**Report on the Winter 2014 Meeting for Discernment**

Held at Purchase Monthly Meeting March 1, 2014

*The passages in quotation marks in this report are from the notes of the four friends who served the meeting by taking notes. The passages are direct quotes from the notes but may not be the exact words that were spoken. We trust that the spirit will still shine through them. To preserve the flow of the report quotes that have been condensed are not noted. One Friend recited for us the 42nd Psalm; interspersed, in bold, are verses from it. Friends from at least 19 meetings spoke: Brooklyn, Butternuts, Central Finger Lakes, Chappaqua, Chatham-Summit, Conscience Bay, Croton Valley, Easton, Fifteenth Street, Manhattan, Morningside, New Brunswick, Old Chatham, Poplar Ridge, Poughkeepsie, Purchase, Rochester, Scarsdale, and Wilton.*

“What we are good at has no words,” and yet this report must try to convey, in words, the experience of the sixty-two Friends from across the Yearly Meeting who were brought together by “willingness, open hearts, the place, the lunch” to meet our need “to talk and to look to God.”

**As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.**

We considered the same queries in the morning and afternoon sessions:

Life is movement.  What tools do we each have for finding our center and for linking it with others?  What happens when we make that connection?  What are the markers on our spiritual compass?

How do we cope with pain when we find it in meeting?  In our community?  In the world?  Is there a gift in the pain?

We answered, “Yes, there is a gift in the pain—that gift of searching yourself. The gift of reaching out to your neighbor.” “When there is pain, you move to act and to look for someone whom you trust.” “I’ve learned to be grateful for pain because without recognizing the pain I wouldn’t change.”

**My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?**

We found that pain comes from perceived differences, differences that can be overcome in community and in our hearts. “There is no one who is not of good will, not of the belief that they’re proceeding in the way that they’re led, and yet, some of those ways are in conflict with each other.” “If I’m going to find pain in my meeting, it’s going to be in business meeting. I take it back to being open to change. If there’s pain, it means that not every person there is open to change. It’s not that we necessarily have to change, but it means that we have to be always open to the possibility that what I hear might change me.” “We have to keep going, Friend, and break bread with people we disagree with.” “I love Jesus’ way of teaching. I encourage each of you to meet with Friends you think are different from you and just sit and be in the Spirit together.” “One day at meeting I was laboring over how to let annoying people into my heart. First one, then the second, then three or four people I let in, and then I heard the inward voice of Christ say, ‘Where two or three are gathered together in your heart, there am I, in your heart, in the midst of them.’”

**When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday.**

Our experience of community, of ourselves, and of God is in part one of seeking balance. “With all of us struggling to understand how to be the best channels of God and yet seeing things differently, I’ve become deeply aware of the need for balance.” We need “balance between faith in our message and the need to express it, and on the other hand the call for humility because we are all imperfect channels.” “I’m on the [Meeting for Discernment] steering committee and one source for the queries is mobiles. They are made of units, each beautiful in its own right, that then are put together so they balance and complement each other.” “The queries talk about movement and the center as though they are a dichotomy, but in fact I think the center is also in movement, and that movement, if I can find it properly, is what gives the center its stability.”

Friends spoke of a variety of ways to seek, hold, and move with the center. “Read more. Choose your own interest and go for it, for the sake of your meeting, for the sake of the Religious Society of Friends.” “Our tools are our bodies that help us look at each other and see each other.” “One tool is yoga; walking is another, seeing trees and connecting to God.”

“One tool that I cherish is awareness of my breath. Another is the practice of gratitude.”

“Committee work is a service to the community, but I feel that whenever I do it, God supports me in my personal life. But if I let my personal life get out of balance - with my finances or my health - in order to do service, the spiritual growth doesn’t happen.” “Quaker tradition has some good ways, such as clearness committees.” “Claremont dialogue helps us to share from the heart.” “I love these queries and I had some long answers - but then I thought, ‘smile.’ I connect to my center by smiling – or crying. It goes in circles. That’s how I connect.”

Friends spoke of the challenges and joys of the life in their meetings. “A lot of people are coming to us, an abundance of new life, and it’s a lot of work, mentoring and explaining, but it’s abundance!” “We’re very sure and steadfast in what we believe but we’re really bad at articulating that.” “We have less free time now to give to voluntary organizations.” “The core of our meeting is disappearing, the core that’s been there for 50 years. And new faces are showing up. Committed to different things, but committed.” “There’s been pain recently in my meeting. The pain comes from disagreement about the way forward. It’s been of some duration now and there has recently been progress.”

“Each year our meeting decides on a theme, and this year it’s forgiveness. This is our third month of talking about forgiveness.”

**O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.**

We experienced the movement of life as a call from the depths for trust and felt that the spirit of the Society of Friends will never die. “The inward Christ, whatever we call him, her, or it, calls us to die to self, which is not as scary as it sounds. We may lose our group identity, our meetinghouses, all, but the Spirit will still call us to worship and witness together. And as we die to self and become transparent vehicles of Christ, we become attractive, we draw people, and we draw them from what is false to what is eternal and reliable and satisfies eternally.” “People often talk as if the kinds of things that will preserve our community or make it come together are institutional planning or a common theology or things than can be somehow organized by leaders, and maybe they can, but the things that make me most hopeful are the many people in this room who have made me a better person by being things I need to be.” “’Life is movement,’ and I keep hearing that around the Yearly Meeting. Many say, ‘The Yearly Meeting is in a state of transition,’ some with hope, some with fear. I spoke with a woman who had been very active in the 1990s and she said, ‘Back then, we were in a state of transition.’ At first I thought that was a problem, and then I realized it is the best state we could possibly be in. We are open to being led by the Spirit.”

We joined with each other and with all creation. We are all needed, and can rest in that. “We all have souls, all creation has soul.” “The greatest thing I’ve learned is that Jesus welcomes people for who they are, not who they think they are.” “Sometimes I think we shouldn’t try so hard to fix things. We fail and that carries over into our meeting for business, our work lives, all areas of our lives.”

“It is an abundant universe, that there is an abundance of people who understand what we understand, people and resources are abundant, God is abundant.” “Where else can we sit in complete silence and be so well understood?” “The Spirit is really with us this afternoon. A few minutes ago I was sitting here longing for a Jeremiah to say woe to Yearly Meeting and longing to hear a Psalmist—and both rose.”

**Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.**

**Yet the Lord will command his lovingkindness in the day time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.**