

Excerpts from the 2014 Summer Sessions Meeting for Discernment July 23, 2014

Morning Queries- *What are your hopes and dreams for your Monthly Meeting; for your Regional/Quarterly Meeting; and for New York Yearly Meeting over the next 3-8 years? Where might God be leading us?*

My hope is that with the approval of the work of the Priorities Working Group that we will see ourselves as a body pulled together, that people will be called to leadership and we will trust and welcome the talents and gifts of these leaders.

My hope is that we raise Quaker children in a way that meetings and the Society of Friends are not simply a context for transmitting the right values. A community is a precious legacy. We need to discover and reconstruct a sense of organic beloved community.

My hope for the Religious Society of Friends is strong. My prayer is that we get our light out from under the bushel. My call is to evangelism; to get out of the Quaker cocoon. I have great joy in Quakerism, and great optimism for the future of the Religious Society of Friends. [With all the many Quaker organizations, and with the many ways we can connect in this global digital age], I wonder – are we in the first paroxysms of the struggle to lay down Yearly Meetings?

I hope we'll be able to see disappointment, pain, grief, conflict that attend diminished resources as opportunity to exercise the muscle of love, in the confident expectation that that muscle will be needed in the work that attends for us.

I dream of a Quaker organization that at all levels is a robust channel for Quaker ministry in which we fund ministries rather than committees. That our meetings are eager and competent in discerning and supporting those ministries. That regional meetings welcome the discernment of monthly meetings, take on recommendations for larger work and are likewise eager and competent. And that yearly meetings take on even larger work eagerly and confidently, for work beyond the yearly meeting. So that there's a constant fountain of God's work rising up from meetings. And everyone has served on clearness committees and feels safe and confident that what we fund has received the same attention and support.

We are each of us conscious of a Source outside of space and time that we gather to touch and be touched by. All struggles, causes, hopes, dreams are solved in this knowledge and experience. We need to share words of great power not limited to any form. Fox said the Spirit of Christ is unchangeable. Woolman spoke of a Principle which is pure. I discovered something today from the brother of Jesus. "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." (James 3: 17-18)

We have been given a charge. Our struggles and difficulties have already been solved. Our task is ministry – broadly and courageously.

My hope is that we take the time to see all individuals, regardless of age, and raise up their gifts, and the service they have been given to do in this world. I belong to a CSA, and recently there was a need for

many pots to be filled with dirt to grow seedlings. Someone realized- kids like dirt, and they are good at filling containers. So they recruited a bunch of 2 to 9 year olds and they joyfully filled 3000 pots in two hours. The adults were pleased to be spared the task, and the kids were thrilled to have made a contribution to their future food.

[Many friends spoke of a longing for spirited activism: “My dream for all Quakers who attend New York Yearly Meeting is that a burning bush of understanding of the need for coupling Earthcare and Social Justice sweep through and move us to action.” Another friend spoke of a new abolition movement to get rid of the new form of slavery seen in the school to prison pipeline, solitary confinement, and the prison industrial complex. Other goals brought forth included Quaker education for people of all socio-economic classes, and service to those with substance abuse problems, homelessness, and autism.]

Reflections on the Morning Session

I took the elder role in this morning’s session and sat with a certain detachment. What I heard was like a symphony. Nothing was left unsaid in the morning. Anything that I wanted to have heard was heard.

When the meeting for discernment was first proposed, I was extremely dubious. I was concerned about usurping things that were the prerogative of the business meeting. I was wrong. From my sense, what the meeting for discernment has done is to teach people the depth of worship that is possible, the space out of which messages can be given. I was particularly touched this morning by the quality of the extended worship and then the messages that arose from the body.

Afternoon Queries - *This morning we considered our hopes, dreams and leadings for the immediate future. May God lead us this afternoon as we consider how we are going to achieve this vision.*

We had a job fair recently; nobody signed up for committees but many people signed up with gifts. Our meeting is now beginning to figure how to nurture people’s gifts—without committees.

Some years ago, I was told “You are the elders we have been waiting for.” I didn’t know they meant me. I don’t know if we are up to the task.

I feel estranged even though I was in the first group of Powell House youth, graduated in the second class of Friends World College, did my alternative service, married internationally. I’ve returned reluctantly to NYYM at the urging of Earthcare witness. In my youth I felt that we were given license about what to do. I was part of the New Swarthmore community. What we needed then and need now is elders guided by the Presence in the Midst. Only one God and that God IS. The God in the Bible is I am, and we are made in that image. We need to be in touch with this reality, which is our creative power. Our faith is founded not on the niceness of human beings but on the spirit moving in our lives.

One gift is patience. God is *so much vaster* than my Patience.

Acceptance of myself and of our meeting. Our meeting is small but we are doing things. Worship sharing that includes others; vigils that include others; stone soup isn’t just Quakers.

Over the years I've seen meetings and committees rise and fall in their capacities. The resource I could name (which is simple) is **people**. I can think of meetings where people arrived and the meeting thrived, and the reverse. Likewise in committees.

We shy away from naming, embracing and developing the gifts of our Friends. The gifts are given by God for the good of the community. Naming, embracing, supporting and holding them accountable is how we thrive.

I have a vision of a people of faith and I ask you to carry that with me because sometimes I waiver and I need you.

I'm dubious about the official recognition of gifts but it's important for us to appreciate what people are doing.

Not quite a need, more a desire...an intense desire: To be able to see my life as part of a story, the story of my species, struggling generation after generation to find a way to live together in peace and love and harmony with the earth, and joyfully. And what I bring to the Religious Society of Friends is the conviction that this is not my design, this is the desire of each and every human being who breathes or has ever breathed.

Reflections on the Afternoon Session

The afternoon had a slower pace – not sleepy, but a slower, deep rhythm, where we got to a pretty deep place that we haven't always gotten to.

After the messages started, one friend was giving a message and I had a clear sensory experience of my mouth being filled with sweetness, so I think that this afternoon was quite sweet.

I was glad to hear this afternoon the number of things that are gifts friends bring to the world that transcend how we organize. I also heard that some kind of support is greatly necessary to make it work.

Reflections Session

For me, this experience began Sunday night when we had a meeting for the elders. When I was coming to the meeting, I was grumbling about so much time devoted to this stuff, and the minute I walked into the room, I felt so centered. I was wrong, we need this time, it is valuable. You never know when practice will speak to you and call you to the center.

One of the things that's growing is our knowledge of the practice of deep worship. We as a body have really learned how to do deep worship together, and that is a gift. Also, the more we have deep worship in this space, we teach the space how to hold that worship. That's true in our own meetings. So our practice makes a difference – the accumulation of experience is important. We are a very different body in practice than we were at the first meeting for discernment here.

There's one more thing to raise up and that is the intentionality that we bring both as individuals and as a body to holding not just what happens in meeting for discernment, but also what happens in our sessions and between sessions, how the work that God is calling us to is being filled in our Monthly Meetings and Regional/Quarterly Meetings, and taking the time for opportunities as we each experience

and respond to them – some experience them through prayer, some through visions, imagery. What holds us together is when we bring a level of intentionality to our practice together.

Reflections on the Experience of Eldering

For me, eldering is an opportunity for prayer. It's an opportunity to hold the meeting in prayer. It was an opportunity during morning and afternoon worship when a person was speaking – I was praying for that person at the same time, so whatever came out of the person would come out with enlightenment. I was able to use the opportunity to sing songs – I was worshipping. When eldering, you have to carry the people, lifting up our brothers and sisters as they speak, because we need to have that flow, the in and out. So when I'm asked to elder, I have to step back

I want to honor the trees. When laboring at eldering, I turned to the trees out there and asked for help and sure enough, the trees helped, as did the breeze coming through here.

Regarding my experience of holding Ann Davidson as the clerk, I had the experience of the three of us [Ann, myself and the other elder holding Ann] as being one; that we were together. It was an incredible experience.

I want to thank the elders who shared their methods. I found that very, very helpful.

Morning Session: Lucinda Antrim, Clerk,
John Edminster and Karen Snare Note Takers

Afternoon Session: Ann Davidson, Clerk
Karen Reixach and Steve Ross Note Takers

Reflection Session: Roger Dreisbach-Williams, Clerk
Spee Braun Note Taker

Report Prepared by Roger Dreisbach-Williams and Ruth Bryan

Quoted from ministry received, except whatever is in brackets