



SPARK

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

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15 Rutherford Place, New York, NY 10003

September 2024

Holding Gender in the Light



Guest Editors: Katherine Alford, Anne Pomeroy, Cai Quirk

The desire to devote an issue of *Spark* to issues around gender arose after the approval of the “Love Thy Neighbor Minute” at Spring Sessions 2024. (Read it at nyym.org.) In the course of our discernment there were times it was clear that we as a body needed more perspectives on the issues of gender identity. This issue is a beginning toward reaching that goal. We broadly solicited articles about gender identity. We did not cull out articles that did not recognize gender identity. We simply did not receive any such articles.

Quakers have a long history with the power of language and how we

address each other. Our choice of words is a reflection of how we see and respect each other's light. This is reflected in several articles submitted about Friends' journeys around the continuum of gender pronouns.

When we embrace gender diversity, we live in to our testimonies of equality and community.

Gender identity is not a ‘new’ issue. There have been gender queer people throughout history. We invite the reader to continue to have conversations about different perspectives on gender so that we can be a more whole spiritual community.



roots entwined, a photograph by Cai Quirk, part of their Transcendence: Queer Restoryation series. See more at caiquirk.com/transcendence

An Invitation to Explore Gender

Anne Pomeroy
New Paltz Meeting

On our spiritual journey, we deepen our sense of who we are which can include deepening our sense of our gender identity. As a spiritual community that affirms that all are welcome we are called to see the Divine in all gender identities and expressions.

How do you see your gender? What have been your experiences around gender? Do you have clarity or do questions arise? I invite you to do a self inventory.

Each of us is on a journey around gender. Some of us identify with the gender that we were assigned at birth. Others of us struggle with

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And We Evolve

Lisa Pellegrino
Hudson Meeting

Love is a boundless energy which, when truly free, overflows all the ideological vessels that society constructs to contain it.

— June Singer, *Androgyny*, 1976

I get it. We were all taught from an early age that there are only two genders. It's taken me a while to understand the difference between biological sex, gender identity, and culture & psychology.

I wish all conversations about gender started with an acknowledgement of this reality:

“We often conflate male with masculine, and female with feminine, when in actuality each of us contain energies of both.”

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Visible Queerness

Cai Quirk
Ithaca Meeting

Content Warning: bullying and assault

I came out as transgender over twelve years ago, and as gender-fluid/genderqueer since then. This whole journey has been a spiritual one, discerning where Spirit is leading every step of the way. Some people have wondered if I am queer simply to get attention, if I try to be weird so that people see me, if being so visible stokes my ego. I am trans because Spirit leads me here. Other trans people may have other and perhaps secular words to describe their transness, but for me my gender is inextricably linked with my commitment to follow Spirit. Will being visibly and vocally trans bring more visibility and attention?

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Love Thy Neighbor

Ann Kjellberg
15th Street Meeting

It has long puzzled me that Jesus was very direct with us about his priorities. “Love one another as I have loved you,” he said. “Love your neighbor as yourself.” He underlined an important aspect of this teaching — that it extends even, indeed especially, to people who are outcast or oppressed or suffering — by coming to us in the form

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Around NYYM:

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Gender in the Light: pp. 4-8

Notices

New Members

Paul Becker — Chatham-Summit
Elizabeth Riker — Syracuse
Ed Smoot — Chatham-Summit

Transfers

Rebecca Boucher, from Brooklyn to Bulls Head-Oswego

Deaths

Angel Ramos, member of Rochester, on August 10, 2024.
Andrea Sears, member of Brooklyn Monthly Meeting, on August 8, 2024.
Thomas Scott Shedaker, member of Manasquan, on May 22, 2024.
Henry Alan Weisel, member of Conscience Bay, on May 16, 2024.

NEWS

Sign up for the Weekly Update

An email newsletter is sent to NYYM Friends each Friday. Past editions are available at nnyym.org/weekly-updates. To subscribe, fill out the brief form at nnyym.org/subscribe.

World Quaker Day is October 6!

Celebrate being part of a global Quaker community! Visit fwcc.world for more.

George Fox is 400!

Quakers around the world are celebrating the 400th anniversary of George Fox's birth with events throughout the year. fwcc.world/fox

UPCOMING EVENTS

ARCH Foundations Workshop

4 part series: Oct. 7, 14, 21, 28, 6:30-8:30 pm ET via Zoom
ARCH is a pastoral care program of NYYM that holds that our interdependence and mutuality are important tools for navigating the changes brought by aging. The workshop is developed as a series of meetings complemented by additional exercises, readings, and group activities. Sign up at nnyym.org/arch

Friends' Decision-Making and Clerking: Participating in Meetings for Business with Joy and Confidence

Nov. 22-24, at Pendle Hill, with *Steve Mohlke and ,O*
A weekend workshop on liberatory clerking skills, particularly valuable

Around Our Yearly Meeting

for meeting clerks and others doing decision-making work within a spiritual setting. Visit pendlehill.org

NYYM Fall Sessions

December 6-8, Online
The next gathering to conduct the business of the NYYM will take place fully online, Dec. 6-8. Details will be announced in the Weekly Update email and in the next *Spark*.

POWELL HOUSE WORKSHOPS

Visit powellhouse.org/event-list/ to register or call 518-794-8811.



Fall Work Weekend

October 25-27, 2024, in person
Enjoy learning new skills? Like to work among 57 acres of God's creation in Columbia County, NY? Bring your favorite tools, old clothes and hearty appetites.

Living into Prophetic Quakerism: A Series of Three Spiritual Nurture Working Group Retreats

Facilitated by *Lu Harper and Anne Pomeroy*. The retreats:

- **Continuing Revelation: Moving Beyond Form into a Living Quakerism**
Nov. 22-24, 2024, in person
Continuing Revelation is a key aspect of our faith. In this retreat we will make space to hear what we are experiencing as Quakers and what we sense is needed. We will look at Quaker forms that have life and evolutionary potential. What must we carry forward? What supports a sustainable faith?
- **Transforming Quaker Culture: Building Authentic Spiritual Community**, Feb 14-16, 2025
- **Stepping Forward Faithfully: Answering the Call and Becoming the Solution**, Apr 25-27, 2025

FOR YOUNG ADULTS

See Children, Youth and Young Adult Community Director Beth Kelly's list: nnyym.org/yaf-events.

Stewing, Bubbling, Brewing

for Young Adults (18+)
October 18-20, 2024, at Powell House
What's cooking in your cauldron? This conference is all about the patience and slow work of creating something beautiful and nourish-

ing. We will center a lot of the theme around cooking with lots of food projects. Additionally, we will have discussions that will broaden our scope to anything from social justice to creative projects.

FOR CHILDREN & TEENS

Powell House Youth Conferences

Visit powellhouse.org/event-list/ to register or call 518-794-8811.


Junior Counselor Training for 9th-12th Grade, Nov. 8-10, 2024
Calling all current and future junior counselors (JCs)! Here's your chance to carry the torch and see Powell House through new eyes. This conference serves as a training for new JCs as well as an opportunity to bolster your skills for current JCs. In addition to gaining skills as a JC, you can expect to have a fun and fulfilling weekend with plenty of games and connecting activities.

Worlds Like Our Own for 6th-8th Grade, November 22-24, 2024
Who would you be in a world of fantasy and adventure? Role-playing games can allow us to reflect on ourselves and our world in fun and exciting ways. At this conference we will play games like Dungeons and Dragons, talk about our favorite imaginary worlds, and maybe even design a role-playing game set at Powell House.

WinterSong 2024 for 7th-12th Grade, December 13-15, 2024
WinterSong is a celebration of care and community during the darkest days of the year. As we approach the winter solstice, we will share in fulfilling activities and discussion, and burst with fun and creativity. We love to have a big group for our "song" conferences, so please consider registering early for this special weekend!

OPPORTUNITIES

Seeking Executive Director(s) for Powell House

Spread the word! The Powell House Committee seeks an Executive Director(s) to help guide and realize our vision for the future with creative, expanded programming and extended outreach in New York Yearly Meeting and beyond. Visit www.powellhouse.org/seeking-executive-director for details. 



Quaker Portraits

Corey Devon Arthur is a published writer, an artist and a Quaker. He says that "becoming a Quaker has allowed me to confront the pains of my inner truths within a community of love and trust." He is a member of the Otisville Prison Worship Group and is an at large member of NYYM.

He has created a collection of Quaker portraits — an eclectic representation of Friends spanning 400 years. He loves nothing more than connecting people through his art from behind prison walls, and he invites us to gather in community to share reflections and stories

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inspired by these paintings. The portraits are of George Fox, Margaret Fell, Mary Dyer, Bayard Rustin, Honey Knopp, Robert Martin and Judy Meikle. Each person has spent time behind prison walls in some shape, form or fashion.

You might be interested in exhibiting the original paintings at your meetinghouse. An online presentation on Zoom is also available. For further information contact Judy Meikle, jubilantjudy@gmail.com. 

NYYM Epistle From Summer Sessions

To all Friends everywhere, Friends gathered at Oakwood Friends School and over Zoom for the 2024 New York Yearly Meeting Summer Sessions to ask the question: “Where is the love?”

With great joy, we felt love in intergenerational play; in deep, worshipful spaces; and in fresh approaches to spiritual exploration. Love shone through tearful smiles as we remembered beloved Friends.

Interwoven with our joy was conflict and challenge. Old and ongoing wounds around othering were revealed. Pain rippled through the body. Love was present and tested.

We hope for commitment to listen faithfully and hold each other across differences. We have much to learn from looking into the depths of the shadow with humility. Conflict offers potential to move us forward in community. May Spirit show us the Way.

In Friendship, we close, continuing to travel a path towards action and insight, as yet unforeseen.

We include with this letter the epistle from Junior Yearly Meeting, lovingly received.


JYM Epistle

Our JYM Epistle this year is an advertisement for Summer Sessions. We are advertising to those who have not come about how awesome it is to be here. We chose this format so other kids can hear from those of us who were here about why to come, instead of something written for them by adults. And we are excited for our epistle to be an official report to the yearly meeting, included as part of the whole community here at Oakwood.

Our Epistle is a large pink poster with some of the many activities we

did this week. Activities listed are: “*What are you doing?*”, “*Sparkling Yoda*,” *Blindfold game*, *Reverse charades*, *kickball*, *Frisbee*, *volleyball*, *cornhole*, *soccer*, *art*, and *slip ‘n’ slide*. *Presentations including: learning about the faulty prison system with King from AFSC*, *talking about food and water security with Emma*, and *meditation with Abby*.

Other fun things were: *Karl the dog*, *contra dance*, *swimming field trip*, *spontaneous singing*, *Fun(d) Fair*, *bonfire*, *the coolest lounge*, *movie nights*, and *Café Night*. *Our snacks were: Goldfish*, *pretzels*, *popcorn*, *cheese puffs*, *yogurt covered animal crackers*, *fruit snacks*, *freeze pops*, *fresh out of the oven cookies*, *ice cream*, *lemonade*, *watermelon*, *honey covered pretzels*, and *classic fresh cool nice clean pure amazing smooth brisk straight from the fountain refreshingly delicious Karl approved... WATER!*


Side effects may include: *Extensive laughter*, *loss of voice*, *fatigue from fun*, and *intense joy*. 

Witness Against the Death Penalty

According to the Death Penalty Information Center, “The death penalty is supposed to be reserved for only the worst of the worst crimes. But legally irrelevant factors such as race, geography, and the quality of counsel disproportionately determine who is sentenced to death. Studies show no link between the presence or absence of the death penalty and murder rates. The death penalty carries the inherent risk of executing an innocent person.”

Our faith calls us to see that of God in everyone and to work for the abolition of the death penalty. This year to date, 12 prisoners have been executed in 6 states in the United States. There are 8 remaining executions scheduled this year. One of these — Emmanuel Littlejohn — has been granted clemency by the Board of Pardons and Parole in Oklahoma but is still scheduled to be executed on September 26. It will require Governor Stitt to follow the recommendation of the Board and sign off on Littlejohn’s appeal. You can write a letter to the Governor urging him to take this action. Details about Emmanuel’s case and how to write to Governor Stitt are on the Death Penalty Action website

(deathpenaltyaction.org)


NYYM now has a Death Penalty Resource Page: nyym.org/death-penalty-abolition — with links to organizations working on the abolition of the death penalty. Please visit the NYYM website and find ways to stay informed and take action! — *Judy Meikle, NYYM Death Penalty Resource Person* 

A Plea and a Prayer Editorial by Don Badgley Poughkeepsie Meeting

One of the distinctives of the Religious Society of Friends is that our decisions and actions, that we sometimes share in the world, arise in *corporate* discernment. The fundamental and foundational principle that guides this process is that we are led, led only by the Divine Guide and Light. Such leadings may arise with individuals, with committees and within meetings. These leadings are then brought and tested by the entire body. We have no hierarchy to make official pronouncements or to endorse the writings of others outside of that process. We are called to act only when in unity, unity that has been discerned by our clerks as the “sense of the meeting” — and then approved, by the entire body.

It is essential to understand that true unity cannot occur without first achieving the higher Unity and Oneness with our Eternal Source. Absent that, all else is compromise, concession, consensus, and worldly advocacy. And there, we are ever deceived. This does not mean that Friends or committees who feel led to offer concerns and public witnesses for meeting discernment should hesitate to bring such concerns. To bring a concern to the body is a demonstration of faith, faith in the Source, and faith in the gathered body to discern the Truth.

As we Friends continue our journey through the 21st Century may we once again return to the simplicity of waiting in the Light to *discern* our way forward. May we find patience with one another in the spiritual certainty that arises in that which is eternal and unchangeable. May we avoid the seductive distractions of transient causes that arise in the world of separation — be it a worldly “urgent call” or other momentary political cause.

May we also avoid divisive accusations, indictments and confessions, and rather, may we simply and humbly point toward the Light that Guides us with Love. May we demonstrate this Love — not with ineffectual challenges to the powers and principalities of the world but by revealing the power of the One Love that includes all of creation. May our ministries reflect our Unity with the Divine, and may we have the courage to share joyfully over the world the Love that unites us — as we strive to answer that of God in everyone we encounter. 

Editor’s Note

Spark welcomes submissions of articles, artwork, poetry, short news items, and letters to the editor. Email them to communications@nyym.org.

Upcoming *Spark* themes:

November 2024 — Music in the Meetinghouse & in Our Lives. Has music been a form of ministry in your meeting for worship? What was (or is) that like? Can music be integrated without overshadowing the silence? Does music contribute to a sense of community within your meeting? If so, how? Are there particular types or forms of music that resonate with Quaker values?

Can music be a form of prayer or meditation for you? How does music enrich your life?

All Friends are invited to respond, whether you attend silent, waiting worship or worship that regularly incorporates hymn-singing. Articles should be 600 words or fewer. We will be creating a Spotify playlist of songs suggested by Friends. If you have a song that speaks to you and your Quakerism, please send in a link and the artist & title! **Email submissions to communications@nyym.org by October 7.**

Join NYYM’s weekly email list at nyym.org/subscribe.

NYYM is on **Facebook** (NewYorkYearlyMeeting) and **Insta** (newyorkyearlymeeting). —*Sarah Way, NYYM*

Communications Director
communications@nyym.org





Holding Gender in the Light

An Invitation to Explore Gender

Anne Pomeroy
New Paltz Meeting

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a lack of congruity between our assigned gender and what our true gender identity is.

Think about others' gender identities. Is it important to you to know someone's gender? Does someone's gender impact how you relate to them? What are your feelings about people whose gender identity falls outside the female/male binary?

One example of the journey occurred in a Quaker book group where we discussed gender. One Friend adamantly said there are only two genders. Later that year, their grandchild informed them that they were transgender. This Friend began a journey of understanding gender that went beyond the binary that they had learned and that our culture teaches. Today this Friend is comfortable respecting the gender identity of other people.

We now know that gender is a continuum rather than a binary. To understand a person's gender identity, we need to look beyond their body presentation. We also need to understand that what is true for one person may not be true for another who identifies the same way.

There are many gender identities. Gender identity is the experience of the individual about their gender, regardless of their body presentation. Cisgender is when the gender of one's body matches the gender one experiences as their true self. Transgender is when one's body does not match one's gender identity and the person changes how they present. Nonbinary is when a person experiences a gender that is beyond the female/male dichotomy. For some people this is a neither/nor experience (the identity is neither female nor male) and these people may use they/them pronouns. Genderfluid is when someone identifies neither

as solely female or male but experiences each identity. While there are many gender identities, the label may be less important than seeing each person for who they are.

Pronouns (she/her/hers and he/him/his) reflect a culturally defined gender identity. Pronouns such as they/them or ze/zer are used by people for whom the culturally defined gender pronouns create



mony and sunny by Cai Quirk, part of the Queer Temple project.

internal dissonance. When we use pronouns that do not align with someone's gender identity a person may feel unseen or worse. When we as a community identify our pronouns (in check-ins or in zoom windows, etc.) we are recognizing and creating a norm that there is

a continuum of gender identities. When the norm is not to identify pronouns, then there is a burden on those with gender nonconforming identities to self identify, which contributes to a sense of marginalization. We can contribute to being a loving community by identifying our pronouns and respecting the pronouns others use to reflect their gender identity.

Recently I was accompanying someone who referred to themselves as a pronoun-unhappy person. As we spoke they reflected on the way that when someone used she to refer to them it caused harm. By the end of the conversation this person became clear to use they/them as the pronouns that most closely fit their gender identity. Using they/them does challenge some English grammar rules; however our language does not have other gender neutral pronouns. Perhaps one day our language will evolve to have gender neutral pronouns. In the meantime, it is important to the wholeness of our community to not dismiss gender identity.

As Quakers, we believe in seeing that of God in everyone. This asks us to see and respect the gender identity of all. Gender identity is a journey. The invitation to all of us is to learn and to recognize the Divine in all, regardless of gender identity and gender expression.

And We Evolve

Lisa Pellegrino
Hudson Meeting

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— *Mythic Deviant, Sea Gabriel, fellow Friend in Seattle*

Words Create Worlds

Language has, and always will, evolve. As do we. We can look to science to help us understand the nuances beyond the antiquated perspective of a gender binary. COVID-19 pandemic aside, the scientific method has become an incredibly helpful empirical framework for settling debates where facts supersede opinions, involving careful observation, repeatable experiments, and peer review. Hallelu!

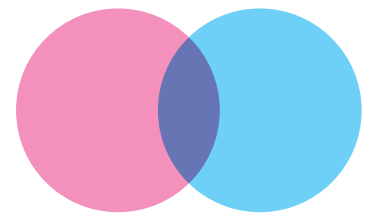
There's an instructive web page by Cade Hildreth called "Gender Spectrum: A Scientist Explains Why Gender Isn't Binary." When we think of gender or sex many of us only consider external genitalia, a penis or a vagina, which is just one of the 10 biological markers of sex. None of these biological markers is bimodal; they all vary and are diverse across the human species. In addition to external genitalia, the other biological markers of sex are:

- internal genitalia
- chromosomes
- gonads
- hormones
- gametes
- secondary sex characteristics ("features that appear during puberty, but are not involved with reproduction")
- skeletal structure
- gene expression
- brain structure (highly recommend Dr. Robert Sapolsky's research on the neurobiology of transsexuality)
- hormone receptor sensitivity

I have found search terms like "queer ecology" particularly insightful and healing in understanding how varied biological sex presents in not only humans, but in all of the natural world (female hyenas have huge penises! whaaaaa!?!?). It's been interesting to note how younger generations instantly embrace these concepts, while also noticing how older generations struggle, often riddled with confusion, especially on related topics like pronouns. Again, I get it. It's hard to keep up.

Many of us have a fear of being wrong, and when issues related to sex and gender, or race come up, we're inevitably going to get it wrong. But we live and learn, no?

So how is gender related to Quaker Faith & Practice? In a word, TRUTH. An integral part of Quakerism is not only about asking questions, but asking questions in the pursuit of seeking truth. Oftentimes, truth can be found beyond a binary concept of "right" and "wrong." In my humble opinion, the ability for one's mind to hold contradictory realities, or "holding both," can be a spiritual act.



Let us educate each other on how transgender individuals have always existed, will always exist, and learn the scientific basis behind the varied ways that biological sex presents in humans. I share this information with you so that you too can be equipped with the facts. Civil discourse is one of the key ways that we've evolved as a species. While I know many people's minds and hearts won't be changed by science, logic, and reason, I know how much my own mind and heart have expanded with this knowledge. Now. How to turn it into wisdom?

Love Thy Neighbor

Ann Kjellberg
15th Street Meeting

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of an outcast, oppressed, suffering person. "What you do for the least of these, my brothers and sisters," he said, "you do for me."

Friends took from this teaching that there is that of God in every person, that this consciousness is at the heart of moral action. This is the fundament of most of our testimonies: of equality, of peace; I would say also of simplicity, because what you consume is drawn from the resources available to others and distracts from your attention to the exercise of love — as Jesus, and

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our Friend John Woolman, demonstrated with their own simplicity. To live simply is to liberate oneself from structures that harm others, the structures that arise from greed.

Jesus was also clear that living by this obligation is strenuous, and requires unwavering moral attention. So I've always found it puzzling and revealing that so much of the energy of Christian doctrine became distracted from this call to love by a punitive preoccupation with sins of the senses, sins of temptation. Of the "seven deadly" ones, first enumerated as far back as the third century, nearly half — lust, gluttony, and sloth — are sins of the flesh. Sex has always risen up as the most powerful and potentially dangerous of these, felling otherwise virtuous Christian heroes throughout literature. Of course there's plenty of study of this impulse, tracing it to Paul and early church fathers and other things, some having to do with patriarchy and who controlled religious institutions. I'll leave that for another day, except to note that, unlike the Hebrew Scriptures, where, as in much of life, connubial love and longing and jealousy play a large role, Jesus did not take much apparent interest in sex, except in one instance — in order to accept and embrace a person who lived outside sexual norms. How did Christianity become so preoccupied with sex, down to, for centuries, threatening eternal damnation for even thinking about it? How did so much Christian doctrine fold into this sexual taboo so many proscriptions against people simply living honestly and humanly as themselves, or making responsible life decisions? How did so many people become convinced that all these proscriptions were matters of importance for Jesus, when he was so explicit about other big priorities, pretty demanding ones, to which many followers of Christianity have seemed to devote not-that-much attention?

Friends have been blessed that the clarity of our recognition of that of God in every person, born of Jesus's injunction that we love one another, has helped to lead us out of many historic wrongs, or at least guided us toward beginning

to escape them, and prompted us lovingly to help others to liberate themselves too. It is time for us to extend this legacy to challenging Christians' historic subjections on the basis of sexual expression. Like slavery, the oppression of women, and the conquest of native peoples, the oppression of those with non-normative sexual expression has long grounded itself in bogus appeals to Biblical authority. Friends know, from the voice that speaks within us, to see past such misappropriations of Jesus's message. We are called by the Light within to stand with those who are persecuted and to renounce, in the name of another of our testimonies, integrity, the arrogation of Christ's teachings to serve oppression and persecution.

Friends of the New York Quarter have been blessed to have among us trans and non-binary fellow seekers who, by the courage of their living in integrity as their full selves, have witnessed to the gathered body the justice and urgency of their cause. We celebrate their bravery and the revealed Truth of their godliness. It is by dwelling with open hearts in inclusive community that our Society has been opened, again and again, to the divine in all, been continually renewed and reawak-

ened, and prompted, again and again, to cast off oppressive dogma. The wider we are, the more various we are, the deeper — and more transformative — is our listening. It was with solidarity and gratitude for this opening that we adopted our minute "Love Thy Neighbor," embraced our trans and non-binary Friends' cause, and brought it to our yearly meeting, which joined us in the Spirit. We call on all Friends to extend the sacred principle of love of neighbor toward people of all gender expression, and take as a mission of our body the effort to secure for them full human rights and civil protections. The Light has led us through the centuries to stand as one with the oppressed and build the beloved community that Jesus enjoined us to commit ourselves to with full hearts.



Visible Queerness

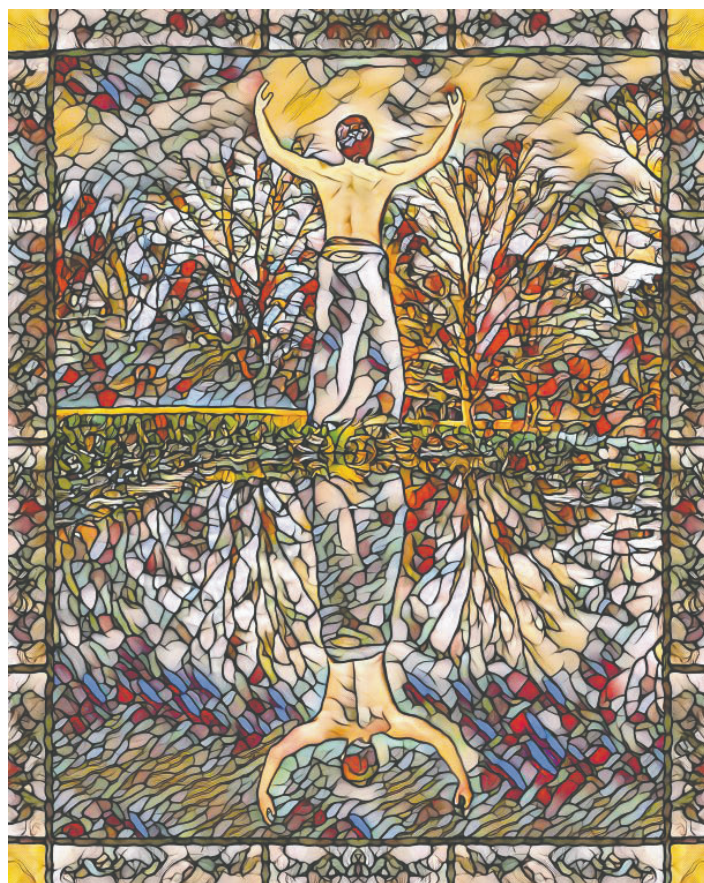
Cai Quirk
Ithaca Meeting

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Perhaps, but it is Spirit I'm seeking, not the attention. The attention may come as a result of society not being fully welcoming to trans folks, but in another time and commu-

nity where a variety of genders are welcome, Spirit could lead me in the same ways and it wouldn't seem out of the ordinary. I don't have a choice in being trans/genderfluid, I have a choice to be faithful or not in following how Spirit made me.

If this was a choice I was pursuing to seek attention in this society, whether now or twelve years ago when I came out, I would have chosen something more conventionally likable. I would not have chosen something that got me bullied and harassed in school and on the streets, I wouldn't have chosen something that got me assaulted eight times, I wouldn't have tried to hide being trans for years, I wouldn't have created art where I would have to wonder if I was risking my life to show it to the world. I wouldn't have wished desperately to be 'normal,' though thankfully I'm more healed from that denial of Spirit and self now. I don't do unconventional things or have less common identities because I'm trying to be weird, I am this way because I'm willing to be faithful even when the things I'm led to are not conventional. Being faithful is more important to me than being normal.



cai mirror by Cai Quirk from the Queer Temple project. The Queer Temple is a sacred space that uplifts, cherishes, and celebrates the humanity of queer folks, especially those that transcend gender. See more at caiquirk.com/queer-temple

Multicolored

Cai Quirk
Ithaca Meeting

they can try to

- erase our stories
- erase our multicolored identities
- erase our very bodies from this earth

but they cannot hide

- the stories the land holds for us
- the rain that returns the knowing to us
- the sun which sparks seeds hidden within us

for we are reflected

- in seasonal cycles of creation and growth
- in every raindrop and color of the rainbow
- in fire's transformative power

since we

- are natural to this earth
- are made in the image of nature's wide spectrums
- are intrinsic to humanity's rebirth and wholeness





Holding Gender in the Light

Listen.

Omen Weaver
Powell House

When I sit with someone and listen to them, it is the most holy thing I can do. It is a gift and a mission to try to put myself in another's shoes. There is so much we can learn from others if we allow ourselves to consider what it must be like to experience what they do. I know many Friends struggle with the concept of pronouns or varying genders and I would invite those friends to think about why it's difficult for them. In my experience, from having those conversations and listening deeply to what Friends have to say, it often comes down to this: "if I allow myself to admit that the norms of society no longer apply, it means that they never had to apply. It means I suffered."



A Friend's Journey

Katherine Alford
Morningside Meeting

It was four days before our son, who is transgender, was to have gender affirming surgery, and my insurance company, Aetna, informed me that it would not be covered. This was a shock, as I lived and worked in New York, where such discrimination is illegal — but because the health insurance policy of the company I worked for, Scripps Networks, had been written in Texas, this could happen.

I called the insurance hot line and thankfully there was a sympathetic and caring person on the end of the line. She coached me on how to ask the company to make an exception for this one case. I called the Corporate Human Resources office in Tennessee. I didn't rant or rage — although I wanted to. My Quaker faith grounded me; I was calm, respectful but persistent. I spoke my family's truth: this was about our son's health and wellbeing. Like so many mothers throughout time I discovered a formidable strength to protect my child. My advocacy came from love.

The woman from HR listened, she was kind but held the company line. She said she would get back to me. I didn't have much hope that



Detail of *each twilight* by Cai Quirk, part of the "Transcendence: Queer Restoryation" series.

this would change. But there was no turning back; we would have to pay the \$40,000 bill.

My son taught me how to be a parent to a trans child. It was not easy. I was hobbled by gender binary concepts that kept me stuck. I made mistakes and learned from them. As a feminist, being the parent of a daughter had been part of my identity. But we never really clicked on typical mother-daughter things. In hindsight, I get it. He was always gender nonconforming. We didn't have that language, but it was true.

I completely embrace our son's gender identity, but it took time. He was in college when he began his transition. When he first started taking hormones, I was terribly anxious. How would he change? When he came home, would I recognize him?

I told him of my fears. "I'm scared that you're going to be different," I said.

"I'm not different," he said. "This is who I've always been. I just now know who I am." That stopped me in my tracks. During transition, we bonded in ways we had never been able to before. WE transitioned and opened as a family.

When he was hassled on the subway, I worried about his safety.

But my son is incredibly brave. "Are you sure you want to transition?" I asked him.

He was really clear. "If you can't be with me," he said, "I am still going to do this." I am awed by his honesty and grateful to him. I am a better human, being his mother.

This is a scary time for families like ours. A legion of hateful right-wing legislators wants to marginalize us for political gain. There are over 530 anti LGBT+ plus bills across the country right now. And

the trans community continues to be a pawn in political hate speech from presidential, congressional and school board candidates.

When gender non-conforming adults, children and families are demonized it diminishes us all. Is there one way to be female or male? Being bound by a rigid gender binary dims the Light in all of us. Gender is not fixed or monolithic. This diversity is our human strength; a chorus of voices lifts us all up.

Transgender and gender nonconforming children are at risk of violent abuse and suicide when parents and communities aren't supportive. When we went with our son to see the surgeon, the first thing the doctor said was "It makes such a difference when the family's here." Being supported by families, he told us, is key to successful treatment.

We in our yearly meeting may think we are protected from this viciousness. But this is our problem, too, if an employer can deny health benefits in New York because its insurance policy was written in Texas. Or deny access to books,

limit what can be taught in schools and hinder equal protection under the law.

On the day before the surgery, I called my company again one last time. This time they told me that they had decided to cover the cost — and not just as an exception but as a change in the company-wide policy. I have never felt prouder of my son, who is helping to change the world. This was in 2018; I wonder if they would make the same decision today?

NYYM's Love thy Neighbor Minute in support of transgender, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people is true to our testimonies of equality and community and our foundational belief in the Light in everyone. We can and should be powerful allies. Transgender and gender nonconforming people deserve our unconditional love, acceptance and protection. We are all better for it. An expanded understanding of gender is consistent with Friends' belief in continuing revelation.



potential responses aside from "other"

nova sturup
brooklyn meeting

gender was a birthday present delicately placed as far away from me in the room as possible, thank you, i did not need one, though few would accept the return unboxed and explored. my gender is not, lol — my gender is not one single item i am, some gender which is not one i am i, but also we, as in gender is a collective agreement addendum — my gender is not a collective agreement. my gender is in absentia, some days — others it is a packed house, standing room only my gender is in the fifth house, with my sun, creative and passionate and full of expression my gender is in space, like the name nonbinary euphoria told me was mine my gender smells of sandalwood and rosemary i apply two times a day if i remember to bring it with me my gender still breathes messy sometimes i accept the gift of comfort in the shape of a divinity that is as gender queer as i am, imago dei makes gender divine co-creation my gender is my breathing-joy, the place where it is safe to ask, to live, to be, the question.





Ashtar Sheran Avital Shtapura Montclair Meeting

The image above is a 2024 illustration of alleged extraterrestrial being, Ashtar Sheran. This was painted digitally in Photoshop by Avital Shtapura based on other illustrations of Ashtar. Ashtar is the peaceful Commander of the Pleiadian Star Command, first described by George Van Tassel in 1952. Sheran purportedly was keeping humans safe from the hydrogen bomb and sought to prevent the Earth's destruction from nuclear war.

The art incorporates a few symbols. On the left side of the chest the Star of Ishtar can be seen. This ancient Sumerian symbol represents the ancient Mesopotamian goddess of love, war, fertility, divine law, and political power. Next, his cuff has an upside-down Venus symbol. This represents 'Attar, Ashtar's namesake: an ancient Semitic god, identified with the planet Venus, the morning and evening star.

The inversion of the female symbol and correlation with transgender colors is intentional, representing the transcendental and ascended maleness of Ashtar.

A rainbow is visible, representing both divine joy and peace on Earth.

The star cluster above Ashtar's head is the Pleiades star cluster, a constellation inspiring mystical folklore across nearly all human cultures.

The halos around Ashtar represent the fact that he and his fellow beings are supposedly able to generate energy so powerful it is visible to the human eye.

On Respecting Another's Gender Identity

Lu Harper
Rochester Meeting

Quite a few years ago, a friend came to our house to have a conversation with my husband and me, sharing with us their understanding of themselves as a gender non-binary person. Their mother held space for the conversation around the kitchen table.

I was deeply moved that my friend cared enough about their relationship with us to disclose their understanding of their gender identity, and to ask for our support. They shared their preferred pronouns and we talked about the practical difficulties of switching from the pronouns we had used for them for all the previous years we had known them, and how to make corrections when we messed up from habit. They suggested that if we stuck to speaking of them by their name rather than using pronouns, unintentional misgendering would not occur. And they asked us, if we unintentionally used the wrong pronouns, to apologize, and to restate our words using the correct pronouns. All of this was said lovingly, knowing that the information was new to us, and that changing habitual ways of thinking and speaking about someone requires intention and work. More importantly, we were being asked to continue to lovingly support our friend in their new understanding of themselves.

I still mess up, with this friend, and with others. I am grateful when someone lovingly reminds me that I have used the wrong pronouns, as it gives me the opportunity to correct myself, and to reinforce my mental pathways around the gender of this individual and my intention to lovingly support them.

In Quaker spaces, we currently create opportunities for Friends to share the pronouns that reflect their gender identity, for example, in our zoom windows or self-introductions. This is an opportunity for all of us to consider our understanding of the diversity of gender identity, and to hear the implicit

request for Friends to respect each individual.

Early Friends also used pronouns in ways that were non-normative and disruptive of societal expectations. They refused to use the formal You to individuals, since when used with individuals it implied a hierarchy of worth rather than the equality before God that Friends testified to. Powerful 17th-century authorities found being addressed as "thee" challenging. So too, cisgender people today may find the use of neutral pronouns equally disconcerting and challenging.

Non-normative pronouns call into question binary understandings of gender which, for many of us, were inculcated, and thus normalized, in our childhood. It can be hard work to notice and change these long-time patterns of thinking and language use. We have choices.

Sometimes, when invited to share pronouns, Friends respond by making unlikely statements such as "I don't use pronouns," or by substituting non-pronoun words or phrases in referring to ourselves. Other Friends raise grammatical issues, telling others how to correctly use pronouns for individuals and groups. I wonder whether these are expressions of discomfort, or whether those Friends are inviting us to not use pronouns at all, or to only use the named words and phrases in referring to them. Have we given a thought to how responses such as these might be experienced by those whose preferred pronouns are seen as non-normative? If we experience discomfort with another's pronoun choices, how might they feel to have their preferences ignored or criticized? Might we instead make an opportunity to openly explore the roots of our discomfort, so that we may be opened to new understandings and move more deeply into supportive, loving relationship? Will we respect the identity of our beloved Friends?

Although early Friends' use of "thee" and "thou" to all resulted in assaults and prosecutions, it was a witness intentionally maintained by the body of Friends. Just as early Friends were persecuted in the 17th-century for their pronoun use, gender non-binary people increas-

ingly are being persecuted today for living into their full gender identity. If we understand everyone as a child of God, living into authenticity and into the wild diversity of creation, perhaps we can step into deeper understanding of gender identity as a witness to equality, an invitation into new possibilities and understandings, and a call into loving relationship in community.

A Changed Mind and Heart

Barbara Sinacore
Albany Meeting

Two scenarios brought about my transformation of mind and heart regarding Trans people.

Snapshot:

As a senior citizen, I listened to a song:

I Only Want to Be Pretty

By Debra Burger

*It's not the coarse hair on my chest
that defines me.
But a knowing inside about who I am
I'm missing the round breasts that
should be there instead
But I do the best that I can*

*I only want to be pretty,
In a red velvet dress
With the scent of perfume in my hair
To feel the soft touch of
French silk on my skin
To gracefully dance on the air*

*They called me a homo, a
Sissy, a queer
I ate all my lunches
Alone
There's no place in
School for a girlie-boy
No place to be welcomed
and known*

*I tried to be normal.
I packed up my pearls
No lipstick or lace for two years
I went through the
Motions, gray day after day
With no laughter, thin
Smiles and dry tears*

*I've made friends with
the mirror and my new
lipstick brush
I've a red velvet dress that I wear
Some folks snicker, some
Laugh, when I walk down the street*

continued on next page



Holding Gender in the Light

continued from previous page

*Some hold their breath
while they stare
And I wonder why they
Would care
I only want to be pretty*

My heart hurt and enlarged. Just because of that song.

Snapshot:

Years earlier two naive girls hitched rides in the UK in winter with dark approaching. A truck pulled over. We got in. The trucker did the usual courteous talk. But then: “You girls wanta see something?” Below workaday jeans were black fishnet stockings and cherry red spiked heels .

The frigid weather, being women alone, and the encroaching dark made us appreciative of his ride. That day a trans person became three dimensional for me. The ride may have saved two lives.

How to deal with my unconscious prejudices toward trans people/others?

1. Can I recognize that I am doing this, preferably at the time of the thought, before acting?
2. Do I accept I had this thought? Remember: Thoughts come up to be healed. Also, change is difficult if there is no acceptance that one has done something in the first place.
3. Am I, as a Quaker, comfortable with this thought/or action?
4. If not, how can I replace faulty with reliable information about the problems/victories of trans people/others?
5. Using accurate details about difficulties with housing, employment, health insurance, see a video in the mind’s eye: a scenario with conversation. See YOURSELF as trans and experiencing this. Let yourself feel

into that role. Ask, how would I handle this?

6. What can I change in attitudes and behavior? What would make escalation into action less likely?
7. Give yourself “a star” inwardly for facing yourself. Hard to do.

This nation, I believe, is suffering from a lack of imagination. Divisiveness and prejudice feed on not being able to place oneself in someone’s red shoes. We can imagine it, IF we value it.



What If We All Used “They”?

Nadine Hoover
Buffalo Meeting

Many people find it difficult to use “they” for a singular person.

The pronoun “you,” reserved for aristocracy, was originally plural. When people overcame the rule of monarchs, they used the plural term “you” for everyone, rather than reverting to the singular term “thee” for the aristocracy. Using the plural “you” as a singular pronoun for everyone was an act of justice.

Today, we are overcoming sexism and removing male terminology as an inferred reference to everyone. In English, I prefer the term Spirit, specifically because it has no gender. I have no problem with the word God in other languages — Allah, Tuhan, etc — when the word has no gender. Using the plural “they” as a singular pronoun for everyone could also be an act of justice.

What if we all used “they”? We could drop the male/female pronouns of “she” and “he” altogether and focus on the content of what’s going on rather than the gender.



Letter Writing in Support of Transgender Rights

Suzanne Blackburn
Genesee Valley Meeting

At Spring Sessions, April 2024, New York Yearly Meeting approved “Love Thy Neighbor: A minute in support of the dignity and basic human rights of transgender and gender non-conforming people.” In part, the minute reads, “We urge our elected officials to support legislation protecting the rights, safety,

and human dignity of all people regardless of their gender identity or gender expression.” In that minute, I heard a call to action for Friends to contact their elected officials. I was led to develop materials which NYYM Friends could use to write to their elected officials, and then sit down with Friends to write those letters.

With the support of some Buffalo Friends and with Cai Quirk, we developed four documents; the QR codes below link to each one. To use a QR code, point your smart phone camera at a code and click on the link that appears on your phone.

A list of resources which includes links to websites for people to look up New York State and federal elected officials, links to organizations that track NYS legislation related to transgender issues, and links to advocacy organizations.



A sample letter to elected officials that includes a brief description of who we are as NYYM and the text of the minute. This file should be copied and customized by a letter-writer.

A document with the text of the minute and the date it was approved.



A list of current bills of concern making their way through the New York State legislature.

These documents focus on New York State. Yearly meeting Friends in New Jersey and Connecticut may want to adapt these materials for their own state.

With printed out letters, stamps, envelopes, and QR Code papers in hand, I attended Farmington-Scipio

Regional Spring Gathering from May 31 to June 2. Several Friends joined me in writing a total of 15 letters, which were all sent out the following week.

The links for the resources in the QR codes above are available at nyym.org/spark.



Left: The letter-writing table at Farmington-Scipio Spring Gathering, May 31- June 2, 2024. Photo by Suzanne Blackburn.