



SPARK

New York Yearly Meeting

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

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November 2016



Vocal Ministry

Photo by Dean Slavin

Thoughts on Vocal Ministry

Anita Paul

Schenectady Meeting

A meeting for worship without speaking is a day without sunshine. Not that every week will bring messages; deep, centered silence is healing and also unites us with the Holy and with each other. The Testimony of Community arose out of early Friends opening their eyes after deep, gathered worship, looking around at the others and realizing ‘O, you too? You were there with Spirit as I was?’, whether there was speaking or not. But early Friends would have experienced speaking in meeting most of the time. I hear occasionally of meetings in which there is no speaking for months at a time. I hope these reports are apocryphal for surely a meeting deeply gathered in worship will have some Friends receiving messages to be shared.

However, just as my car needs gas in order to go, so do Friends, each and all, need to come to meeting for worship with some spiritual content already installed. If we only gather in worship once a week for an hour we can’t expect to go deeply into the Divine. We each have a responsibility to meeting and to each other to enter into times of worship and prayer during the week so that we come to worship prepared. Start with prayer in traffic jams and lines at the copier, if that is your only available time. Spiritual reading, whether scripture, Thomas Kelly, Phil Gulley or *Friends for 350 Years* also can add to the readiness for going to that deep, rich place Fox promised us all. If you don’t have time to read, get some spiritual reading on CD from the library for your commute. Of course, having

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A Letter from Our Clerk

Dear Friends,

History again asks us to revise or refresh our view of the world. Few of us expected the outcome of the recent presidential election, even if we were among those who hoped for it. As Quakers, we know experimentally a place of deep grounding and a process of unfolding into continuing revelation, and we know this happens in all moments in history. We have this knowledge to offer ourselves, each other as Quakers, and the world.

While we know that place and that process, and from those, that God speaks through the least of us, that truth must be spoken to power, that change happens, we also know that *we don’t know*. What seems clear to us does not seem clear to others. I encourage us to ground our reaction to the results of this election, as much as we feel that it was right or wrong (most of us in New York Yearly Meeting are liberal, but some of us voted for Trump—voices we value), in the sure knowledge that, as Rumi says, “Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I’ll meet you there.”

Small actions matter a lot now. Small actions that are grounded in Spirit. Walk lightly in the Light, open to whatever action might open before you. We matter. Love matters.

In peace,

Lucinda Antrim
Clerk, New York Yearly Meeting

My Experience of Sharing Vocal Ministry

Regina Baird Haag

Powell House Director

I came to Friends in the early 1980’s because of my relationship with, and then marriage to, a Quaker. I joined the local programmed meeting and began to acquire knowledge about what it meant to worship among Friends. It seemed to me that there existed a love/hate relationship in that meeting with the vocal ministry that could or might evolve from the rather short period of open—or waiting worship—that happened in the regular order of worship. I remember one Sunday specifically when someone rose from the silence to announce that he had puppies for sale...

There were glimpses and experiences of a deeper, more spiritual type of vocal ministry over time in various worships and meetings on the Yearly Meeting level. These

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“Oh Lord, Open Thou My Lips!”

Jim Atwell

Butternuts Meeting

I’m guessing that other writers in this special Spark issue have offered fine advice on how we might best speak quietly out of the silence of our worship.

Presuming this, I’ll address two other kinds of speaking out, ones especially familiar to me after many years of serving as one recorded in gifts of ministry: vocal ministry outside of meetings for worship, and ministry through the written word.

By its nature, a gift is something unearned, unpaid-for, and freely given. (Otherwise, it might be a ransom or perhaps a bribe.) But I’ll also add three other hallmarks for gifts from Infinite Love: they are meant to be used in service of others, they are temporary, and they must not be mistaken (by others or, worse, by us) as essentially a part of us.

My gifts are presently demon-

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Notices

New Members

Michael Andrew Tritto, Jr. —
Buffalo

Transfers

Joseph Best, from Manhattan
to Manhasset

James Townsend Darragh,
from Westbury to Brooklyn

Mary Owen from Staten Island
Executive Meeting to Brooklyn

Magnolia Sampson, from
North Branch MM (PYM) to
Brooklyn

Nedelya Simeonovia, from
North Branch MM (PYM) to
Brooklyn

H. Wayne Williams, from
Brooklyn to Catskill

Deaths

Claire Aldrich, member of
Farmington, on September
12, 2016

Donald Bay, member of
Farmington, on August 29,
2016

MEETING NEWS

Ways of Peace Indigenous People's event at Brooklyn Meeting

On the evening of October 25, a group of people, including Chiefs, Clan Mothers, and Elders from a number of different Indigenous Nations visited Brooklyn Meeting as part of a day-long Indigenous Peoples Program jointly sponsored by the meeting and Brooklyn Friends School. Earlier that day they had participated in collections (assemblies) and a number of classes and events at the school.

Following refreshments, the



Haudenosaunee social dancing at Brooklyn Meetinghouse. Photo by Jillian Smith

Around Our Yearly Meeting

evening program began with Mohawk Elder Tom Porter with the Haudenosaunee offering of love, gratitude and thanks to the Creator and all Creation ("Thanksgiving Address") traditionally given at the start of any event. Tom then spoke of the long-standing relationship between Quakers and the Haudenosaunee (Confederacy of the Six Nations), including the support he had personally received from Quakers when he refused induction into the U.S. military. Other members of the group also spoke about issues of concern, including the ongoing opposition to the North Dakota Access Pipeline by the Standing Rock Sioux joined by many other Indigenous Tribes and Nations as well as other allies (including a number of Quakers). There was also a rap piece by Oneida Hip-Hop artist Daygot Leeyos. Everyone present then joined in Haudenosaunee social dancing led by Anenhaiton and Kanonwiio and their three children to bring the evening to a joyous conclusion.

Interfaith breakfast and discussion at Flushing Meeting

Flushing Meeting's Peace & Social Action Committee hosts monthly interfaith breakfast meetings with members of the Baha'i Community of Queens and the Flushing Interfaith Council, which includes representatives from a wide variety of faith-based organizations and community groups in the area. The interfaith breakfast starts 8:30am on the first First Day of each month with piping-hot bagels from a local store run by Korean American immigrants. After breaking bread, the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian,



The new Ramallah Friends Middle School building. Photo by Diane Keefe.

Jewish, Muslim, Quaker, and Sikh participants share prayers, poetry, and song in the worship room of our meetinghouse, often followed by a discussion on topics of concern. Past discussions have focused on domestic violence, environmental sustainability, and spiritual journeys. Meetings are free and open to all. For details, please contact John@FlushingFriends.org.

Ramallah Friends Meeting and School visit

Diane Keefe and her husband, from Wilton Meeting, visited the Ramallah Friends meeting and school on October 30th. David, the Friend in Residence, showed them the new middle school building and a large white commercial building, the rent of which will support the school. A classroom of students were taking an IB math make-up class because their teacher wanted the students to be well prepared for their IB exam. The headmistress has been there for 13 years and said that no one from the YM has visited since a group of Friends Seminary students visited a few years ago. They would welcome more visitors. FUM is looking for a new Quaker head of school; all are encouraged to apply and Arabic fluency is not required. Dylan, a Friend from New England Yearly Meeting, teaches English at the school. Meeting for worship was very moving and involved singing songs of peace and the beauty of life.

Friends in Unity with Nature sponsors art show at 15th Street

An art show was held at 15th Street Meetinghouse on Oct. 21, 2016, featuring the nature-inspired work of Lynne Jones-Dietze of Springfield, PA Friends Meeting. Lynne's technique is a fusion of traditional Asian art styles and Impression-

ism, providing a unique approach to Chinese painting. The event was sponsored by 15th Street Meeting's Friends in Unity with Nature Committee, who also received a percentage of the show's profits.

Quaker Parent Meetups

In future InfoShares and Sparks we will be reporting on a series of Quaker parent meetups. The first one occurred in New York City on Dec. 3rd. For more information on hosting or attending a parent meetup, contact Melinda at childrenyouthfs@nyym.org

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15 Rutherford Place
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Sarah Way

communications@nyym.org

Steve Davison

steven@nyym.org

Walter Naegle

walter@nyym.org

Christopher Sammond
nyym.gensec@gmail.com

Helen Garay Toppins
office@nyym.org

UPCOMING EVENTS

WORKSHOP: What White People Can Do About Racism DECENTERING WHITENESS

How to act against racism from a position of unearned (and unwanted) racial privilege

Saturday, December 10, 2016,
9:00am-3:30pm

Brooklyn Meetinghouse,
110 Schermerhorn St., Brooklyn NY
United States society is historically and presently structured by race. White people have a privileged position within that structure. Many white people understand this implicitly and are uncomfortable with the inherent unfairness, but do not know what to do about it. This workshop is intended to give people some basic knowledge about basic concepts and models; decentering whiteness, as a goal; building multi-racial community, as a goal; and the inter-dependent nature of these two goals. Cost: is \$95, including lunch; sliding scale available. NYYM Black Concerns Committee is also offering financial assistance.

For more information, and to register, contact:

Robin Alpern (914) 736-5447,
robin.alpern@gmail.com
Jeff Hitchcock (908) 245-4972,
contact@euroamerican.org

Going Home: knowing and connecting with our nurturing places

A Young Adult Friends (ages 18-35-ish) mini-retreat, facilitated by YAF field secretary Emily Provance
Saturday December 17, 9am-3pm
(9am-10am breakfast and conversation) at Chatham-Summit Meeting,
158 Southern Blvd, Chatham, NJ

It's December. Some of us are about to return to the places where our roots and comfort are; others of us are walking away from our roots and comfort in order to make visits that might be hard. Still others are wishing they could go home—but it just isn't going to happen this year. Where are our roots? From where do we each draw sustenance? How do we stay connected to sources of comfort, support, and guidance when we are, or feel like we are, far away?

In this mini-retreat, we'll explore these questions and more, with space for celebration, wondering, and grief.

For registration, find the link at nyym.org. Cost is pay-what-you-can,

up to \$20/person to cover costs. Childcare is available upon request.

Youth Institute 2017: Exploring Faith Together

Hosted by Chris DeRoller, Mike Clark and Melinda Wenner Bradley
Under the care of the Youth Committee of NYYM
April 21-23, 2017

REsources and REnewal joins with the Youth Institute for a weekend jam packed with useful materials, proven practices, conversations, fun and worship. Especially designed for adults and teens working with children and youth in our Meetings, it is open to everyone interested in exploring our faith together. The time will include plenaries, experiential learning, small group and whole group discussions, all grounded in joyful worship and fellowship together.

Meetings are urged to send a team of Friends, including those serving on First Day, Religious Ed or Ministry and Counsel committees. Together, we will explore: *What does it mean to be a Quaker and how do we share this with others?* Our intention is that participants will come away from the weekend affirmed and refreshed, ready to move forward whether you're newly stepping into this work or a seasoned practitioner.

Watch for more information about registration on powellhouse.org or email info@powellhouse.org.

UPCOMING POWELL HOUSE YOUTH CONFERENCES

Winter Song

for 7th-12th grade: Dec. 9-11
Mystical. Magical. Incredible. Real. Join us as we gather to celebrate our community and fill both houses with Light and Love. There will be inspiring workshops, a game or two, small group discussions, simple but elegant food at the "dress-up" dinner, and the ever-entertaining Cabaret. This is a popular weekend; priority will be given to folks who have participated in conferences throughout the fall.

For more information or to register online visit powellhouse.org and click on "youth programs."

UPCOMING POWELL HOUSE CONFERENCES

Cherish Family and Friends Annual New Year's Celebration
Dec. 30, 2016-Jan. 1, 2017

This multigenerational conference is one of our most popular, so register early! At this annual event we can have activities for all ages—it's up to you. Last year there was finger painting, energy work, Tai Chi, Pilates, a work project, a walk to Dorson's Rock, a gathering for young adult F/friends, and frosting cupcakes among others. There's also Cabaret, a midnight feast on the 31st, and brunch on the 1st. Come and be a part of this wonderful intergenerational celebration. Scholarship funds and special family rates are available.

Dwelling Deep, a Contemplative Retreat with Linda Chidsey and Carolyn Moon

January 13-16, 2017
(through Monday lunch)
Co-sponsored by the School of the Spirit Ministry

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. There will also be opportunities for individual and group spiritual reflection. Come and simply BE with God; listen and attend to the Divine stirrings of the soul.

Being of Service: Exploring Public Ministry in our Meetings with Kristina and Callid Keefe-Perry

February 10-12, 2017

Some meetings struggle to name the spiritual gifts that their members are carrying. Others have lots of members in ministry but wonder what they can provide in terms of support, development, and accountability. Others still wonder exactly what ministry is. If you are a person that feels called into service, you might not quite know what your role is, how to get the connection and support you need, or what the relationship is supposed to be between your personal sense of leading and your community's oversight of it. If any of these things seem familiar, this is a weekend for you. Visit powellhouse.org.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Help Wanted at Powell House: Snow Removal Person — this person must be available to work when snow is accumulating! The position

is part-time, hourly work. If you live nearby and would like to earn some extra money, let Regina Haag know at 518-794-8811 or by emailing regina@powellhouse.org
Cooks — We would like to add another person or two to the supply of folks who are employed for weekend retreats and programs (both adult and youth) to provide meals under the direction of our food service manager. Send your resumes to Tony@powellhouse.org.

Farmington Friends Church is hiring a pastor to start in April 2017. They seek someone with a commitment to Full Time Pastoral Ministry that is rooted in Quaker Practice and Christ Centered. You can find the job description under the News tab on the Farmington Friends web page:
www.quakercloud.org/cloud/farmington-friends-church

Hello Friends! You are invited to write for Spark. Articles in Spark should be considered a form of written ministry. Pieces should be spirit-led and reflect your personal experience, Quaker history, or present faith and practice.

Upcoming Spark themes:

January: **The Connection Between Witness and Faith.** How does one inform the other? How do we keep that connection centered?

March: **Discernment**

We welcome articles on this or other related topics. Please send your submissions for Jan. Spark to communications@nyym.org by January 1st.

Don't forget to share your meeting's news, announcements, and upcoming events with the rest of the Yearly Meeting through InfoShare, our digital newsletter. We publish InfoShare between issues of Spark, in February, April, June, August, October, and December. Send your items to communications@nyym.org. Don't get InfoShare? Email office@nyym.org to get on our list.

Announcements received outside of the deadlines for Spark and InfoShare are posted on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NewYorkYearlyMeeting/ and tweeted out via the twitter handle [@NYYMTweets](https://twitter.com/NYYMTweets) (go to twitter.com/NYYMTweets)

— Sarah Way

Encouragement and Discernment: Making Space for Young Voices

Melinda Wenner Bradley
NYYM Children and Youth
Field Secretary

"In worship we listen very carefully. Sometimes a person feels something happening inside that won't go away. That person listens very hard to answer questions inside: 'Is this from God or from somewhere else? Is this for me only, or for the group? If it is for everyone, do I share it now or later?'" Sometimes the person feels words inside that are from God, that are for everyone, and that are for now. Then the person shares the message in a clear voice so everyone can hear the message. The messenger uses as few words as possible and as many as needed, then stops and reenters the silence."

When we consider exploring vocal ministry with children and together in a multigenerational group, two lenses occur to me: *encouraging* the sharing of voices, and *discerning* the source of what we're led to share. The words above are part of the Faith & Play story, "Prayer and Friends Meeting for Worship," which was shared during Community Worship at Summer Sessions this year. These stories were created to be tools for teaching children about our faith and practice as Friends, and so this passage can lead into a discussion about vocal ministry. How do we inform and invite children and newcomers of any age into our practices as Friends? Exploring the practice of vocal ministry is an opportunity to welcome Friends of all ages into the spiritual community of the meeting.


Creating openings for children to share their voices and what is in their hearts begins with creating safe spaces for them to share. The time we spend gathering and "building the circle" in First Day School or other programs (I think about the community building inherent to youth programs at Powell House) welcomes young people into spiritual community. One exercise to encourage sharing could be to invite children (or a multigenerational group) to bring a small object that is special or has significance to them to share with the group. Set up a small table in

the center of a circle of chairs, and invite Friends when ready to share why the object they have brought is special to them, and place it on the table. You build a sacred space together that is both visual and in the words and feelings shared. Another way to approach worship sharing with children is "Heart Sharing" (directions and suggested queries on the Philadelphia YM website <https://goo.gl/y47ApR>). In Heart Sharing, we lift up a query for response, but invite that response to be "from the heart" and just a word (or sentence) and not a longer sharing. You can do Heart Sharing in a whole group, or break into smaller multi-age/generational groups of 3-4 with suggested queries. Heart Sharing taps into the here-and-now of children's spirituality. They don't differentiate between worship time and play time or work time. When we move beyond (or back from) the intellectual nuances and details often in adult responses, we make space for everyone to share from where they are.

The "wondering questions" found with Godly Play and Faith & Play stories are another example of making space for children to listen and reflect, in this case on their experience of a story or message. Truly, these open-ended queries can be used in response to any story, whether it's a Bible story, a children's book or questions about how a child's day at school went. "What part did you like best?"; "What was most important for you?"; "What part could you take out and still have all the story you needed?"; "Where were you in the story or what part was about you?" The questions are open, invitational, and there are no "right" (or "wrong") answers when we wonder together. It's a place where all voices are invited, and yet not forced (we don't "call on" children in the circle). There is also room for silence in this practice; when no one shares aloud, we can trust that wondering is happening inside, and allow the pauses and spaces to model our practice of waiting and listening. After many years of storytelling, I came to see the wondering time after the story as a place for children to practice hearing their voices lifted up in the spiritual community gathered for First Day School — but also a place to practice deepening how we listen inwardly.

How do we listen for God, and know a message is from Spirit and for us to share with the whole

group? You can find several versions of "flow charts" from different sources online and see how they speak to you. One or more of them could be given to small groups and discussed, or you could make them into a kind of movement activity/game, like "red light, green light": if the answer to one of the questions you ask yourself is yes, it's a green light. If no, it's a return to center (like a "stop.") This fall, teens at Friends Meeting of Washington were inspired by earlier written works to create a skit for their meeting community about vocal ministry. The skit is meant to be shared, and can be found posted on the Quaker Religious Education Collaborative's website (<http://www.quakers4re.com>).

This could be a great conversation started for a multigenerational group, as the skit requires "audience participation" and references contemporary tensions as we listen to the still small voice within. Another resource that might be of interest to youth and multiage groups that include teens and adults is a recent QuakerSpeak video on "How to Deepen Quaker Meeting for Worship." (<http://quakerspeak.com/how-to-deepen-quaker-meeting-worship>) At the 4:34 minute mark, Honor Woodrow lifts up several of the questions about when and whether to speak, but stretches that discernment to include the question of "Do you feel that you were faithful in your speaking?" She opens a space for considering how vocal ministry can develop as a skill, which brings me back to the start of this piece and the question of how we "teach" children about vocal ministry. Perhaps part of the answer is in the truth that we're all still learning. 

Thoughts on Vocal Ministry

Anita Paul
Schenectady Meeting

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a monthly meeting reading the same book or having a discussion can be even richer. Many meetings have worship sharing immediately after the clerk breaks meeting for worship as it can encourage the nervous or the newcomer that they have something that others want to hear.

"When one rises to speak in [a gathered] meeting one has a sense of being used, or being played upon, of being spoken through."

— Thomas Kelly

Some have said that the discomfort of some in meeting with a person's particular spiritual language keeps others from speaking for fear of offending or, worse yet, of being criticized. Dear Friends, surely we are spiritually mature enough to allow everyone the spiritual language that is meaningful to them. Translate into the words that speak to your heart. It is selfish to limit anyone's heart-felt words because they make you squirmy, and be assured that they will not limit yours. We can be non-Christian without being anti-Christian; we can quote Abraham Heschel, mantras, Zen koans, Jesus and William Penn, among others, all of it OK.

And while we're at it, God is just God's nickname and doesn't begin to encompass all of the Holy, any more than your various titles express all of you: Mom, boss, Grandpa, clerk, etc. 'God' is universally understood, as are Yahweh and Allah. Squelching others' word choices can limit or even suppress messages that would have been to the benefit of at least some, if not all. That's right: sometimes messages in worship are God-sent to only one or a few. If the message doesn't suit you, generously assume it is for someone else. Also, when you are wondering if what you are thinking about is a message that truly needs to be spoken during worship be assured that if mentioning NPR or the *NY Times* is part of it, it can wait until coffee hour after meeting. Often messages are something we would not have thought of, and they can still come with quaking or other physical manifestation, at least for some.

Speaking for the first time can be daunting; we wonder if this is truly a message, if others will hear it negatively, if we want to reveal our inner life of the Spirit. It gets easier; you can ask for someone you respect to give you feedback later in private. Just as our bodies have eyes and ears, so the eyes of our hearts yearn to see the Light, and the ears of our hearts yearn to hear words from the Spirit. 

My Experience of Sharing Vocal Ministry

Regina Baird Haag
Powell House Director

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inspired me to seek the place from which those messages came, and my love of silent unprogrammed spaces of connection grew. However, I remained primarily affiliated with programmed Quaker meetings. Over time, my call to ministry led me to become involved as a pastoral minister, responsible for bringing a message each week in worship. This, then, is what I am most familiar with in terms of vocal ministry.

My love of the study of scripture and the topics or themes within the weekly chosen passages (I was basically a Lectionary preacher), coupled with the experiences in my daily life, both on a local and wider perspective, were the source of my messages. These were written, usually, on Saturday or early Sunday morning; then delivered in our worship service, after the corresponding scripture had been read to the gathering. My process always felt as though it was founded on and seasoned throughout with the action of the Holy Spirit working in me, as the message simmered and thickened throughout the course of the week before our Sunday meeting.

However, a call to the more extemporaneous vocal ministry out of silence and Spirit, continued to be a challenging dynamic (a thorn in my side!) underlying my ministry in worship. I sought to incorporate a more impromptu,

spiritually driven and alive way of offering vocal ministry. But, my bottom line came to be that I would use what gifts I had been given, which included a very spirit-led preparation process that ended with a manuscript. It included the spiritual practice of writing out my manuscript by long-hand for many years, before I began using a laptop computer. I concluded that when I was supposed to alter my practice, God would let me know and then lead me into a new way.

That new way came unexpectedly one Sunday morning in 2014, as I finished the message on my laptop and promptly pushed “don’t save” instead of “save.” After repeated attempts at recovery, it was too late to do anything else but prepare a brief outline of what I could remember for use in worship. Later, out of the silence, I rose to deliver a message that was more closely grounded in and led by Spirit than I had ever allowed myself to be before then. I felt as if I had truly experienced the practice of speaking out of my divine center, enabled and supported by God.

Since that Sunday worship, I have found myself more inclined and responsive to leadings to share vocal ministry out of Silence. While I still prepare diligently when occasions to plan to preach arise, melding scholarship, daily life, and spirit over time, I am more sensitive and responsive to those inner leadings and the Spirit, from which ALL vocal and non-verbal ministry are born and enlivened. I am so thankful for those who are nudged, and then who rise to bring messages that inspire, challenge, and affirm us for our life beyond our worship. 

Articles to read online at nym.org

Fruits from the Silent Tree by Khary Bekka:

"Prior to the recent Democratic National Convention held in the birthplace of William Penn's "Holy Experiment," I was hopeful that this historical note might be referenced. Unfortunately, no one came remotely close to unearthing the fount of gold found in Friends' early reform efforts that set this country on a "Just" course. This was indeed disappointing; however, my new hope... is Quaker testimonies will guide this nation forward..."

On Breaking the Silence by Terence Ward:

"...My worship can be introspective and personal, and frequently deep enough that I don't even notice when someone rises to speak. At other times, when I have more difficulty settling into worship, a voice echoing through the meeting house does little to quiet my mind. I never actually become annoyed that there was vocal ministry—certainly not!—but there are times when all I hoped for has been that my fellow Friends would be led to remain silent..."



Quakers standing in support of the Standing Rock Sioux and their protest against the Dakota Access Pipeline at a vigil held in Washington Square Park on September 13th. For more information about NYM support for the Standing Rock Sioux, please see Fall Sessions minute 2016-11-34 on nym.org.

“Oh Lord, Open Thou My Lips!”

Jim Atwell
Butternuts Meeting

(continued from page 1)

strating these last three points to me even as they're gently being taken back—ironically, through two other gifts: advancing old age and advancing Parkinsonism. In a very few years, these two will have put earlier gifts in the past tense: e.g. a quick and active mind, a broad education, a strong memory and large active vocabulary, a keen sense of any audience's needs and capacities.

All the above are on their way out; and blessed be God, I say. They weren't mine by right. And as they fade, I begin to see the real wisdom of old age—it's my new life's motto, one that would do well on a memorial stone: “There's far less to me than meets the I!”

But to my point: So long as “my” gifts do remain, they can be used in another kind of vocal ministry, a complement to the kind we share in meeting: ministry by voice outside our worship sessions. That is, vocal ministry, formal or informal, directly to others around us. And by extension, I mean vocal ministry through writing.

I know all of us try to share the Light through words of kindness and comfort to all we meet, letting “our Light shine before humankind, leading them to glorify God,” its Source.

More formally, I have been led through years of ecumenical work, lecturing and preaching in dozens of churches and across a wide range of denominations. I have always been able to do this from a Quaker perspective and have most often

found that other faith communities' interest in inviting me, a Quaker Christian, has flowed from their wanting to understand the Friends' testimonies and, even more, our reason for praying in shared, expectant silence.


Let's use our voices, both in meetings and out, to spread the Light.

Silence, as you know, is a rare commodity in most denominations' worship; and yet, the hunger for it is deep in all humans. And so I think there's been something useful, as one Quaker wit likes to say, in “Jim's poaching in others' pulpits.”

Another approach to vocal ministry is through writing. Since my retirement from college teaching and administration, I've written better than a thousand articles and columns in magazines and newspapers (including, of course, Quaker ones), and a couple of books, too. This seems to me to be still another way to express my Quaker faith, using what talents for expression have been lent to me.

But let me end, friends, by stressing that we all have the gift to raise our voices! And each of you, especially in these frightening times, is meant to use that gift to bring others to truth, comfort, and joy.

Here's a contract with you, friends: Let's use our voices, both in meetings and out, to spread the Light. Let's follow the psalm's words, “So I will bless Thee as long as I am—in Thy name I will lift up my hands!”

And I promise you to keep on my poaching, and to tap away on this laptop as long as my hands work, and the mind still works that guides them. 

On Vocal Ministry

Christopher Sammond
General Secretary

As I have worked with the Spiritual Nurture Working Group (SNWG), to offer workshops to monthly meetings on over ten topics which might nurture and support the Life of the Spirit in their meetings, what Friends have been asking for, more than all the other topics combined, is help and guidance on vocal ministry. Clearly, this central practice in our faith is an area where many of us have concerns, and where many of our meetings struggle. Some say there is not enough vocal ministry, and yearn for more in their meetings. Others experience vocal ministry in their meetings as being shallow, and even problematic. What we on the SNWG have emphasized, is the reality that vocal ministry is not an entity in itself, but arises out of the quality of the community of Friends gathered in worship. Here's a summary statement which for me encapsulates how I understand vocal ministry:

Vocal ministry with depth and power comes though us from the Divine, and arises, by grace, through the communion of Friends in a gathered meeting.

This is a very dense, compact statement. Let's unpack it one piece at a time.

Gathered worship occurs by grace. Gathered worship cannot be ordered up or made to happen. There are, however, conditions and efforts on our part which can make this treasured experience more likely to happen, or less so.

Enlightenment is an accident. Practice makes us accident prone. — Zen proverb

One condition which makes us more "accident prone" to receive the gift of a gathered meeting is a depth of community characterized by trust and knowing each other, of being able to be open in heart and spirit with each other. If it doesn't feel safe to open our hearts to the others in the room, it is difficult, if not nigh on impossible, to open them to God.

Another condition is that which arises from daily spiritual practice. Such practice allows us to "come to worship with hearts and minds prepared," an advice in almost all Friends Faith and Practices.

Vocal ministry with depth and power arises out of community gathered together in worship.

Spirit-led vocal ministry does not arise *ex nihilo*. Only in very rare occasions does a powerful message gather and deepen a body of Friends which had been scattered and uncentered. It is almost always the other way around; a gathered and centered body makes the occurrence of genuine vocal ministry possible. It is therefore something that we all create together. "Friends have never regarded this (Quaker meeting for worship) as an individual activity. People who regard Friends meetings as opportunities for meditation have failed to appreciate this corporate aspect. The waiting and listening are activities in which everybody is engaged and, as we shall see, produce spoken ministry which helps to articulate the common guidance which the Holy Spirit is believed to give the group as a whole. So the waiting and listening is corporate also. This is why Friends emphasize the 'ministry of silence' and the importance of coming to meeting regularly and with heart and mind prepared." (John Punshon, *Encounter with Silence*)

Vocal ministry with depth and power comes though us from the Divine.

Friends understanding of vocal ministry is that a message is something from the Divine, something from well beyond our own small selves, coming from God, the Inner Teacher, the Light Within, leading and guiding us as individuals and as a community. This may seem like an audacious claim, to put it mildly. Yet that has been the experience of our process in worship to which Friends have witnessed for over three hundred years. "The term *prophetic* indicates in a single word the basic theory of Quaker ministry...a ministry which waits until it becomes a vocal expression of the Divine Word spoken immediately in the heart." (Howard Brinton)

To act as a prophet is to give voice to the Divine. Thus, all authentic vocal ministry is, at its heart, prophetic. And while we can never get our small selves completely out of the way, the degree to which a message is vocal ministry, and not our own interesting thoughts, depends upon the degree to which we are able to let the Divine speak through us. Bill Tabor, renowned Quaker teacher, saw this capacity as something which we can even "catch" from each other. "Even so,

many of the prophets act as if the willingness and the ability to be a prophet can at least be caught, and perhaps even taught, so long as we remember that the fact of prophecy remains with God alone."

We discern whether a message is merely our own interesting thoughts, or coming from our egocentric desire to speak or be heard, or whether it is a message from the Divine for the gathered meeting. *Discernment is going to the place where God makes things clear.* (Wade Wilson) Discernment, therefore, is key to our understanding of vocal ministry.

Checklist on Discernment as to Whether or Not to Give Vocal Ministry


Basic:

Am I in a deeply centered place?	If "no," return to center.
Do I desire to speak?	If "yes," return to center.
Do I desire not to speak?	If "yes," return to center.

More Advanced:

Is this message only for me?	If "yes," return to center.
Is the meeting gathered enough to receive it?	If "no," return to center.
Is now the time?	If "no," return to center.

Queries:

- If enlightenment (and Spirit-led vocal ministry) is an accident, how do we practice our faith daily so that we become more "accident prone?"
- Can prophetic ministry be "caught?" If so, how best to expose ourselves to the virus? 

Vocal Ministry as a Calling

Steven Davison
Central Philadelphia Meeting, PhYM

Does your meeting have Friends who speak fairly frequently in meeting for worship? I am such a Friend. Vocal ministry is for me a calling, and so I feel a certain kinship with the vocal ministers of the past.

But nowadays I suspect that most Friends do not think of their own vocal ministry as a calling and that most meetings don't think of vocal ministry this way either.

But I wish we did. I wish we took better proactive care of our vocal ministers and their ministries in general, whether they feel they are called or not.

By proactive care I mean that Friends on a meeting's ministry and counsel committee might say to each other (in my case), Steven Davison seems to be speaking fairly frequently in meeting for worship—I wonder whether he feels a calling to vocal ministry? The members of the committee probably wouldn't know unless they asked me. If I were in your meeting, would your M&C committee ask me if I felt called to vocal ministry?

Here's how I would ask the question if I were they: We notice, Steven, that you speak fairly often in meeting and we wonder whether you feel a calling to vocal ministry?

Since I would answer yes, I would hope they would then ask me: Can we help you be faithful to your call in any way? Because we know this is a serious concern for someone so called.

Some in the meeting might think instead that such a sense of calling would be a dangerous self-exaltation. They might invoke the testimony of equality, in fear of some hierarchy developing. But to the one called, such a call is humbling, if not terrifying.

We Friends pay lip service to the idea of Spirit-led vocal ministry, but I think we mostly do not take this tenet of our faith very seriously.

For some of us, however, the weight of responsibility for radical faithfulness to the leading is heavy. To exalt one's self through one's vocal ministry or even just to run past one's guide in a message, is a kind of sin against the Spirit. And to find one's self lost in a spiritual desert, bereft of one's leading—well, we should not leave our ministers so bereft of our support. Supporting one another in our leadings is one of the essential missions of the Quaker meeting.

So I ask: do we know who among us feels led into vocal ministry? If someone among us does feel led, do we not owe her our support? And do we not owe it to the meeting both to nurture this gift to the meeting and to protect our worship from its misuse?

What forms might this support take? I personally would be interested in a small, informal mutual support/discussion group with a concern for each others' vocal


ministries, a group that would find its own direction as we were led. I might also be interested in a vocal ministry/spiritual journey friend—some individual person to be in touch with more intimately, as the two of us feel led. But another Friend might have other needs or ideas.

Suppose that M&C feels that this is a meaningful way to approach vocal ministry, but they wonder whether the rest of the meeting agrees with them, or fear that Friends would feel the committee was being impertinent or intrusive if they inquired of frequent speakers. Or perhaps the committee has never actually considered the possibility that one might be called into vocal ministry? (Has your committee ever discussed the matter?) What then?

Do we take seriously the traditional Quaker faith in Spirit-led ministry, or not? More to the point, have we *experienced* Spirit-led ministry? Almost certainly, the answer to the latter question is yes. So now, what about the traditional *practice* of vocal ministry? Has the meeting no role in its nurture and oversight?

If the committee and the meeting feel they have no role to play in the religious lives of Friends called into vocal ministry, even though they bring that ministry to the meeting regularly, what does that mean? What does it mean if a meeting has so abandoned its traditions as to leave its vocal ministers with no help at all, even when they have a calling that to them is a profound responsibility that is

fraught with real personal spiritual risk?

If you're pretty sure that no one in the meeting feels so called, then what? What do Friends who regularly speak in meeting think they are doing? Perhaps they just never thought of their speaking as a calling, and only need to be asked in order to be awakened? 

Vocal Ministry: Irritation

Transformed

by Tim Connolly
Attender, Wilton
Monthly Meeting

"Vocal Ministry happens when God speaks through us, usually during meeting for worship. It can be profound, scary, rich, moving." Sentiments expressed well by Sarah Way in Spark, Oct. 2016 and that align well with mine.

Oh, and did anyone mention vocal ministry can be downright irritating? Probably not in writing. Risking excommunication and ostracization, here are my thoughts.

To describe the problem, I find it helpful to consider ministry on this topic from Douglas Steere (lifted from the Introduction to his book *Quaker Spirituality*):

"It is necessary to note that the freedom of the unprogrammed Quaker meeting may tempt some persons to minister too frequently.

Distraught persons occasionally

may use it for self-expression, or some who attend the meeting seldom may find it hard to resist what for them seems an invitation to press some personal cause, quite ignoring the inner unfolding of the meeting.

It is remarkable how creatively a grounded meeting can absorb this surface speaking and gather it into the worshipping silence. Often the silence and subsequent ministry can transform it into something unbelievably helpful.

Friends seem to know when, for the sake of the meeting, some elderying may be necessary, and in those cases a quiet and loving conferring with those whose ministry is unhelpful is undertaken by a seasoned Friend."

Douglas helps me when I am a meeting captive, having no choice but to listen to those who speak every week without fail, or unload personal problems, or advance some pet causes having nothing to do with worship.

Specifically, how does Douglas help me? In at least three ways:

First, I recognize that the foregoing negatives are the consequence of our evolution as a Religious Society. In most meetings, elderying is mostly non-existent or ineffective, and secular activism and related soap box pronouncements are becoming the norm. Undisciplined vocal participation logically follows when a simple majority of our NYM neither reads nor recognizes the authority/validity of our Faith and Practice. Many members ignore this book and advocate standing for all things to all people, irrespective of our Discipline, and thereby end up standing for nothing.

While seemingly a long shot, the profound does find a way to break through the un-eldered noise, secularity and undisciplined blather. But it can take awhile. So first, I recognize that listening for divine messages from and through others takes time, patience, forbearance and love—all well worth the effort.


Second, I trust in and have witnessed how a centered meeting for worship can absorb what Steere calls 'surface speaking' into the silence, and follow it with spirit-led ministry that includes and evolves the original message. After having purged their secular and self absorbed systems, the ego led ministers will become weary, stop talking and be subsumed into

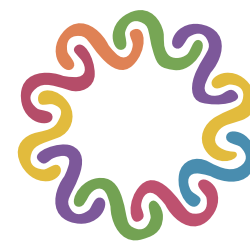
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the gathered meeting. The noise becomes something better if I trust in the ministry of others and let the process proceed.

Third, I know that the most important ingredient of vocal ministry is active and expectant listening. My inner listener and my outer Listener guide me well through the irritating shoals of meeting. Both encourage me to trust my silence, my ears and my soul. Something may rise up within me during these times. Should I sound off or maintain stillness? Whence the source? Impelled into that which is vocally ministerial or verbally flatulent?

While often irritating, vocal ministry is mostly good. Following Douglas Steere's lead, a prayer of my own: "O God, I thank you for my friends who sound off whenever about whatever in meeting. May they be especially blessed for coming at all and trying vocal ministry. Without them I cannot discern your will." 




*We are not for Names, nor Men,
nor Titles of Government, nor are
we for this Party, nor against the
other, because of its Name and
Pretence; but we are for Justice and
Mercy, and Truth and Peace, and
true Freedom, that these may be
exalted in our Nation.*
— Edward Burrough, *To the Present
Distracted and Broken Nation of
England* (1659)

The Outreach Working Group of NYM invites meetings to participate in a process designed to give support to meetings that want to explore and initiate outreach activities. The process is designed to be collaborative, incremental, and individualized, offering resources and encouragement at a pace suitable to each meeting's needs and leadings.

The focus for 2016-17 is "**Becoming a More Welcoming Meeting**" (improving how we receive and engage new attenders and seekers). At the end of Year One, meetings can decide if they wish to participate in Year Two, the focus of which will be "**Becoming a More Inviting Community**" (how we reach out into the community around us).

More information about the simple requirements and help in discerning whether your meeting is ready to engage in more active outreach is available at nyym.org (search for "Meeting Outreach"). You may also email your questions to OWG co-conveners Robin Whitely at rlwhitely@comcast.net, or Arlene Johnson at arlene_johnson@verizon.net.

We encourage you to bring this opportunity to the attention of your monthly meeting as soon as possible in order to become part of the process. 

Thoughts on the Election

Vocal Ministry Given by Christopher Sammond at Fall Sessions

Good Morning,

I had not planned on speaking this weekend, having originally found no leading to do so. After the election, I gradually felt a leading to speak growing in me. Lucinda and I felt that we could not just enter into our business without acknowledging the impact of this election on many of us. This message is in response to that concern.

I want to preface these remarks with the recognition that I know that some members of our yearly meeting are Republicans, and that they anticipated voting for Mr. Trump. I respect their decision based on their best judgement and sense of leading. And I know that they often feel in a distinct minority in our fellowship, even beleaguered, and I want to say that we as Friends are not Republican nor Democrat, conservative nor liberal, that we are a fellowship of people drawn to a practice of listening for God's voice and leading, and seeking to live out our lives in accordance with the will of the Divine as best we can discern. I believe we would be a healthier Religious Society if we had more people in our ranks who differed

from what can often be an assumed liberal norm, and can even feel at times like a liberal enclave.

That said, I have spoken with many Friends who are deeply, overwhelmingly traumatized by the election of Mr. Trump. One Friend told me when it happened she was so distraught she repeatedly threw up. Another reported waking up screaming in terror at the prospect of a Trump presidency. I myself have had many a night with disrupted sleep over the past six months at that prospect, chilled with an overwhelming fear of what that might mean.

Some here are not traumatized. Some I have spoken with are concerned, yes. Disappointed, yes. But by no means bearing the trauma I witness in others. We need to be able to be present to each other in all the different ways we are responding to the election.

Some see the Trump presidency as being disastrous for abetting the growing impact of climate change. Bill McKibbin, founder of 350.org, wrote that this election is "game over" for averting the catastrophic impact of global warming, meaning literally the eventual end of life on Earth as we know it. Some see a Trump presidency as a legitimization of the racism which has permeated our society, now more visible, and now both tacitly and overtly acceptable in the eyes of some. In the night after Election Day, racial epithets and swastikas were spray painted in public places across this country. Some see a Trump presidency as putting the world at grave risk, with someone whose emotional maturity and psychological balance they question now in charge of the largest military on earth, and the codes to deploy our nuclear weapons. Some see a Trump presidency as threatening our civil and human rights, as his campaign promises included resuming the practice of torture, limiting the rights of Muslims, and supporting an aggressive police response to those protesting the reality of racism in this country. For some of us, the horror of having, as evidenced by his many public statements, a racist, bigot, misogynist, and xenophobe in the White House is more than we can bear. Some see a Trump presidency as threatening to fill the Supreme Court with justices so far to the right as to tip the balance in this country on a variety of issues for a generation, or more.

I, personally, hold all these fears,

and more. And in the moments when I could find centered connection in the midst of the terror I felt leading up to and after the election, what I heard in that place where I know the voice of the Divine to speak in me, was "Will you trust me?" Over and over I heard, "Will you trust me?"

Now, I don't interpret this to mean everything is going to be just fine. I think quite the contrary. But I do hear it as both a query and a request. And I will tell you what I know I can trust:


- I trust in God's presence, and availability.
- I trust in my ability, when I am centered and grounded that I will be led.
- I trust in the power of love and compassion to overcome fear, hatred, and bigotry.
- I trust that when I am aligned with God, that my meager resources of abilities and gifts are multiplied many times.
- I trust in the power of non-violence, love, and the willingness to suffer to soften people's hearts, and thereby overcome structures of domination, injustice and intimidation.
- I trust that the arc of the Universe does indeed bend toward justice.

Speaking with a friend about what I trusted, she told me the story of a woman in a village near Bhopal, when the chemical plant blew up. Everyone in the village was running away, screaming in panic. She, having had a long practice of meditation, listened inwardly for what to do. What she heard was "turn on the fan, lie down on the floor, and go to sleep." She did that, and she was the only one in her village that survived that day. All those running away were breathing in the poison in great gulps, while her metabolism slowed down, in sleep, where the air was better, down low, on the floor.

On a lesser note, the Friday before the election, I had had an intimation of which way it was going, and I was utterly undone, so upset and grieved that I couldn't really function. I could hardly manage to pack to go to the workshop on Beyond the White Privilege Conference. I was already running late. But I kept getting a pull to go out to the garden and weed. I finally heeded it, and after about 45 minutes with my hands in the rich soil, I felt grounded

and enough together that I could function.

This is what we do. This is what we do as Friends. We listen, and are guided. We act.

Night before last, as I held the question of what to say today, the words "baptism of fire" came to me. I believe we are at the dawn of a moment in history that will shake us as a nation to our very foundations. We will be called to new depths in our practice. We will be challenged in ways I can only imagine. We will be tempered. It will not be easy. And we have the resources to face this time. So I ask you, in what do you trust? 



Ethical Culture Society, White Plains, NY

Highlights from our Fall Sessions

Lucinda Antrim
NYYM Clerk

The full minutes are available at www.nyym.org and in the inbox of your meeting's clerk; if not already in your inbox too, email office@nyym.org

In the aftermath of the presidential election, our General Secretary, Christopher Sammond, brought ministry. Then, in small groups, we answered the question Christopher posed: "In what do you trust?" Jeffrey Aaron closed this special time together with "A Song of Peace." From this centered, though for many of us grief-filled, space, we worshiped over the business before us. We approved the 2017 Budget, encouraged Friends from across the Yearly Meeting to contact the Ad Hoc Committee on Staff Structure with ideas and thoughts about our staffing in the light of our General Secretary's resignation next summer, and approved a minute in support of the Standing Rock Sioux. We revised our Faith and Practice's section on covenant relationships; as our minutes report "Friends spoke to the joy and timeliness of the approval of this inclusive and non-judgmental expression of our faith." We come together again for Spring Sessions on Long Island on March 31–April 2. Please come. It is and will be good to be together. 

NYYM Fall Sessions Survey!

The NYYM Sessions Committee invites you to complete the new Spring and Fall Sessions survey, online at the URL below. The survey is designed for those who attended the recent Fall Sessions and those who did not. Friends of all ages are encouraged to complete the survey by Wednesday, January 11th, so that we can collate responses in time for the Sessions Committee meeting at the end of January. Paper copies of the survey are available also—just contact Melanie-Claire Mallison, Sessions Committee clerk, with your street address (607-280-8182 or MsMellie@gmail.com).

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2016fallsessions>