program started with silent worship and followed by religious songs and messages. After the indoor program a Naseberry (Sapota) tree was planted by the principal, staff, and children in back yard of the school office. Posters were made by students Kumkum, Anjali, and Sandhya. The program ended with a distribution of biscuits.



Porch repair on the old Bethpage Friends Meetinghouse in progress. Photo by Ernest F. Isip



Volunteers from the Bethpage Meeting community came together to repair the porch on the old Bethpage Friends Meetinghouse. Photo by Ernest F. Isip

Back at Bethpage

Jay Singh
Bethpage Meeting

After a break of about a year, Friends are once again meeting for worship at the historic Bethpage Friends Meetinghouse. The meeting has used volunteers from their community to repair and extend the front porch (see photos). During pandemic restrictions, worship is taking place under a large tree on the meetinghouse property.

Bethpage Friends Meeting has a rich history that stretches back to 1698. Thomas Powell, along with other settlers of the Bethpage Purchase, started meeting for worship in private homes that year. Known as the Bethpage Preparative Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, the group built several meetinghouses over the years that were lost to fire. The current meetinghouse was moved across the road in 1930 when Bethpage State Park was formed. You can find the current location of the meetinghouse on Google maps by searching for Bethpage Friends Meeting, 24 Quaker Meeting House Road, Farmingdale, NY 11735. Quakers continue to meet there today, holding an unprogrammed Meeting for Worship at 11:00 a.m. every Sunday. All are welcome to attend silent worship for an hour. For more information, contact acting clerk Jay Singh, 516-473-4002, jayantsingh61@yahoo.com, or clerk Valarie Smith, 516-657-5408, vesmith@optonline.net

Editor's Note

Welcome to *Spark*, the printed newsletter for New York Yearly Meeting-area Quakers. In addition to *Spark*, NYYM sends a weekly emailed newsletter. If you aren't receiving it, but would like to, please email walter@nyym.org.

Please consider writing an article or submitting images for *Spark*. Submissions are considered a form of written ministry.

The deadline for the January issue, "Another World is Possible," guest-edited by the Another World is Possible Working Group, has passed, but you still have time to send in news announcements for that issue.

Upcoming *Spark* themes:

March: One Year of COVID-19. It will be one year since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Quarantine restrictions and isolation have effected our ability to worship as well as our daily routines and plans. Many people have experienced losses of loved ones or experienced a frightening illness. Do you have a story from this year? Is there anything you've learned?

Please contribute to this sharing of ideas. Deadline for the March issue is Feb. 1. Email article and photo submissions to communications@nyym.org. Please limit yourself to 400-600 words.

Send your meeting's news to communications@nyym.org to be shared in the next weekly email update or in *Spark*.

NYYM is on social media:

Facebook:

NewYorkYearlyMeeting

Twitter:

NYYMTweets

Instagram:

newyorkyearlymeeting
Happy Christmas and Happy Solstice.

—Sarah Way, NYYM

Communications Director

Donate to NYYM

Won't you support NYYM? Visit nyym.org/donate or mail a check to the yearly meeting office at 15 Rutherford Place, New York, NY 10003. Thank you!



Articles and Essays by Friends

Ministry of Poetry

Frederick Drew Robinson
Otisville Worship Group

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civility in our politics, culture and interpersonal relationships — as well as the loss in some cases of our reliance on faith.

Overall, what has been revealed to me is how fragile this thing called life is and how we are all interconnected in our striving for peace, justice, joy, love, harmony and dignity.

I have had to let go of petty disagreements and worries. I have had to let go of impatience and the feeling that I must always be right and in control. I have had to let go of thinking that I have to have all the answers — because if this pandemic has shown us anything it has shown us that no one has all the answers. And, I have had to let go of the fear of death.

Yet, what has lifted me up is my reliance on faith and my personal relationship with the Divine Spirit. I know that GOD is alive and active in the affairs of his children, and though the trajectory of human history was never straight, there have been and will continue to be crucial moral lessons that GOD is teaching us.

This pandemic will pass as have those that came before it but the true vaccine for all our ills will be peace on earth.

It was the Quaker testimony of peace that attracted me to The Religious Society of Friends and those I have met who share this fervent belief have strengthened and sustained me in good and bad times. I have lost much contact with my birth family but they have become my new one. My only disappointment is that being incarcerated I cannot commune and worship with the larger body of Friends who I know continue to pray for me and hold me in the Light.

FOR THOSE

by Frederick Drew Robinson

For those who walked this planet wide
Who now have crossed the huge divide
and sit where only gods reside
we pray for your safe passage

For those of us now left alone
who grieve with heavy hearts of stone
your absence we do now bemoan
and miss your presence dearly

For those who fought the battle great
when strength and courage could not wait
to tempt the fickle hands of fate
when danger came a-calling

For those of us who knew you well
your stories we will live to tell
how great the power in the spell...
of the magic you bestowed us

For those who seek to reason why
that some must live while others die
we have no choice now but to try
and search for Heaven's meaning

And those whose lives were filled
with hate
know when you stand at Heaven's gate
that all the venom which you spate
negates your true redemption

But for those who lived a life of peace
know that our efforts shall not cease
until the bonds of love increase
for those who know God's blessing

So now for those we say hold fast
we will unite with those who passed
as Gabriel's horn sounds one sweet blast
and angels come a-calling!

For Benjamin Smalls, d. 5/04/20,
aged 72, while waiting to hear about
medical parole



Stay Out, Stay in by Fred Dunn licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.

College Behind Bars Black Concerns Committee

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reason was COVID. However, when we investigated further we found out that in many cases there was a lack of financial resources. In other instances there was a hostile environment from the surrounding locality where the prison was located. We also found out that there was a great need for college preparatory classes as many of the incarcerated students' academic were not up to college entry level even when they had their high school diploma or GED.

After careful investigations involving numerous discussions with college administrations and ongoing task group meetings, the decision was made to utilize Sharing Fund dollars to support the Bard Prison Initiative. This program was presented in the Ken Burns *College Behind Bars* documentary on public television. One student is quoted in the documentary, "Prison is to punish. It's not about creating productive beings. Individuals are not being prepared for anything

other than what they've already been doing—crime."

College Behind Bars is a transformative story about the power of education and how it can change lives and also benefit society at large. Once commonplace in American prisons, higher education declined precipitously after 1994, when Congress ended federal Pell Grants for inmates as part of the Clinton Crime Bill. For more than two decades, as "tough on crime" policies made America the world's leading jailer, there was almost no federal or state funding for college in prison, despite its proven efficacy in preventing recidivism. In the nearly 20 years since BPI began, more than 500 alumni have been released, and fewer than four percent have gone back. The program currently enrolls 300 men and women in six prisons, and costs \$6,000 per student per year, most of it privately funded. Currently, there are 3 main needs: 1. expand and support the new BA program at Fishkill; 2. financially support re-entry program; and 3. advocacy/ community education for their program and similar programs.

The Barrington Dunbar Fund for Black Development has utilized Sharing Fund dollars to support **Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison**. There is a great need to help prepare incarcerated students for college courses and Hudson link sponsors support for their college readiness programs.



Stamps for Right Sharing of World Resources

Marjorie H. Weisel
Conscience Bay Meeting

About 20 years ago, Alan and I moved to Foxdale Village, a Quaker directed Continuing Care Retirement Community in State College, PA. We had previously lived on Long Island for over 30 years and still maintain our membership in Conscience Bay Meeting. About 15 years ago, at one of our weekly gatherings, I made an announcement explaining Right Sharing of the World Resources (RSWR) and its programs to benefit women in developing countries and then set up a

box in which residents could put their stamps. We have many Penn State University faculty members living at Foxdale so we get stamps from all over the world. Last month, I sent off our 14th medium sized (12" x 13") USPS box to Indiana.

Perhaps people living in other Quaker facilities may want to think about doing the same thing. There are many other items besides stamps that RSWR can use to support its activities. Visit www.rswr.org. We were particularly happy to read the recent report about RSWR written by Mary Eagle-son of Scarsdale Meeting. If you're interested in the stamp program for RSWR, please contact Linda Lee at 3030 Kessler Boulevard East Dr, Indianapolis, IN 46220 for more information.



Join the Inside-Outside Letter Writing Collective

Connecting incarcerated Friends with outside Quakers

Visit nyym.org/content/inside-outside or write to Judy Meikle at the yearly meeting office (15 Rutherford Place, New York, NY 10003)



Heard It Through The Grape Vine COVID-19 in Prison

Michael Rhynes

Attica Prison Worship Group

One instrument of control in prison is the tool of uncertainty. Correctional uncertainty brings out the paranoia in prisoners. Prisoners already live in a world where it's hard to differentiate between shadows and substance.

Prisoners take their cue from the shadowy whispers of correctional staff. Prisoners can never be sure whether those organizational whispers are true or just disinformation.

Flu shots for older prisoners are usually conducted before flu season begins. This year, flu shots were cancelled at least four times. Up and down the grape vine, men began questioning the availability of flu shots. Prisoners began asking the rank and file officers, "Why are the flu shots being cancelled?" Their retort was, "It's above our pay grade, ask medical." Medical's reply was, "We don't know." Prisoners turned to their administrators, who answered, "We'll check it out." Meanwhile 2 out of 3 prisoners became sick with flu-like symptoms that just didn't seem to go away.

Prisoners harbor a deep pathological fear about the collective health care system in prison. One of the things it springs from is the de facto regulation: If you're not bleeding, don't go to emergency sick-call. If one is seen by the medical staff and they can't find anything wrong, prisoners can receive a misbehavior report. One can be confined to a cell for 23 hours a day for 30 days. The rationale behind this is that prisoners are malcontent abusers of drugs and they'd do anything to get high.

Older prisoners finally received their flu shots. The collective thought of prisoners were, just like everything else we're the last to receive anything.

Enter COVID-19. The upside down world of prison was turned around again. The blue whispering machine started humming, prisoners picked it up, and conspiracy theories started flying left and right. Staff believed the virus was a left wing plot to deny Trump the vote.

Prisoners believed it was Tuskegee all over again.

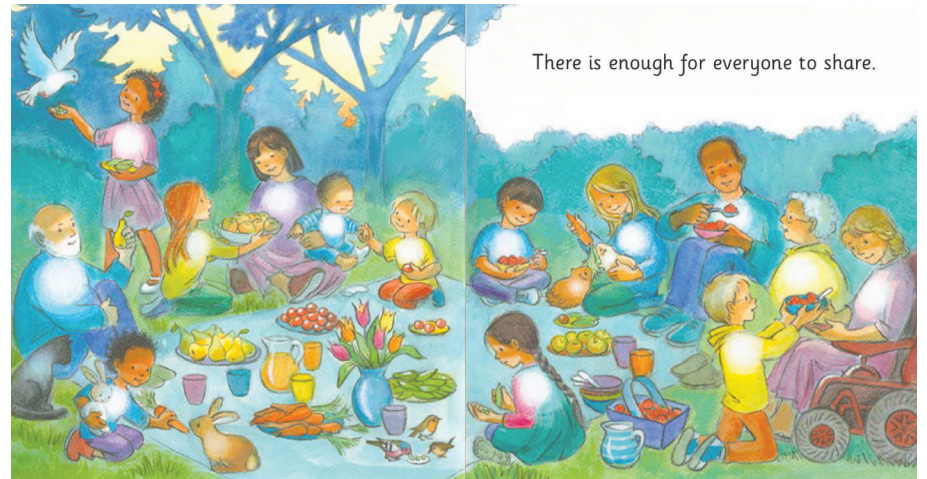
Prisoners knew something was really wrong when visits were taken away. Visitation is the life blood of a prisoners existence. We were told it was for the protection of the inmate population. The collective logic of prisoners hummed up and down the grape vine. Inmates see their keepers come and go from the outside world every day. Science dictates that one would be more likely to contract COVID-19 from people whom one sees each and every day, than from loved ones prisoners see once a week, once a month, or once a year.

While the virus was ascending, prisoners were given the warning: Don't be alarmed if you see officers wearing masks, it's for your own protection. The grape vine was up and humming. Prisoners were concerned about their own protection in more ways than just one. It's very frightening to have people who control one's bowel movements and the air one breathes showing up for work wearing masks. For 40% percent of prisoners it brings back racial nightmares of night riders.

The collective logic of prisoners kicks in, "Why don't we have masks to protect us from them and each other?" Prisoners throughout the ages have deployed defense mechanisms involving the ability to recognize the facial expressions of predators. One would be surprised how a smile and good morning could prevent a suicide or stop a homicide. Now prisoners are left without the use of these defense mechanisms, because of a mask.

Prisoners were informed about the value of social distancing. Social distancing goes against herd mentality. The herd protects one from a knife in the back, from rape, and gang assault. Social distancing represents isolation from the herd which can trigger abandonment, loneliness, and thoughts of suicide.

On Monday July, 6, 2020, a nurse accompanied by a guard stopped at prisoners' cells, informing them their names were on a list of inmates 55 and older. Then she asked, "would you like to take a test?" Most prisoners responded with, "What kind of test?" The answer was, "COVID-19." Questions were posed up and down the grape vine:



"There is enough for everyone to share." From *Let's Explore the Quaker Way*, Text and illustrations © Rebecca Price, published by Quaker Books 2017.

1. If you're positive, where would you go?
2. What happens if there's a false positive?
3. How long would one stay in quarantine?
4. What would medical treatment consist of?
5. After the medically determined period, once you tested negative, would you be placed back in the same environment you contacted the virus from?

The vine agreed that as prisoners they were being denied the right to make an informed decision. On July 8, 2020, prisoners ages 55 and older were herded like chattel into the facility mess hall. They were directed by guards, wearing masks and carrying night sticks, to form a single file. As prisoners shuffled up to a filthy table with a nurse sitting behind it, the nurse would ask, "Do you want to take the test?"

Prisoners who wanted to take the test were directed to a doctor wearing a face guard. The prisoners who didn't want to take the test were asked to sign a form.

One may ask, why wouldn't an inmate want to take the test? The vine theorizes that most prisoners have already contracted the virus, and wanted to take an antibody test, instead, to prove it.

Prisoners who weren't taking the test asked the nurse practitioner:

1. "If the test is voluntary, why do we need to sign a form?"
2. "Will medical send the result?" She stated, "Probably not." The only way prisoners will find out they've tested positive is if guards show up at their cells wearing masks and carrying night sticks.

Universal Basic Income

M. Radh Achuthan
Peconic Bay Meeting

When businesses contract or close, their employees experience occupational loss. This is happening more frequently during COVID-19. In addition, employees suffer occupational loss when businesses shift to automation.

The financial implications of the above can be remedied through transition to a Universal Basic Income, UBI. A regionalized global UBI under capitalism would nurture liberal education and small businesses. The approach circumvents the historic 'Robin Hood' aspiration of resolving inequities within societies by transferring funds from the rich to the poor.

One could strive for UBI in the US within the next 8 years, negotiating in the interim with different viewpoints and implementing it step by step. Similar campaigns elsewhere in the world could foster UBI there, circumventing starvation for the global poor.

Visit this webpage to learn more about UBI and, if willing, sign the petition: diy.rootsaction.org/petitions/universal-basic-income-5

The first video on that page addresses increased automation and why humans "need not apply" for some jobs. The subsequent two videos inform us how a Universal Basic Income, supportive of small-businesses, could be implemented in a capitalistic economic environment.





Photo of the Native Plants Garden in the New York Botanical Garden, October 2016. Photo © Tony Jin under a creative commons license

Nature's Best Hope by Douglas W. Tallamy

A Book Review

Victoria Quesada
Hamilton Meeting

Sounds optimistic—and it is. In this time of isolation, *Nature's Best Hope* offers a message of hope. Indeed, its ideas are a shift of the conservation movement from someone else's responsibility to our own backyards. It is a science-based idea that simply requires making different choices of what you plant in your yard. The author of *Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard* is Dr. Douglas Tallamy, a professor of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware for over 40 years and a renowned author. He refers to the backyards of America as the "Homeland National Park."

E.O. Wilson pointed out that insects are "the little things that run the world." The website of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) of the United States Department of Agriculture (www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/plantsanimals/pollinate/), notes that "Three-fourths of the world's flowering plants and about 35 percent of the world crops depend on animal pollinators to reproduce....Some scientists estimate that one out of every three foods we eat exists because of some animal pollinators, like bees, butterflies and moths, birds and bats, and beetles and other insects." The site admits that "bees are disappearing and bats are dying." It notes that pollinators face many challenges in the modern world, including habitat loss, disease, and environmental contaminants.

To those, Dr. Tallamy adds light pollution. The NRCS also recommends backyard conservation and has handy lists of pollinator friendly trees, shrubs and flowers.

Dr. Tallamy does have a message of

hope. Nature is all about relationships. There are certain native trees, shrubs, and flowers that provide the best food for insects and other wildlife in your area. Tear out the invasives in your yard and gradually add the natives. He recommends reducing the amount of your lawn and adding a pollinator garden, and if you have space, native trees that are environmental all-stars. He says your choices in trees, shrubs, and flowers count as food for wildlife. Human survival depends on wildlife. There are 20 million acres of backyards in America. Insects need undisturbed areas, decay, and leaf litter for homes and to complete their life cycle. So don't be a total neat freak. If a tree is stuck in a lawn and the ground around it is densely compacted and devoid of plant matter, insects cannot complete their life cycle. Plant wildflowers around the base of your native trees instead. Create little mini habitats where you can observe birds, butterflies, and caterpillars. You are improving your soil and water as well. Dr. Tallamy sees this as a nationwide movement, so he is not telling you what is native to your area, but rather points you to resources like the **National Wildlife Federation** (www.nwf.org). Another resource is the chapter of **Wild Ones: Native Plants, Natural Landscapes** in Central New York: www.hgcny.org.

Here is an excerpt from *Nature's Best Hope*:

"In the world I envision, landscaping practices will no longer degrade local ecosystems; landscaping will become synonymous with ecological restoration. We will not be living with less; we will be enriching our lives with more — more pollination services;

more free pest control; more carbon safely tucked away in the soil; more rainwater held on and within land for our use in a clean and fresh state; more bluebirds, orioles, and pileated woodpeckers in our yards; more swallowtails and monarchs sipping nectar from our flowers. Indeed, more species of all kinds will inhabit our landscapes, increasing the stability and productivity of our ecosystems. This proactive approach to earth stewardship will no longer be the unfulfilled dream of a few environmentalists, but a culturally embraced imperative, not only because we have no other choice, but because it works. It is nature's, and thus humanity's, best hope." —Dr. Douglas Tallamy

Fighting Racism in Detroit

Marjorie Van Hoy
Bulls Head-Oswego Mtg

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Any two human beings will share at least 99.9% of their DNA. So how was race established in this country as a social concept? Racism in the US has its roots in slavery. After slavery was abolished progress was made during Reconstruction at improving political and economic conditions for African-Americans. However, Reconstruction came to a halt in 1877 after several years of physical intimidation of southern African-American voters and a national Democratic Party compromise. The Democratic Party, at that time the party of the former slaveholders, gained power in the state governments of the former confederate states and began enacting "Jim Crow" laws. These laws were added to and enforced in the US South into the 1960's, and served to provide a legal basis for the separation of those of European descent from those of all or some African descent, as well as discrimination against the latter. The physical intimidation and suppression of voting only increased subsequent to the passing of Jim Crow laws. By the way, South Africa, which instituted its apartheid laws starting in 1948, used Jim Crow laws as a starting point for their racist legislation.

Jim Crow laws in areas such as

interracial marriage and education were not confined to the southern states. I grew up in NY and Pennsylvania, in neighborhoods and public schools where no African-American, Hispanic or American Indian families or students were to be found. So there was certainly no lack of discrimination and segregation in the North, created by racist real estate and insurance practices. During the mid '60's in Garden City, LI, our neighbors called the police to report that the Kenyan exchange student staying at our house was walking down the sidewalk!

So, how did Detroit come to be so polarized by racism? Racism was always present throughout Detroit's history of over 300 years, but I'll start with the post WWII era. When the GI's came back from WWII, there was a huge demand for housing. In Detroit, as in many other cities, there was a tremendous surge of construction in the suburbs. However, in Detroit none of these homes were sold to those designated as "black". The VA home mortgage program for GI's was in the lead during this era of discrimination.

On top of that, many freeways were built out to the suburbs, often by tearing down African-American neighborhoods. Detroit's 93-year-old streetcar system was totally dismantled and replaced by GM diesel buses, as also happened in many other US cities. To this day, Detroit does not have an efficient public transportation system. This is the background for the Detroit of the later 20th and early 21st century, the time that we lived there.

Let me introduce you to some of our neighbors. One family, the Van Burens, originally moved to Detroit from Boley, OK. One of Troja Van Buren's grandparents was of European descent, one was American Indian, and two were African-American. Her father was an attorney and a pillar of the community in Boley. When she was growing up, touring jazz musicians would stay at their house when they came to perform in her Oklahoma town.

When we formed a radio patrol in our Grandmont neighborhood, the application form, which the Detroit Police Dept. required all prospective members to complete, requested information on "race."



Sharif, around 21 years old at that time, was baffled. His mom, who had grown up in Grandmont, had an African mom and a German dad. Sharif's dad was an Egyptian Air Lines pilot. After some consultation, Sharif put "human" in the blank for "race." A month later, a response came back from the police saying that this was not a satisfactory response. (This happened in 2008!)

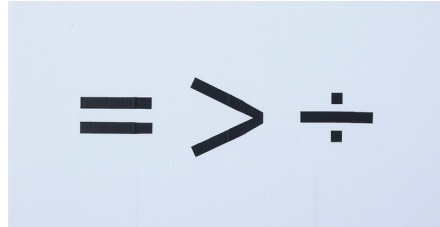
Throughout the 1970's, '80's, and '90's, the Grandmont Community Association worked hard to insist that realtors who owned empty houses keep up the yards, put curtains in the windows, and otherwise be responsible sellers. Truthfully, we were living in a very beautiful neighborhood, filled with elegant custom built homes from the '20's, '30's and '40's. Our neighborhood art fair, which attracted over 100 vendors/year for several years, was a point of neighborhood pride. People would tell us, "Your Art Fair is so peaceful!" After years of being bombarded by news articles spotlighting violence in Detroit, Detroiters themselves doubted the viability of their community.

The sub-prime mortgage crisis dealt us a very injurious blow. Homes were sold at high prices to buyers who could not afford them. When the buyers defaulted and the mortgage holder repossessed the homes, the homes would sit empty for months, allowing for scrap metal thieves to strip them. In our neighborhood, it took 30 minutes for the police to show up after they were called. In many neighborhoods, they wouldn't show up at all. The thieves realized that the police wouldn't show up in time to catch them, so they started breaking into occupied homes, attempting to disable burglar alarms.

We moved to Colorado Springs seven years ago to live close to my older son and his family. We were lucky to be able to sell our house in Detroit at all. Our home's appraised valuation dropped from \$140,000 to \$33,000 in a couple of years. Talk about racism!

I'm grateful for the years we had in Detroit, and the many wonderful people we got to know there. I am grateful for my Quaker upbringing which helped give me the ambition and energy to fight for Grandmont. One thing I soon realized in this

process was that all of us have good points and bad points—no one is perfect. If I didn't know what my bad points were, I learned them quickly enough in trying to build community under sometimes adverse conditions. I am so glad to have known all our friends and neighbors over the years.



The graphic that appears on the Van Hoy's anti-racism yard sign in Colorado Springs

The Four Types of Vocal Ministry

Donald Mick
New Haven Meeting
(NEYM)

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to vocal ministry comes upon the speaker unplanned and may seem to have its source outside of the individual. It is experienced as happening to the person rather than being a product of the person.

These types are not always pure and mutually exclusive. The internal process can be a blended experience.

Left-brained Vocal Ministry

Prepared. Prepared vocal ministry means that a person decides to speak before worship and in part, or wholly, prepares his or her spoken message in advance. Some Friends who are clear that they are called to a spoken ministry are open about their process and feel that such ministry is part of their spiritual calling. One Friend described his process to me in the following way. Every week, during the week, he decides on a message that he may bring to worship. He prepares the message in advance, usually writing it out. He goes to meeting prepared, but not committed, to give vocal ministry. For this person, whether he speaks or not is dependent on whether he feels the spirit moves him. Sometimes he delivers his prepared message (reciting but not reading it), sometimes he remains silent and does not speak. He comes prepared, but lets the spirit determine whether or not he speaks.

There is evidence that "prepared" spoken ministry has been part of the Friends tradition from the beginning. Early Friends would attend the church service in their community and after the minister finished his sermon, stand up and speak. Often what they said was the same message Friends shared over and over again, reflecting a perspective rather than a spontaneous message. The same could be said of early Quaker leaders speaking in meetings as worship evolved into the form of worship unprogrammed Friends use today.

Led by belief, faith or testimony.

The second type is vocal ministry arising out of Friends' religious beliefs or testimonies. By religious beliefs I refer to Friends' common assumptions about theology or testimonies. A Friend may have an issue on his or her mind, or be concerned with what is happening in the external world. The leading to speak could be sparked by a specific event or a general concern about an issue. The leading to speak needn't be less spiritually rooted because it arises from a conscious process.

In this case the decision to speak is conscious. Often the Friend goes through a process of refining his or her thoughts to create a clear, logical coherent message. On occasion, messages can stimulate other friends who are led to speak out of the same or similar leading.

Led by experience, self or other.

The form of vocal ministry arising out of a personal experience or feeling can be based on one's self or refer to another person. Messages can be based on a positive experience, a negative experience, or something troubling. An example of a positive experience might be relating attending a wedding or some joyous event. A negative experience might relate what the friend experienced when confronted with a conflict or disappointment. Messages can also arise from some internal condition that weighs heavy on the speaker, an illness or state of mind.

Like vocal ministry based on faith or testimony, the decision to speak is generally conscious. Depending on the depth of emotion involved in the decision to speak, the friend may or may not spend time planning or refining the


message before speaking. Such a message can be light, in the sense of not being deeply personal or revealing. Such a message can also be poignant, in the sense of being deeply revealing on a personal level, and involve opening up to the community in a vulnerable way. This type of message can also lead friends to feel led to speak to the theme that was raised or to their perception of the condition of the Friend who spoke first on the issue.

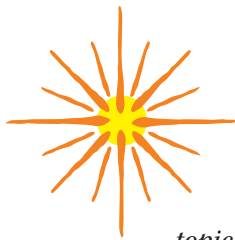
What all of these three types of messages have in common is that they arise from a conscious process. The speaker consciously thinks about the issues, or consciously feels the issue before being led to speak. As the leading to speak increases, the Friend often spends some time, perhaps a good deal of time, processing what they intend to say.

Right-brained

The right-brained or numinous leading to speak is different by virtual of origin, not subject of the message. In this case, the individual is not thinking about the issue. They are not consciously reflecting on an event or concern. The leading to speak comes upon them unbidden and unformed. It is numinous in the sense that the leading has affect and power and seems not to be of our creation. For some, this is experienced as the voice of the Divine, for others as a psychological process. In all instances it is an experience of kenosis, the sense that one's ego is not the source of the leading. (In Christian theology, *kenosis* is the 'self-emptying' of Jesus' own will and becoming entirely receptive to God's divine will.) Mystics have often struggled to describe this experience. For early Friends the experience was ecstatic and emotional and led to our earning the name Quakers.

There is often a special quality of the extemporaneous and or unease that may be apparent when a numinous message is shared. Friends often describe resisting an impulse that seemed to come upon them, but then need to surrender to God's will. It is not the content of the message or subject of the message that sets this type of vocal ministry apart, simply the impetuosity.

To read the entire article, including "Why Does Having Distinctions Matter?" visit nyym.org/spark and click on the November 2020 issue. 



News from Fall Sessions

A “social meal” on the topic of hybrid online-and-in-person meetings was held during Fall Sessions. Herb Lape was one of the presenters at that meal.

Hybrid Meetings for Worship

Herb Lape
Westbury Meeting

Westbury Meeting quickly converted its worship to Zoom when we had a lock down in March. And then when the state allowed us to return in person at 25% capacity following social distancing rules in June, we went Hybrid (a combination of in-person and over Zoom video conferencing). We bought a Blue Snow Ball surround microphone that plugs into a computer and positioned it in the meeting house so that it would pick up any vocal ministry of those present. The computer was connected to Zoom worshippers with a Bluetooth speaker that transmitted vocal ministry from those in Zoomland. This system worked as well for afterthoughts, joys and concerns, announcements, some socializing/connecting after MFW, and after meeting programs like our Quaker Heroes (Helen Garay Toppins joined us one Sunday for an excellent presentation on Paul Cuffe). We had some technical issues that were quickly addressed—using a

Verizon hotspot until we “boosted” the Wi-Fi coverage in the meeting house, for example. Our attendance over the summer was consistent with past years, maybe slightly better as we attracted distant Friends who have moved away. We are presently on Zoom only given the uptick and colder weather and wait for the installation of a better filtration system in the meeting house and safer general conditions to be discerned. We have felt spirited as we maintained our connection in difficult times.



Highlights from the Fall Sessions Minutes

At NYYM’s 2020 Fall Sessions, the body of gathered Friends approved an operating budget for 2021 that includes \$100,000 for the support of children, youth, and young adults. The minute below is the approval of that budget and gives a sense of some of the discernment that took place.

Nov. 8, 2020, minute 2020-11-17. There was further consideration of the proposed budget, with the three levels of funding that had been laid out in the presentation by the Co-clerk of Financial Services, Mary Williams, on Saturday morning. During the discussion, Mary clarified that the baseline budget included no funding for C/Y/YA, the

\$50,000 increase above the baseline would be just a few thousand dollars more than the current year’s funding, and the \$100,000 increase above the baseline would be an increase over the current year.

Friends listened with openness and shared with care their concerns and their hopes for the YM.

Friends spoke about:

- the importance of our work in support of young adult Friends and the ways that work overlaps with witness work, grounded connections, and building our yearly meeting
- the complications of funding that work, asking whether we have sufficient resources to sustain additional paid positions beyond a few years, to pay a living wage, or to provide employee benefits for part-time staff
- how difficult it has been to keep connected to families with children during Covid
- the need to clarify how the witness funding, especially the administrative costs of doing witness work, is shown in the budget and whether some of that funding should be reallocated
- how it has come to be that we support a few Quaker organizations directly but not others and whether those decisions should be revisited
- how work with young adults

includes pastoral care that is very much needed

Some of the aspects of budgeting to cover new positions were considered, including:

- the possibility of a separate designated fund for C/Y/YA
- the possibility of an endowment for C/Y/YA and how the Development Committee can work on this possibility
- whether sufficient work can be done for C/Y/YA without additional paid staff/with volunteers only
- that there is integrity in saying “no” to some requests
- that some meetings may be willing/able to “get creative” about funding for these goals
- that we must hold ourselves accountable
- that threshing sessions will be held, starting very soon, to consider several questions about sources of funding, including how to use the income from the Lindley Murray funds and whether to draw down principal from the endowment, expecting to consider our legal and moral faithfulness to the directions and intentions of deceased Friends whose generosity funded the YM’s endowment.

Friends acknowledged that the proposed budget and the long-term commitment to C/Y/YA were

dependent on Faith, and assured concerned Friends that funding this commitment would not detract from our other financial commitments and, in particular, would not require taking money away from our witness work. Indeed, many considered that the C/Y/YA work cannot be separated from witness work. Friends approved the budget as recommended by Financial Services Committee (that is, the \$100,000 increase above the baseline budget) with the caution that much long-range planning needs to be done in parallel and begun right away.



NYYM’s Spring Sessions will be held online April 9-11, 2021.

Friends at Fall Sessions were asked, “What are you grateful for?” This word cloud was created from their replies.

