



American Friends Service Committee

AFSC UPDATES

by Arthur Kegerreis

LIBRLART@GMAIL.COM

(323) 573-4758

AFSC
100 YEARS OF WAGING
PEACE

**(AFSC is century old in 2017.
For the full timeline check it**

Quaker Center Consultation Summary

From October 20-22nd, the Quaker Center held a "Consultation" in Ben Lomond, and shortly beforehand a fire broke out in the mountains nearby, quickly growing from 100 to 400 acres, and yielding front-page reports of injured firefighters in the ravines. Inquiries were met with responses that it was 10-20% contained, over a ridge five miles away, and spreading the other direction. Many of us took a deep breath, said our prayers and packed our bags to go.

Nearly 50 participants from Vancouver to San Diego attended, myself as Orange Grove's representative. We weren't quite sure what we were there for, but understood the time spent would contribute to the life of our Meetings. Bob and Kathy Runyan, Mary Klein, and Henri Ducharme led us through an assortment of activities that helped us evaluate our personal and Meetings' involvement with an assortment of concerns, yielding final presentations that brainstormed ways to share our work with our Meetings. Forthwith, a summary of the weekend, which I hope will inspire your interest to adopt some of the activities for our Meeting.

Quaker Quadrants:

On Friday evening, the first group activity divided the room into quadrants, as we had for some exercises at Orange Grove's Sierra Madre retreat. These quadrants indicated our individual interest and engagement with a concern on one axis, and our perception of our Meeting's interest and involvement with it on the perpendicular axis. North was "My Meeting supports and encourages this;" south was, "my Meeting discourages or is uninterested." East suggested, "I support and encourage this in my meeting," and west; "I discourage or devalue this in my meeting." So people who had a strong interest in a concern but didn't feel that it was valued in their meeting gathered to discuss their struggles, while those who felt strongly supported and in alignment with their meetings discussed the rewards of this in the opposite corner of the room. The topics we discussed included: community; connection to God/Spirit; inspiration/discernment; order/organization; service/stewardship; purpose/challenge; social/political action; and Quakerism. By the end of these seven discussions, we had all met and interacted with most of the attendees.

Saturday began with a "crack of dawn" discussion on George Fox's 10th epistle, relating to addictions, followed by their 7:30am 30 minute worship session. After breakfast, we gathered for the next succession of exercises.

Kathy discussed the importance of relationship in community, and the role of commitment in enduring deep disruptions in our lives. Habits and structure were discussed as helping us navigate these issues - notably Meeting for Worship - as an important opportunity for structure. But how to integrate structure throughout the rest of our lives? "Plants do not go to their roots once a day for an hour" (though I missed the quote's source).

Mary shared a theme she had learned from our Meeting's Blake Arnall, the "Five Fingers in the Hand of 'Church.'" Apparently church attendees' main desires for religious involvement broke down into five key things they were seeking:

- 1) ritual/liturgy (encounter the sacred together, value mystical experience)
- 2) doctrine/philosophy (provide moral compass in world of ambiguous values)
- 3) tradition/history (transmit wisdom and experience of our beloved ancestors)
- 4) community/support (help each other in crisis, celebrate joys together)
- 5) service/social action (Thanksgiving turkey deliveries, working publicly for justice).

With that in mind, we were asked to consider who is responsible for maintaining the health of these issues in our Meeting. Does a committee do this work? An individual? Or has it been overlooked or not undertaken yet? We were invited to consider the monthly life of our Meeting and how many "person-hours" were devoted to each area of activity, then to show it in a pie chart.

I found myself stumped. I realized how little I knew about the committees I'm not involved in, and how much time their members devote to their work. Without a nominating report, I couldn't begin to recall all the positions our members fulfill. In my defense, our Meeting was one of the three largest at the consultation; many small worship groups have only a handful of members who undertake multiple responsibilities for their Meeting. It seemed they had an easier time answering the questions.

This analytical approach was then given personal reflection, and times for creative ideation. With a column for each category above, we were asked to consider:

1. What regularly scheduled activities are already in place regarding each category?
2. What have I heard people longing for?
3. How can I work with my meeting to address these longings?
4. What might make it difficult to implement these new endeavors?
5. What support will I need to overcome any difficulties?

We broke for lunch, and a dining companion from Seattle shared their experiences and news of the Tacoma Immigrant Detention Center, which is plagued with some of the same issues our "local" Adelanto Detention Center struggles with. During the free time "hiking" break, I met a friend from Portland who shared her substantial experiences with FCNL Lobbying and Lobby Visit Training, which a group of us are undertaking involvement with at OGMM as well. She spoke of how important sharing our stories with legislators had been in their lobbying efforts to decrease military spending, and how that can really sway the vote on an issue.

When we regrouped, a series of resources for spiritual deepening were shared, including:

1) Western Friend Magazine

Current issues are online in abridged form for non-subscribers; past issues are archived unexpurgated, and are searchable on their website. The entire historical archive of the magazine - dating back to 1920 - is available online, though ancient issues may only be images of the pages, and the text may not be "searchable."

Study guides have also been created for some topics of interest, and there are monthly online video conversations to dig deeper into some concerns. Discussion packs of 6 copies of a single issue are also available for \$18.

The site now includes help wanted listings and suggestions for submissions, which are encouraged.

<https://westernfriend.org/magazine>

2) The Quaker Center website now includes a page of Quaker quotes to inspire discussion or reflection.

<http://www.quakercenter.org/quaker-quote-archive/>

3) Quaker Speak online videos

Friends Journal started this series of brief interviews discussing topics of interest to Quakers, often aiming to explain our practices to the broader community we exist within. They now are a separate endeavor from the Journal, but they have a webpage, YouTube channel, and Facebook page. Some are quite funny, others quite serious.

<http://quakerspeak.com/> <https://www.youtube.com/user/Quakerspeak> <https://www.facebook.com/quakerspeak/>

4) Spiritual Deepening Groups

These are groups of 4-5 people committing to 3 months of consistent daily spiritual practice, ideally with a leader who has some experience with spiritual oversight and support. Each weekend every participant emails an update about their experience, under 250 words, to everyone in the group. Every member then responds to everyone, either by email or in person, by Wednesday. The intention is for the response to be loving and encouraging, and advice should point to, "that Spirit, the true teacher."

Ultimately this leads to a group spiritual journal, a record of participants' spiritual journeys. The group can decide whether to be public or confidential. An initial face to face meeting is recommended, or if geography makes this difficult, some groups have used Skype for the meeting. After three months, the group can decide whether to continue or lay the group down.

5) Spiritual Life Sharing Groups (Margaret Sorrel for Quaker Center)

This is a structured worship sharing group, focusing on participants on-going spiritual journeys. Ideally composed of 4-5 people, a mixture of seasoned and less experienced Friends, this group meets regularly for about 2 hours. The first session asks each participant to share their 20 minute spiritual history. Subsequent sessions ask each participant to respond to two queries, "How has your spiritual life been nourished in recent weeks?" and "Have there been opportunities for spiritual growth?" Each person shares for 15 minutes with 5 minutes of silent reflection or prayers, blessings, and support. Everyone participates in turn.

If one of the four cannot attend, the meeting continues with three people, but if two cannot attend, the meeting is rescheduled, as the group commitment and support has been found to be essential for its success.

6) Discernment Group Process (from Marcelle Martin)

This might be seen as a group clearness committee meeting. The entire meeting opens and closes with 5 minutes of worship. Each person in the group spends time as the focus person, explaining what they are discerning about for up to 7 minutes. Others ask questions for 12 minutes, with periods of silence between each question, while a "recorder" writes them down. The focus person chooses one question and responds for 5 minutes. Three minutes is then spent holding the focus person and their discernment in the light. This process is repeated for each person in the group until everyone has participated. If time remains, the group may reflect upon how well the process was followed, whether participants realized benefits, or how future meetings might better serve the group.

Once we had all learned of these resources, small groups brainstormed ways to utilize them on a monthly and weekly basis in our Meetings, or personally at home. Some of the ideas included: First Day school or Adult Ed sessions structured around articles from Western Friend; group collaborative collages on a topic for submission to Western Friend; Quaker Speak binge-watching pajama parties; sharing a quote daily via email, or sharing one before Meeting for Worship by reading it or writing it on a lobby bulletin board; including a quote in monthly Meeting announcements; or sharing it for discussion during fellowship. Other ideas included hosting discernment groups at members homes, having an hour long discussion of a Western Friend article after worship, and having a yearly discernment group retreat.

Knowing What Is True At Meetings

Henri Ducharme led discussion considering how assumptions or habit regarding "what is true" affect our meetings. His examples addressed the experiences of younger first time attenders, and the explanations members offered for them not returning. In fact some did return; others didn't for reasons completely unrelated to the assumptions. He also considered who was truly carrying the "weight of the Meeting." By examining the Nominating Committee report records over time, it became clear that some people had largely upheld certain responsibilities for the Meeting, rather than being shared.

What I found interesting was his willingness to question accepted "truths" and to test them through a variety of methods, some directly drawn

from scientific methodology, others perhaps familiar to news reporters. Among his methods were: "counting; adding, subtracting, ratios; recording people, especially informal comments; reading meeting documents; structured interviews; comparison with other Meetings; probing the logic of an argument through analogy; structured behavioral observation; controlled experiments; and researching best practices."

He concluded by offering these queries for any important issue at a Meeting:

- 1) What are the facts in your meeting that Friends might disagree about?
- 2) How could you decide which facts are more likely to be correct? (This might not happen right away. Some facts might take sustained work over time to determine.)
- 3) What are things unspoken at your meeting which you think it would be helpful to speak about? (These could be assumptions of fact, values, feelings about past history, etc.) How might you bring a factual grounding to a discussion about this issue?

On the final "crack of dawn" early Quaker writings study, we considered Isaac Pennington's "To the Women Friends that meet at Armscot in Worcestershire." The advice to season your hearts with the grace and truth of the Lord God, that "ye will know the joy of seeking out and bringing back the lost sheep," led to ruminations on border collies, and how they made it possible to farm on impossible terrain, and how we might aspire to higher objectives amidst the impossible social terrain we labor within. The mornings worship was quiet, and after breakfast everyone paired with their geographically neighboring Meeting representatives, to share ideas how to move forward and support each other with some of our group discoveries.

Everyone joined in whole-heartedly to clean and pack, and after some final worship, in true Quaker fashion, about half of the attendees proceeded to drive the wrong way down the one way loop road out of the Redwoods, meeting up with the others who followed the "one way" signs, somehow still averting accidents and managing to accommodate each other. After I was recalled by phone to retrieve a bag I'd forgotten, we finally merged back into traffic, Santa Cruz, San Jose, Burbank, and home, as the idyllic visit, star-filled skies, unfathomably tall trees, and beautiful beaches receded from memory.

I'd encourage all of us to consider whether you'd like to initiate any of the activities I've discussed within our Meeting, and feel free to contact me if you'd like more details on anything I've mentioned.

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ARTHUR KEGERRIS



Welcome Alden Newman Scoma!

Kate Newman and Sam Scoma who were married under the care of Orange Grove Meeting two years ago, brought baby Alden to meeting for a welcoming ceremony on Nov 5, 2017..

Friends and Family who attended were called on to become part of the community that will support the new family. Alden was blessed with water, earth fire and Air and awarded a flower in honor of his becoming naturally who he was meant to be. Then we all ate vegan goodies to celebrate.

Peg Newman, who was one of the original founders of Friends Western School and the stalwart creator of many Christmas shows, came west from Philadelphia to celebrate and read Alden a letter from his grandma.

Everyone was having such a good time, they forgot to take pictures until after it was over!