

Introduction to Quakers and Friends Ways

Session 3 - The Meeting Community - Worship and Ministry

Introduction

Friends in Canada meet for worship in many different places and spaces, on different days, and at different times. Still, we have in common a 'settling into silence in our community'. The following quote from Margaret Springer, section 3.19, *Canadian Faith and Practice*, describes one Friend's first experience:

3.19. At first I am most aware of the beauty of this place. The warmth and sunshine of a glorious fall day; the dappled shade in which we sit. I hear the rustle of leaves, the sound of neighbours discussing their garden, a screen door banging, and the far-off shouts of children at play. But gradually the silence deepens. I am less aware of my surroundings. I hardly notice when someone rises and beckons to the children. A shuffle of feet on the grass. A murmur of voices. Time seems suspended.

Then, someone speaks, about looking for God in our lives. Again there is silence. Sometimes I sense a feeling of deep peace and timelessness, and catch a glimpse of a profoundly moving religious experience, of God in our midst. At other times I am too aware of the distractions, and of the length of the silence. Another person speaks, about what being in this group has meant to him. More silence. Then suddenly the hour has passed. We are all shaking hands with those on each side of us, introducing ourselves, talking, stretching, collecting the children, or going to the kitchen to start lunch. The spell has broken. My first Quaker Meeting for Worship is over.

—Margaret Springer, 1978

Agenda (Lesson Plan)

1. First Worship (10 minutes).
2. Experience of being in worship and from last session (20 minutes)
 - a. What is alive for you right now, coming out of this brief time of worship?
 - b. What questions or reflections have come up for you since our last session?
3. Second Worship (30 minutes)
 - a. Invite Friends to notice the silence, the quality, the 'feel' of it.
 - b. Encourage Friends to be aware of any time they might feel 'even a little' led to speak what comes to them. Welcome them to speak if they are so led, and note that there will also be time to share after worship.
4. After-words: conversation with the group (30 minutes)
 - a. What did you notice during our time of worship?
 - b. Taking turns, read aloud the selections from *Faith and Practice*.
 - c. How have you experienced vocal ministry (from others or being led to speak yourself) in your Meeting or Worship Group?
 - d. How have you experienced Spirit in other ways during worship, or in your day-to-day life?
5. Reflect on the learning: (15 minutes)
 - a. What are you taking away from this session?
6. Closing Worship (15 minutes)

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Selections from Faith and Practice, Canadian Yearly Meeting

3.12. *Through all my changing certainties and uncertainties, there runs a constant thread. My connection with God is fostered in worship. And worship is essential to our lives together.*

Each of us has our own experience of the depth. For me, the focus can vary. There may be inner expressions of thanksgiving or adoration. Perhaps a wrestling with anger or despair; recognition of times I have not spoken or acted in the Light; a seeking of clarity in matters of faith or action. Often my "monkey mind" goes on nattering. But if I am faithful, there's time to calm it down. To set aside my own agenda; to wait quietly in the presence of God, with a brief prayer that my heart may be open. To accept and breathe in the fragrance of the Spirit — or to be startled into fresh awareness of what is required of me on my spiritual journey. At best, if only for a moment, I feel whole, united with God.

—Muriel Bishop Summers, 1995

3.15. *As the Author of all Good continues from time to time to open amongst us the spring of living ministry, it is fervently desired that Ministers and Elders may so dwell under the Divine influence as to be enabled to discern when offerings proceed from the right source, and when they do not, and thus experience a qualification to be nursing fathers and mothers to those who are young in the ministry; with gentleness and wisdom advising and encouraging them to abide in simple and patient submission to the will of God, and to keep to the openings of Divine love in themselves in order that they may witness a gradual growth in their gifts.*

—Discipline, Genesee Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1885

3.23. *When I listen to vocal ministry I try to listen to that of God in the words, but not necessarily the language being used. I love vocal ministry. I think vocal ministry can illuminate a meeting and take away one's self in a way where you are not listening to the "individual" but the Spirit within them. Even if the language is "Christ centric" or whether it's more feeling oriented I can still "listen" not with my ears but with the Spirit within me. That's what I attempt to do in meeting, sometimes better than others, but I try.*

One of the most profound things that Friends "do" in Meeting for Worship is listen. We listen to the Spirit, to God, to the Light, to Jesus, to whatever you want to call it, within ourselves and in others. You hold others in the "light" not to intellectualize their words, but to listen to them with your being. So take away the words, the language, the intellect, the ego, and one is God. There are no quick and easy solutions to the listening and receiving. It's just something as messy and imperfect as people can be. —Rachael Maxcy, 2003

3.33. *Living out the immanent and transcendent aspects of spirituality as a Friend has never been a private matter. Quaker structures depend on the shared inward experiences of members as the basis for worship, the ordering of business, and social and humanitarian action. The Quaker way takes on faith the seemingly irrational proposition that the inspirations of individuals can lead a community to unity and spiritual power, not to chaos and dismemberment.*

—Ursula Jane O'Shea, 1993

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References for those who wish further resources:

Canadian Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice (The Lowe-Martin Group – 2011)
– Chapter 3 – The Meeting Community, pp 70 – 81.

The Committee on Eldership and Oversight of Britain Yearly Meeting - *Quality And Depth Of Worship And Ministry* - Britain Yearly Meeting 2001

William Taber - *Four Doors To Meeting For Worship* - Pendle Hill Pamphlet
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