

SPARK

New York Yearly Meeting

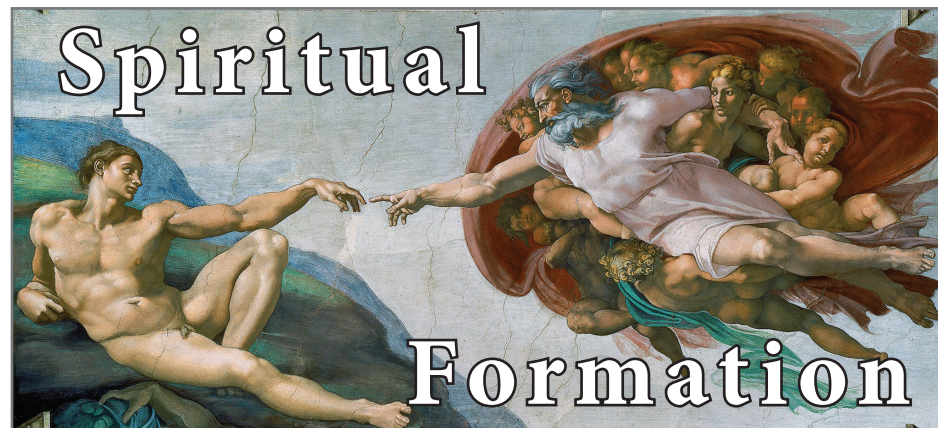
THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (QUAKERS)

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By Willpower or by Grace?

Steve Mohlke,
Ithaca Meeting

In the dozen or so years following my discovery of Quakers in general and Ithaca Friends in particular, I attended worship, joined committees, and generally participated in the life of the meeting. Then in 2006, three separate workshops over a period of several months served as what I now call a spiritual awakening. Like many others, I had been embracing the Quaker experience for what it wasn't: no creeds, no single minister, no liturgy, etc. With the awakening, I realized that there was much more to Quakerism than defining ourselves in the negative.

In the first of the three workshops, I learned about meditation. At a gathering of our regional meeting, Sue Tannehill and Mark Kenmore taught a form in which one focuses on a short spiritual reading. After they shared the method, the group practiced.

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What Forms You?

Mary Kay Glazer,
Madison Meeting (WI)

What forms you? What things from your past have made you the person you are today? What influences in your life continue to shape you? Some possibilities are: popular culture, politics, your friends and family, your Quaker meeting, Quaker theology, that book you read last week, your smart phone, the town you grew up in, and where you live now, the food you eat, where you shop, the music you hear.

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See Also

Help in Finding One's
Way p8

Christopher Sammond

On Spiritual Accompaniment as a Calling
and in a Vocation p6

Lu Harper

Formation and Risk

Callid Keefe-Perry, Fresh
Pond Meeting (MA)

In *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, peacemaker and scholar Sharon Welch writes about what she calls a state of "cultured despair." She says that this state has two primary characteristics. First, it occurs within the context of an awareness of systemic injustice and oppression. Second, it occurs when people feel there is no option to act in opposition to those systems. In this state of "cultured despair," it becomes increasingly harder to envision creative options for resistance or ways to care for one other as we all feel the impact of struggle. Allowed to play out unchecked, this despair slowly grinds us down into a darkening spiral of passivity.

Not all meetings everywhere actively grapple with this kind of despair, but my hunch is that many have at least encountered it. Sometimes the press of issues can seem overwhelming: global climate

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Children's Spiritual Formation

Melinda Wenner Bradley,
West Chester Meeting (PA)

Rufus Jones wrote, "Something of God comes into our world with every child that is born. There is here with the newborn child a divine spark, a light within." My experiences with children as an educator and a parent align with both these words and the belief that a child's spiritual life is present from the time they are born. For Friends, what does it mean to nurture children's spiritual lives from infancy through youth as part of life-long spiritual formation? How do we weave together the activity implied in the language of formation and the stillness of a faith rooted in listening within for guidance from Spirit?

My youngest son was a toddler when he pointed to curtains billowing in a breeze through the window of a quiet room and exclaimed, "God." His siblings were exploring stories from the Bible and Quaker faith and practice,

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Around Our Yearly Meeting

Meeting News

Rochester Meeting: *I'm Not Racist, Am I?*

On November 15, Rochester Meeting showed the film *I'm Not Racist, Am I?* and held a facilitated workshop afterward. They hoped to create a brave space for more authentic and meaningful discussions on racism that encourages them to recognize and dismantle it. The film follows a group of a dozen teenagers learning to live together. You can watch a trailer at this link, notracistmovie.com and a talk-back with Quakers in 2014 at youtube.com/watch?v=ZuAfJ8HVTbo.

News & Announcements

Tending the Garden—NYYM offers spiritual nurture workshops

The Yearly Meeting's Spiritual Nurture Working Group is offering spiritual nurture programs to meetings and individuals on the following 12 topics: Sacred Journeys, Opening to Deeper Worship, Vocal Ministry, Experiential Quakerism, Discernment, Pastoral Care, Spiritual Support and Accountability, Prayer, Quaker Toolbox, Forgiveness, A Deliberate Faith, and Sense of the Meeting. To learn more, visit nyym.org/?q=SpiritualNurturePrograms. To ask questions or schedule a retreat, contact Lu Harper (luharper@gmail.com) or Anne Pomeroy (apomeroy10@gmail.com). See also the article that starts on the next page.

White Privilege Conference 2016

April 14–17, 2016
Philadelphia, PA

New York Yearly Meeting is a co-host of the 2016 White Privilege Conference and has formed a task group to help with its planning and to facilitate partici-

pation by NYYM Friends. Friends General Conference is also a co-host and offers discounts for registrants, a Quaker hospitality room for fellowship and worship, and home hospitality for Friends attending the Conference. For more information, visit nyym.org/?q=WhitePrivilegeConference.

Grants for the study and practice of mysticism

The Elizabeth Ann Bogert Fund for the Study and Practice of Christian Mysticism invites proposals. Deadline for proposals is March 1, 2016. Grants are announced by July 1. Grants up to \$1,000 are made to individuals, groups, or institutions without denominational, cultural, racial, or national preference or age restrictions. The Fund is administered by Friends World Committee for Consultation—Section of the Americas. For more information, visit nyym.org/sites/default/files/BogertFundBrochure.pdf or email Kenneth Henke at kenneth.henke@ptsem.edu, or write to Princeton Seminary Library, 25 Library Pl., Princeton, NJ 08540.

Follow the NYYM clerk on Instagram

The Yearly Meeting clerk Lucinda Antrim invites you to follow her ([ymclerk](https://www.instagram.com/ymclerk)) on Instagram. She posts when she's out and about in Quakerdom. You can see where's she's been—lovely, loving places, and they're everywhere in our Yearly Meeting!

Oakwood School chooses new Head of School

The School's Board of Managers has unanimously named Chad Cianfrani as Oakwood's 38th Head of School. Chad Cianfrani has served Oakwood for over a decade, most recently as Associate Head of Operations and Technology and Interim Head of School. For more details visit oakwoodschool.org.

For Friends Involved in Interfaith Work:

March 4–6, 2016, Stony Point Center, Stony Point, NY

You are invited to a weekend retreat of worship sharing, reflection, and conversation on "How do we as Friends enrich interfaith work and how does that work enrich us?" The weekend is sponsored by the Community of Living Traditions at Stony Point Center and the Dialogue Institute of Temple University. We offer a subsidized rate of \$40 (double occupancy) for the full weekend for the first 12 registered participants (not including travel). Contact kitty@stonypointcenter.org or 845-786-5674, ext 121 for questions or to register.

FUM's Chain of Prayer

Link your meeting to another Quaker meeting in meaningful, intentional prayer from January 1 to Pentecost, May 15. Visit fum.org for details and to receive your information packet, poster, and an updated Daily Prayer Guide.

Toward Racial Healing—high school leadership forum

Monday, February 15 – Wednesday, February 17, 2016

The NY State Council of Churches is sponsoring a trip for high school students to the United Nations. The group will study at the United Methodist Seminar Office and tour the UN. The cost of \$385 covers lodging, travel by chartered bus, lunch on Tuesday and Wednesday, and breakfast Tuesday. Students will need to bring money for dinner Monday and Tuesday, and for breakfast on Wednesday. See nyym.org/sites/default/files/UNTripFlyer.pdf and UNTripApplication.pdf for more information and an application. 

Notices

New Members

J. Robert Frick — Bulls Head-Oswego

Karen Taborn — Morning-side

Robert Baird Kendall — Manasquan

Vicki Lynn LaBella — Manasquan

Marriages/Covenant Relationships

Beth Gill & Mark

Harper, members of Chatham-Summit, on October 10, 2015, under the care of Chatham-Summit

Deaths

Esther Darlington, member of Ithaca, on July 10, 2015

Ellen Flanders, member of Albany, on September 23, 2015

Laurence Jaeger, member of Brooklyn, on July 29, 2015

Elsbeth Rhodin, member of Ithaca, on August 20, 2015

Ian White, member of Fredonia, on May 22, 2015

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Meeting for Discernment

Saturday, February 27, 2016

9:00: coffee and signing in, 9:30: worship begins

Westbury Meeting
550 Post Rd. Westbury, NY 11590

Meeting for discernment is a chance for extended worship among New York Yearly Meeting Friends, a chance to hear and experience what is rising in our meetings and in our selves. It is a way to bring our meetings together and to get to know each other better. Come and let your voice and your spirit participate. The meeting is a full day, with lunch provided in between. The snow date is Saturday, March 5.

Save the date!



Tending the Garden

A Series of Traveling Workshops and Retreats

Emily Provance, Fifteenth Street Meeting

Like many Friends, I'll never forget my first Quaker meeting. How could I? It was really annoying.

Here I was, a twenty-something who'd been earnestly searching for a faith community since childhood, who'd tried everything from Methodism to Catholicism to Judaism to Mormonism, who'd finally gathered up the nerve to walk into yet another sacred space for yet another encounter with yet another group of strangers who might or might not be welcoming, might or might not be loving, might or might not be really weird. I slipped in through the doors, found a seat in the back, swallowed anxiously, and waited. . . .

And nobody talked. For an hour. Not one word.

It made me crazy to walk out of that meetinghouse knowing nothing more about Quakers than I had when I walked in—because, of course, it meant I'd have to come again!

Which I did, and then again, and again, and again, and since that time I've learned how precious expectant worship is (although of course, that first day, I didn't know that was what we were doing)—and that vocal ministry isn't always necessary (although of course, that first day, I didn't know that was what I was waiting for)—and that the silent worshippers in that meetinghouse would become my spiritual family (although of course, that first day, I couldn't imagine how).

I learned some of these lessons in worship, sometimes listening to vocal ministry, sometimes listening to Spirit in my heart. But many lessons I learned out loud—in conversation at social hour, at Powell House, at NYYM summer sessions. There, I heard the stories of my adopted people. There, I learned much of what Quakerism had to teach me . . . or, more accurately, the ways in which the practices of Quakerism could open doors to the precious direct experience of God.

Silence is valuable, but so are speaking and listening, especially in an experiential faith in which we learn so much from one another's stories. That's why I leapt at the chance to be part of the group organizing Tending the Garden,

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Ministry & Counsel in Farmington-Scipio Regional Meeting

With 20 groups that meet for worship and fellowship—monthly, executive, preparative, and summer meetings, worship groups both inside and outside of prisons, with and without pastors—Farmington-Scipio Regional Meeting sure has variety. Covering over 200 miles from end to end, the Region can

be challenged to stay in touch and take care of each other. A Ministry & Counsel of the Region is charged with supporting the spiritual life and pastoral care of the Region and its component meetings and worship groups.

The current three-person regional M&C is seeking to fulfill that charge in a variety of ways. Here are three.

In June an ongoing program of extended meetings for worship began. Copied from the long-running program in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, it is meant to be simple and nourishing. On a Saturday in June, October, and February, different meetings host an extended meeting for worship. Hosting is kept minimal: unlock the door in the morning, turn on

the heat if needed, and lock up after we leave in mid-afternoon. Moving the extended meetings for worship around the region allows lots of Friends to experience it, and deepens connections with Spirit and between Friends.

A lot of people who haven't experienced a three-hour meeting for worship are quite sure they can't possibly do it. One participant wrote afterward, "...the experience of the Extended Meeting for Worship has truly made a difference in my life. It reconnected me with the visceral sense of joy and wonder in Meeting for Worship, and surprise at its ease. In large part, that has made space for some clarity and changes in my life. I am thankful beyond words!"

The second program we are exploring is Experiment with Light. Developed by British Friend Rex Ambler based on his understanding of early Friends' experience, this guided worship is designed to help Friends open to the teachings of the Inward Light. We have heard of meetings with ongoing Light Groups, with the reported effect of deepening corporate worship as well as transforming lives. We hope to offer the opportunity to experience Experiment with Light as a workshop at the weekend-long regional Spring Gathering in May. Perhaps seeds will be planted!

The third effort is to help Friends from around the region connect in the work they do or might be interested in doing with their meeting. At Spring Gathering last year people were invited to eat lunch with affinity groups such as Peace and Social Concerns, Religious Education, Pastoral Care, Ministry & Worship. Friends got to share experiences and ideas. At the regional one-day gatherings in the fall and winter we are trying the use of affinity badges—"Let's talk about Stewardship of Space and Finances!" or "Let's talk about Meeting as a Whole!"—to help Friends identify others with shared passions and concerns in order to strengthen the work we do and deepen our connections.

NY
YM

Upcoming Spark Themes

January: Family-positive Meetings

March: Vocal Ministry

May: Racial Justice

**Send us
your
articles!**

What Forms You?

Mary Kay Glazer

(continued from page 1)

How do you respond to the things that shape you? How much do you resist? How much do you yield? Would you like to change some of these influences? Maybe you do some things intentionally to help you be formed in ways that you want.



Now let's think about potters, who show up frequently in the Bible. The metaphor of the potter forming clay is a powerful one that describes how God forms us into people of Love and Spirit. For example, Isaiah 64:8: "Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand." This is spiritual formation, which can be described as "being formed into the image of Christ for others." (Robert Mulholland, Christian scripture theologian)

Some other ways to define spiritual formation include the following:

"Being opened to the Good at the core of life and, being filled with Good and formed to Good, sharing it freely with others."

Ann Ulanov, Jungian Theologian, and Barry Ulanov, Liberal Arts Professor, based on a passage in *Cinderella and Her Sisters*

"... the wish that we will apply the teachings in our everyday lives and thus free ourselves and others from suffering. ... Thus the wish is made that we not keep the teachings to ourselves but use them to benefit others ..."

Pema Chodron,
Tibetan Buddhist Nun

The Places that Scare Us

"Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to [all people], and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

Step Twelve,
Alcoholics Anonymous

These quotes all describe how God molds us and transforms us, with spiritual formation as the essence of spirituality—being formed by God into God's image. Or, another way to say it: The Spirit of the Universe transforms us into the whole and sacred people we are meant to be, leading us into deeper, more intimate, and more holy relationship with God, the people in our lives, the global community, the earth and the universe—the whole of creation. Being formed into the people we are created to be, that is what spiritual formation is.

Why Spiritual Formation

So why does spiritual formation matter? If you are a parent, you may have a sense of why. Parents try to create the environment and experiences their children need in order to grow into their best selves. For each of us to grow into our best selves spiritually, we need the right environment and experiences.

In addition, spiritual formation is about something much deeper. It is about the soul's longing for its Creator and Lover. It is about the deep desire that our Creator stirs in us. The heart of spiritual formation is aching, longing desire.

So, why spiritual formation? To respond to that desire, to the invitation into deeper life with the Divine within community. Saying yes to God's desire to form us is how we say yes to full and deep living.

The How of Spiritual Formation

The foundations of formation are disciplines that Spirit uses to form us. It is important to know that this is not a quid

pro quo arrangement in which if I do my spiritual practices God will give me good things. Rather, disciplines are part of your relationship with the One who calls you Beloved. They are a response to God's invitation and your way of cooperating with the divine work being done in you.

How does that feel to you? How do you feel about this sacred invitation into more of who you are? You may notice, in addition to your desire, that you feel some resistance. That is natural, and it is good to explore your resistance and any other obstacles to spiritual disciplines you may notice. But don't let your resistance convince you that spiritual disciplines are not worth the bother.

This story might be helpful:

Once upon a time, a group of people from Chicago left their jobs in the high-rise office buildings, moved to the prairie, and bought some farmland. "We're farmers!" they declared to each other. All summer long they would go to the field to watch their crop grow. But when September rolled in, their fields were filled with golden-rod, wildflowers, and weeds. "Where's the corn?" they asked each other. And they wondered what they could possibly have done wrong.

The Reading Room at the
Water's Edge
drawnear.org/prayerministries/SpiritualDisciplinesPart1.pdf

Spiritual formation is being formed into the people we are created to be.

Do you see the profound and practical need for good habits? Disciplines support your life choices, your commitments, and your relationships. They are part of how we live with integrity, in a way that aligns with our beliefs and with the Kin-dom of God.

Just about anything can be a spiritual discipline; it just needs intentionality and regular practice. The Quaker Richard Foster describes twelve classical disciplines in his book *A Celebration of Discipline*: the inward disciplines

of prayer, fasting, meditation, and study; the outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission, and service; and the corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. Silence, play, gratitude, hospitality—these and more can be spiritual disciplines when practiced with intentionality and regularity.

Formed by Friction

Spiritual formation is cooperating with the Divine work being done in you.

Spiritual formation is both an individual process and a communal work. In the friction and yielding of interpersonal relationships we are formed. While this may not always be pleasant, it is deeply rewarding and it yields the sweet fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

The invitation is in your heart. How will you respond?

Take some time to reflect on and pray with these queries and talk about them with people in your meeting:

- In what ways have you been formed? Who and what have done the forming?
- What are the obstacles and openings for you as God forms you?
- What is God asking you to put onto the potter's wheel for forming, or re-forming, right now?
- How are we formed collectively, as a faith community?

NY

Mary Kay will be traveling in the ministry in NYYM April 6-19, 2016. She will be available for visits with meetings, small groups, and individuals, as well as for retreat and religious education programs as requested by meetings. If you are interested in scheduling a visit, please contact Lu Harper (lu-harper@gmail.com) or Anne Pomeroy (apomeroy10@gmail.com).

By Willpower or by Grace?

Steve Mohlke

(continued from page 1)

The standout memory from that experience for me was when someone asked if we do this for 20 minutes a day, how many days do we need to do it in order to feel an effect. Mark responded that if we did it every day for three months, then we wouldn't need to ask that question.

It took a while before I was ready for a daily 20-minute commitment but when I finally did it, I discovered he was right. After a while, I noticed I was more settled and present in weekly meeting for worship. My racing mind could make short pit stops. I noticed that when life's inevitable bumps and disappointments came my way, my response was closer to my best self rather than my worst self. I became less susceptible to society's persistent message that I am not good enough. When the passage I chose to focus on went stale, I found another. When the whole meditation practice went flat, I changed to journaling. The benefits remained. When my ability to write dried up, I found it important to read. Then I circled back to the meditation.

Eventually I noticed that I could skip days and still retain the benefit. I started skipping more and more days until I wasn't doing it anymore. After a while, the benefits dissipated. In the years since then, I've been off and back on with a daily spiritual practice enough times to know, deep in my soul, that my life is better when I have some form of daily spiritual practice. The content of the practice matters much less than the regularity of it. Many spiritual elders besides Mark Kenmore name the value of daily practice. My experience confirms this for me in ways somebody else's words never could.

Several months later, I attended a Drawing Out Gifts weekend workshop at Powell

House led by Christopher Sammond. I had no idea what "Drawing Out Gifts" even meant, but I'd heard of Powell House, I'd liked Christopher when I had met him earlier, and it seemed like a good opportunity to try something new. I don't remember the details of what he did to gather us together and help us open up to new possibilities, but soon I was trying things outside of my experience, such as actively receiving God's love and directing it to a person facing



Daily Spiritual Practice

me. By Saturday afternoon I experienced a high level of mutual trust in the group. We formed concentric circles and, among other things, we were asked to look into each other's faces and name gifts that we saw. This was a real stretch for this introvert who would prefer never to look anyone in the eye, but I was moved to do it because of the community we had built in less than a day. I was astonished at the accuracy with which people whom I had just met could name the gifts I brought to that community and how I could name gifts in others. This became part of my new openness to trusting Spirit.

A month later, Arthur Larrabee's clerking workshop taught me both the pragmatic and spiritual aspects of our business practices. The weekend was loaded with "Ah-ha" moments that clarified the reasons behind some of the "rules" I'd heard over the years. The

concepts I learned helped me begin to understand some of the nonsense that occurred at some Quaker business meetings I'd been a part of. More importantly, my new understandings gave me knowledge about what to do and the courage to act. As I clerked NYYM Financial Services through 2008 and 2009 and then my meeting through a major transition, I learned and practiced how to do hard things together. During the years following my awakening, I furthered my formation by becoming a frequent attendee at Powell House and FGC Gatherings where I learned



about elder-ship, discernment, healing, prayer, and more.

By 2012, I was hungry for more spiritual depth

and attended The School of the Spirit's program On Being a Spiritual Nurturer. Like the awakening in 2006, this program helped further deepen my understanding of spiritual matters and opened me up even more. The reading syllabus exposed me to things I never would have read on my own. I found Gerald May's *Will and Spirit* deeply moving. For example, there are things, such as a gathered meeting or finding unity, that we cannot bring about by our willpower alone. We can take steps to set up a conducive environment, but in the end we find ourselves gathered or in unity by God's grace. Besides the readings, our small groups, core teachers, guest teachers, field trips, and projects all served as steps along the path of spiritual formation.

After an initial draft of this article, I took time to accompany my parents as my mother entered the hospital, spent a week in intensive care, entered hospice, and then passed away. During that time, as we made family decisions about removing life support and changed our minds as a group and then

became ready again, I was in unfamiliar territory. Yet I felt strength and familiarity in a spiritual process for decision making that I had practiced with Quakers and now trust in a way I didn't ten years ago. I recognized when we were in unity as a family. I also understood on the occasions when we were not in unity, how to proceed in a way that respected differences.

Spiritual formation makes my life richer and more meaningful.

At the meeting for worship that followed the passing of one of our elders, someone shared ministry that "when one of the big trees falls, the whole forest feels it." I shared this with my mom as we were working through her end-of-life decisions and added that I also understood that when a big tree falls, more light gets through to the nearby parts of the forest and allows for new growth. She couldn't speak but she reached for the clipboard and wrote, "That's my understanding of resurrection." And I knew, on a deep level, just what she meant. Resurrection didn't happen just once a long time ago; it happens to all of us on a regular basis.

I value spiritual formation because it makes my life richer and more meaningful. My spiritual formation journey has been incremental. I look for opportunities and take steps to foster growth but usually don't notice any changes right away. Later, when I take time to look back and reflect, or something dramatic happens, I recognize that I understood or handled a situation better than I would have earlier. Sometimes I feel completely aligned with Spirit to the point life can't get any better. Other times I feel I've reached bottom and I don't know how to go any further. There is a small death. Then, maybe, something opens. I am surprised. A new opportunity emerges. The growth begins again. Resurrection.



Children's Spiritual Formation

Melinda Wenner Bradley

(continued from page 1)

through Godly Play and Faith & Play respectively, at First Day School, and our household was a place where imagery and language for Spirit were part of the everyday.

In *Through the Eyes of a Child*, Dr. Rebecca Nye shares that children's spirituality is everyday, integrated, verbal, and non-verbal—and endangered. For even the youngest children, Spirit is present and integrated in moments of challenge and joy and deeply connected to how they understand themselves—from the time before they have any spoken language for their experiences.

For even the youngest children, Spirit is present.

Working with early adolescents in Friends schools, I found them longing for a place to talk about what they believe and the many questions they have about faith and belief in their lives. In our meeting communities, we hope children and youth find a safe place to share. We also need to be watchful not to treat the openings they share as “sweet,” or “cute.” Over time, children will hide or ignore their spirituality if it is critiqued or not taken seriously. Religious education for young Friends can plant seeds of life-long spiritual formation when it affirms a young person's present, growing spiritual life. How do we nurture ways to weave together what is taught in First Day School and youth programs with what is “caught” in their interactions with the Quaker way in the meeting community and with their own experience of God?

Thinking about the range of experiences that exist, not just developmentally for children and youth, but among individuals in an experiential faith, I'd

like to propose a few core ideas for nurturing young Friends' spiritual lives across childhood and adolescence:

1. *Support parents:* The people who raise us are our first teachers, and pastoral care for children begins with care for their caregivers. When they cross the threshold into a meeting community, help parents explore both their individual spiritual journeys and hopes for spiritual community for their family. This isn't a process that ends when a family has become members or when kids have grown into teens. Parenting continually challenges us to adapt and grow, and spiritual nurture of caretakers at all ages is an ongoing endeavor for the meeting community.

2. *Engage in reflective attentiveness:* Isn't this one way to describe what we engage in when we worship? With any First Day School curriculum materials, where can we make space for imagination, creativity, and play together? We are not passive receivers of truth, but active seekers. How can we make space for children to explore and reflect on what they experience through silence, story, and community? Do we make space in worship for children to join us? (That's often a messy question, one that can challenge meeting communities and parents alike. I think we have work to do and ideas to share to make that space. . . . see #4 below.)

3. *Create safe spaces:* To thrive, children's spirituality needs safe spaces to explore, to come closer to what is bigger than them, and to trust in both the knowing and not-knowing. It's about balancing intentional child safety in our communities with the relationships built between us and between generations, and with God. Spaces have boundaries, and working with children and youth means adapting those outer edges as


On Spiritual Accompaniment as a Calling and in a Vocation

Lu Harper, Rochester Meeting

An ongoing thread in my Quaker life has been opportunities for accompaniment as a spiritual practice. I first became acquainted with Friends in college, where I shared housing with a local Quaker family. My Quaker “mom” practiced what I have come to think of as “kitchen table Quakerism”: deep listening and open-ended, non-judgmental queries that encouraged deep sharing in community.

In my adult life, I have often been a “listening ear” for others within and outside of Quakerism. Some aspects of Quaker practice have strengthened me in these opportunities, from serving on clearness committees for significant life issues, including marriage or membership; serving as an elder accompanying retreat leaders

young people grow and gather experiences. We may be called on to create safe space in new ways, to trust in the child and trust in Spirit showing the way for all of us.

4. *Invite them to the table:* In religious education programs for children, youth, and also for adults, we are laying a table with what Quakerism has to offer today. Like many family gatherings, there may also be a children's table—a place like First Day School. This table needs to exist because sometimes children need a space that is their own, to try on ideas, to play, learn, and be in community together. At the same time, we need to make sure we ask children to pull up a chair at the “big” table. We need to invite them into fellowship, learning, and worship within the larger community. They need to know there is a place for them, for their voice, there. We need to do this both for our children and for the future of Quakerism. 

Melinda Wenner Bradley is sojourning in Long Island Quarter.



and ministers; holding corporate bodies of Friends in prayer during business sessions; providing adult religious education opportunities; and serving on long-term anchor committees for Friends called into public service and ministry.

In 2007, after a period of intensifying calls for and experiences of such accompaniment, including being “yoked” as an elder to a young friend with significant developing gifts in ministry, my husband Kenn and I were led to support this calling by taking the School of the Spirit's two-year course On Being a Spiritual Nurturer.

This spring, in the course of applying for a job, I was led to write about how I approach my professional life as a form of spiritual accompaniment. The writing was an opening for me to see the ways I had already integrated this practice into both my Quaker and my professional life.

In the opening paragraph, I wrote:

“One who is called into the work of spiritual accompaniment practices deep, respectful listening; cultivates relationships based in mutual learning; provides practical support for another's work; carries a concern for the well-being of the body and is open to unexpected opportunities; creates space for “way opening”; creates structures of integrity & mutual accountability; serves the community as led;

continued on next page

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is grounded by both history & experience; and provides opportunities for witness and testimony in a meetinghouse of ideas.”

I saw specific collegial relationships and projects as examples of this accompaniment, and over the course of the application and interview process, I became clear that I was not yet released from those relationships and that work. One reason is that I have been blessed with mutual accompaniment in these relationships, in a workplace that for many years has been incredibly supportive.

Thomas Kelly, in *The Reality of the Spiritual World*, speaks of “the internal prayer of carrying:”

“Within the fellowship there is an experience of relatedness with one another, a relation of upholding one another by internal bonds of prayer, that I can only call the prayer of carrying. Between those of the fellowship there is not merely a sense of unity when we are together physically; with some this awareness of being bonded through a common life continues almost as vividly when separated as when together. This awareness of our life as in their lives, and their lives as in our life, is a strange experience. It is as if the barriers of individuality were let down, and we shared a common life and love. A subterranean, internal relation of supporting those who are near to us in the fellowship takes place.”

Over the years, my husband and I have had the sense that certain individuals were “ours,” given to us to carry in this way for a time. It has happened in many parts of our lives, Quaker and non-Quaker. This accompaniment has been, and continues to be, one of the greatest blessings of our life.

“Have you had the experience of being carried and upheld and supported? . . . And do you carry some small group of acquaintances toward whom you feel a peculiar nearness, people who rest upon your hearts not as obligations but as fellow-travellers? . . . These are not a chance group of people.

change, ongoing struggles for the acceptance of LGBTQ friends and family, systems of racial injustice in schools and prisons . . . The list is long and whenever I spend any significant time reflecting on it, the awareness of my complicity with those systems emerges. I consume too much. I need to be a more outspoken supporter of my friends and colleagues who are people of color. I pay taxes into a pool of funds that bombs and polices with policies I often find suspect. The list of my complicities is often just as long as the problems themselves.

Welch, however, suggests there is a way through.

What she calls “the ethic of risk” has three components, each a vital part of maintaining a sustainable resistance to forces that can feel overwhelming. Each of these three components seems to me to be a practice of spiritual formation, a way of exercising the muscles of our faith and learning to listen more closely to the Inner Teacher.

First, we must redefine what “responsible action” is, giving up on the idea that to act we must do so with the certainty that we are helping or solving. As Welch puts it, “responsi-

They are your special burden and your special privilege. No two people have the same group to whom they are bound in this special nearness. Each person is the centre of radiating bonds of spiritual togetherness. If everyone who names the name of Jesus were faithful in this inner spiritual obligation of carrying, the intersections would form a network of bondedness whereby the members of the whole living church would be carrying one another in outgoing bonds of love and prayer and support.” (Kelly, *The Reality of the Spiritual World*)

Have you had this experience?



Risk and Formation

Callid Keefe-Perry

(continued from page 1)

ble action does not mean the certain achievement of desired ends,” simply the commitment to act so as to pave the way for imagining that further action is possible. Woolman did not end the practice of slavery, but he did help to open people to the reality of its evil.

Welch’s framing feels familiar to me. When I return to my meeting after traveling in the ministry, I am not asked “Were you successful?” I am met with a harder question: “Were you faithful to the leading?” Faced with pressing issues, we ought not calibrate our self-criticism in comparison to perfection. Do I believe that the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God can happen in our midst? I sure do. And . . . I trust that if we act as we are led, it matters, even if what we do “isn’t enough” on its own.

Second, we must ground our actions of resistance in community. Welch argues this pointedly: “we cannot be moral alone.” If Isaac Penington was right and our life is supposed to be “helping one another up with a tender hand,” then we need a place to work at that.



What I yearn for is to grow in the Spirit with my community, being called out when I’m out of line, being encouraged when I need it, and trusting throughout that we are all striving to listen to that small voice that calls forth the peaceable kingdom. I want us all to have a place to practice. I want my daughter to have models and mentors in her own community. And I want that modeling and mentorship to be part of weekly (and daily!) life, not

just things we experience on Sundays or on retreat. Formation happens most powerfully when it happens at home. Where it can be practiced routinely. And failed at. And practiced again. Our meetings can stretch out far beyond Sunday morning.

Spiritual formation is listening more closely to the Inner Teacher

Lastly, Welch calls for us to practice “strategic risk-taking.” We ought to (1) reject the idea that we can’t move ahead until we’ve addressed all the minutiae, and we ought also to (2) be on guard against what we might call “outrunning the Guide.” Howard Brinton once described our practice of communal discernment as forging reason and revelation in the fire of worship, moving forward based on both pragmatics and prophetic witness. I think this is just the kind of approach Welch seems to advocate.

I don’t want to suggest that Friends have it all figured out and Welch just confirms that. Rather, I think that we have stewarded some practices within our traditions that we might want to rely upon more heavily in our shared life together. I think that that communal formation happens at the monthly meeting level. Our moments at FGC Gathering, quarterly meeting, and Powell House certainly might serve a purpose, but if we seek a faith community in which we try with powerful engagement to live ever more fully into that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars, we need to make sure that the place we practice most is with each other.

I believe our meetings can become places of even more profound spiritual formation. To move this way, it seems to me we need to be willing to take more risks and to encourage the development of interpersonal (and intergenerational!) relationships that ground and support making those risks in ways that are faithful and strategic.



Help in Finding One's Way

Christopher Sammond, Poplar Ridge Meeting

In 1989, I had a powerful leading to go to Pendle Hill for their residents' program, a ten- to twenty-week commitment. Knowing that I was pretty green as a Friend, my committee of care from my monthly meeting advised me to ask for a spiritual director once I got there. Naively, I did. I had no idea what a hornet's nest I was about to kick. The brouhaha that ensued was really remarkable.

At issue was the question of whether or not it was appropriate as Friends to believe one Friend could lead or guide another in their spiritual development. If we are being led and guided by the Inward Teacher, what could any human agent add to that? And isn't it always a struggle to find your way in the dense forest of the spiritual life? That struggle itself was viewed as valuable, and if you helped someone too much, perhaps you would rob them of that struggle's benefits.

Yet a few Friends saw some value in having an experienced guide who had learned to hearken to that inner voice, had learned a few paths in that forest, and could help others to do so. After a long and



painful process, some institutional acknowledgement arose that students just might benefit from having Friends in the role of spiritual nurturers (any sense of "direction" was beyond the pale). However, in the larger philosophical and institutional questions, my particular needs for some help were left dangling.

Fortunately for me, there were some deeply experienced and gifted Friends in the 35 residents that year. I went to one aged, compassionate Friend, and asked her how she centered down in worship. She taught me a prayer that she had found helpful, and that helped me to spiral down through a raft of thoughts and emotions into something resembling centered worship. For some time, at least one to two years, I used that prayer to find that place where God and I meet, until I didn't need it any more.

I received other help, counsel, and support in the weeks that followed as I wrestled, seeking direct experience of the Living God. It was a hard, lonely time for me. I got some support each week from my staff advisor, which Pendle Hill assigned to each resident. He was a good soul and a good companion as I wrestled, and very supportive. But the kind of help I needed was not in his range of gifts. Not everyone, no matter how seasoned a Friend, is automatically suited to the work of helping another person find their way in our distinct practice as Friends.

We liberal Friends have come a long way since then. The School of the Spirit has offered a course "On Being a Spiritual Nurturer" for some years. Just in my contacts alone, I know of two Friends who have hung out their shingles as spiritual directors, and have Friends as clients. The idea that one Friend might be of use in helping another find their way in the turbulent waters of spiritual discovery is now much more commonplace and accepted. Yet, too often, we still expect our newcomers and children to somehow pick up our practice by osmosis. It's like we see someone struggling in a deep undertow and say, "I wonder whether they

are going to learn how to swim? Gee, I hope they make it," without thinking that perhaps some help in learning a few strokes that we have arduously acquired ourselves might save them some needless struggle.

The roots of what we most seek, what we most hunger for in our meetings—powerful worship and deep and loving community—lie ultimately in the spiritual formation of individuals. Some NYYM monthly meeting Ministry and Counsel committees are providing a coordinated approach to growing in the Spirit together, often because the community is experiencing some friction or disharmony, and they have recognized the need for spiritual formation of both individuals and of the community as a whole. Some meetings have designed or borrowed Quakerism 101 programs, which have helped to make sure that those who are newer to our practice have some help in finding their way.

But that is just the start of a meeting's potential role in offering opportunities for spiritual formation. From meeting retreats to study groups, from "Friendly 8" dinners to Bible study, from hymn singing to men's and women's spirituality groups, the possibilities are virtually endless. Our meetings have a vital role in this work of formation, and the fruits of this work will enrich worship, transform the business process, and deepen the community.

**Ultimately,
it is God who
directs, God
who forms.**

Tending the Garden

Emily Provance

(continued from page 3)

a new series of workshops and retreats that will travel to any group of Friends or Friends meeting.

If your meeting is looking for a day-long retreat on discernment, we can do that. If a group of young Friends is feeling led to explore prayer, we'll be there. Whether it's for a weekend or a couple of hours, whether it's forgiveness or vocal ministry or pastoral care, whether it's intergenerational or otherwise, the Spiritual Nurture Working Group will work with you to clarify the need and connect you with a facilitator. We're also planning some retreats to take place at Powell House. The aim is to help individuals and meetings sink more deeply into Quaker faith and practice . . . to facilitate conversations in which Friends can speak their experiences and testify to Truth.

It's serious work, but we also know joy to be the surest indicator of the presence of God—so we've prepared these workshops in the hope that we will laugh a bit, play a bit, and gratefully grow in the presence of the Divine.

To learn more: contact the New York Yearly Meeting office, or find full descriptions on the website at nyym.org/?q=SpiritualNurturePrograms. NYYM

Ultimately in spiritual direction and spiritual formation, it is God who directs, God who forms. That does not mean that we have to stand back and watch someone struggle fruitlessly. Ours is a difficult, challenging practice and those who have acquired some skill with it can often make the difference between a seeker's finding their way and giving up in frustration. Our meeting communities can play a significant role in this process. NYYM