

# FRIENDS JOURNAL

QUAKER THOUGHT AND LIFE TODAY

12/2025

WHAT  
DO  
WE  
BELIEVE?





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# A Belief That We Can Do More

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*Friends Journal* December 2025

I'll admit it: a year ago, I was worried. Returning from the World Quaker Plenary meeting in South Africa, I had felt the weight of a concern that we at Friends Publishing were falling short in carrying out our mission. Despite the great geographic dispersal of Quakers and the potential for the internet to carry our stories anywhere on the globe, our audience was concentrated in North America and a few English-speaking countries. Eighty-seven percent of the people we were reaching came from places with less than thirty percent of the world's Quakers. We had work to do. With some visionary support from generous Friends, the Friends Publishing team has been busy tackling this challenge over the past year, and I'd like to share with you news of our progress.

In October, we welcomed Alfred Mbai to our staff in the role of corresponding editor for Africa. Alfred is passionate about reimagining and retelling the African religious narrative from an African perspective. Trained in both communications and ecumenical theology, Alfred has already begun developing relationships with Quaker writers across Africa and suggesting ways we can use new media to increase African Friends' engagement in global Quaker conversations.

Renzo Carranza, who joined our team in June, has been cultivating the contributions of Latin American Friends in a similar way, and in this issue, we're very pleased to begin sharing articles that originated as Spanish-language manuscripts. Jasson Arevado's "You Will Be Told What You Must Do: A Biblical Perspective on Quaker Pastors" makes for an illuminating beginning. Readers can expect many more contributions from the Spanish-speaking Quaker world to enrich our understanding of how God is leading Friends today.

Thanks to the generous support of readers like you, we've built the world's largest library of free Quaker materials. And this year, we've made it even more accessible: as of now, all of the material on *Friendsjournal.org*, *Quaker.org*, and *Quakerspeak.com* is available in Spanish and Swahili translations as well as English, and new stories will be translated into these widely spoken Quaker languages going forward. We're already seeing this change lead to increased readership. Both Alfred and Renzo have contributed mightily to this project.

We envision a Quaker publishing ministry that more thoroughly draws from and reaches audiences across the world and across our theological and cultural diversity. So what do I believe? I believe that the next big opportunity for growth in our mission is to zoom out, to embrace the reality of Quakerism as a diverse, multilingual, global faith tradition. We're taking steps to embrace this opportunity. Reader, I hope that we can walk together!

We could have filled a dozen issues with fascinating Quaker responses to our theme: What Do We Believe? The testimonies that our editors have curated in these pages are but a taste. Let them linger in your mind and in your heart. For me, understanding what my fellow Friends believe challenges me to think more deeply about my own leadings. I can't help but be changed.

I'm excited to work toward a world where Quaker perspectives and values have ever more reach and influence, one where Quakers everywhere can develop and nourish a global spiritual perspective. With God's guidance, I believe we'll see that Friends can transcend political and cultural parochialism and think boldly about what unites us.

Yours in peace,



Gabriel Ehri  
*Executive Director*  
[ED@friendsjournal.org](mailto:ED@friendsjournal.org)



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- **Open Issue** (due Jan. 19, 2026)
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Cover image by Cristina Conti



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#### Quakers and the Mystery of Worship

The latest episode of our podcast looks at the purpose of ministry and features interviews with Rhiannon Grant and Paula Christophersen and profiles a new worship format called "Meeting for Worship with Attention to Worship." You can follow along at [QuakersToday.org](https://QuakersToday.org) or your favorite podcast app, but new this season will be extended video interviews on our YouTube channel at [Youtube.com/friendsjournal](https://Youtube.com/friendsjournal).

## ONLINE FEATURES

*Friendsjournal.org/online*

## The Road Back to Rediscovering What Unites Us as Friends

PETER BLOOD-PATTERSON

What I believe is that the core belief we share as Friends is not what happens in our minds but in our hearts. It is our actual shared living relationship with the Spirit at the heart of creation.

## Embracing Diversity to Deepen Our Walk

MICHELLE DOWNEY

The path out of ignorance begins with curiosity. When we venture into someone else's beliefs, we open ourselves to learning and we allow the other person to be valued by our sincere interest in them.

## Thy Will Be Done

JOHN ANDREW GALLERY

I was looking for Jesus's core spiritual beliefs, and I was surprised to find that the implications of this one prayer [Gethsemane] gave me a better idea of what those beliefs did than anything else.

## Tell Me About the God You Don't Believe In

DAVID O'HALLORAN

While one of the great attractions of Quakers is its absences—priests, rituals, creeds, sacred objects—we can't be a faith of absent things, and I certainly don't want to add God to that list.

## We Cannot Do This on Our Own

CHRISTOPHER E. STERN

What matters most is that we are willing to listen to God's voice in our hearts. When we are open, we can feel this secret power working in us and knitting our hearts together.

## Settling into a living silence

I have attended two of the recent gatherings for extended worship held in New England Yearly Meeting, as well as many, since 1997, in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, and I can attest to the truth of what Michael Wajda says about the living silence that waits for us in a gathered meeting and the healing and transforming power that it has ("A People Who Dwell in the Living Stream," *FJ* Oct.). I'm grateful for all the ways that Friends are helping one another to settle into that living silence and become more receptive to the gifts it offers us individually and collectively.

*Marcelle Martin*  
Chester, Pa.

Silence is a sublime state that we Westerners find difficult to achieve, but I did a practicum with children who couldn't handle regular classroom situations and the teacher decided to use a short, quiet period in the middle of their free time. The children were surprisingly receptive and calm.

*Eve Gutwirth*  
Upper Darby, Pa.

## Hope for cooperation

Thanks for Cliff Loesch's fascinating, informative article on the Ramallah Friends School ("Growing Hearts of Compassion," *FJ* Oct.). In the past, we have supported the school and enjoy hearing about its activities. The current projects shared by students show hope, creativity, and positivity.

I lived and worked in Palestine-Israel for some months, have been a guest of a Muslim family in Nablus, and have

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been involved in discussions over that tragic, troubled land since the late 1960s.

One caution: this article mentions only what the Jewish people have done wrong to Palestinians, including the wall between the West Bank of Palestine and Israel, settler attacks, and apartheid control of Palestine by the rightwing Israeli government. For instance, that wall that in so many ways is very unfair, very unequal toward innocent Palestinians was originally mainly built to stop many years of attacks by violent Palestinians who murdered innocent Jewish civilians via tactics like suicide bombings.

Let us hope that this new generation of Palestinians and Israelis can share and cooperate like the Christian and Muslim leaders of the village Loesch mentions.

*Daniel Wilcox*  
Santa Maria, Calif.

Thanks for this, Cliff Loesch. My prayer is to have so much fairness to humanity in the West Bank that the wall can be done away spiritually. The small village integration can light the world.

*George Busolo Lukalo*  
Nairobi, Kenya

## New asylum network

I am happy to see Gabbreell James's thought-provoking contribution, "Who Will Reopen the Underground Railroad?" (*FJ* Oct.). The North Star Network (NSN) was established in February by Friends to help immigrants and other uprooted people in the United States explore pathways to Canada. Quaker volunteers in several parts of the United States as well as Friends in Canada are involved. NSN shuns publicity but welcomes support. We try to apply quiet energy where it's needed to help people living on the edge. Please visit us at [thenorthstarnetwork.com](http://thenorthstarnetwork.com).

*Anonymous*

## Shame, healing, and personal transformation

Edward W. Wood Jr.'s essay "Recovering from the Shame of

*Continues on page 55*

# BEYOND WHAT WORDS CAN UTTER

## Moving Past the Question of Belief

Thomas Gates

**F**or me to state what I believe would be a relatively straightforward task. But to articulate what Quakers believe is much harder: I quickly become aware that there is probably nothing I believe that would be endorsed by all Quakers—and some of what I believe would likely be rejected by most Friends, even in my own yearly meeting. Hence the dilemma of “what Quakers believe.”

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*Thomas Gates is a retired family physician and medical educator. He is a member of Lancaster (Pa.) Meeting, where he serves on the Worship and Ministry Committee. He is the author of several Pendle Hill pamphlets and a recent book, *Turning Toward the Victim: The Bible, Sacred Violence, and the End of Scapegoating in Quaker Perspective* (Wipf and Stock, 2025).*

Some years ago, Arthur Larrabee, who was then general secretary of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, presented the yearly meeting with a document for discussion and discernment: “What Do Quakers Believe?” It was a reasonably clear and concise statement with nine numbered propositions, carefully worded so as to be minimally controversial and answering his desire to have something succinct with which to engage non-Quakers. (See his 2018 *QuakerSpeak.com* video, “Nine Core Quaker Beliefs.”) In the ensuing discussion, some raised quibbles about specific points, but the more substantive objection was that no group of Friends, not even the yearly meeting in session, could legitimately define what Quakers believe: the question itself was illegitimate.

The issue, of course, was Friends' traditional witness against formal creeds. Creeds inevitably give authority to verbal formulations, and ultimately to the institution or ideology that produced the creed. Early Friends, however, looked to a different source of authority: the Divine Voice, the Inward Light of Christ: "Truth in the inward parts," as written in Psalm 51:6. Their rejection of creeds was not (as modern Friends sometimes interpret it) a position that "you can be a Quaker and believe anything you want." The inward authority that they experienced and came to trust was not self or ego but (in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's memorable phrase) "the beyond in our midst."

This yearly meeting exercise led me to wonder if there might not be a better way to get at the core of Quakerism, beyond the seemingly futile search for a short list of propositions to which we could all agree.

At least since the European Enlightenment, our modern culture has distinguished between what we know, established by sense perception, objective measurement, and scientific experimentation (although even here there can be a fair bit of disagreement) versus what we believe, which is thought to exist in the private or subjective realm, and suggesting a much lower level of "evidence." But Marcus Borg reminds us that prior to the seventeenth century, the word *believe* did not mean assenting to the truth of a proposition. Up until that time, the grammatical object of "believing" was not a statement or a proposition but a person—as in "I believe in you." He points out that in premodern English, the context of "to believe" makes it clear it meant:

to hold dear, to give one's loyalty to, to give one's self to, to commit oneself. . . . Most simply, "to believe" meant "to love." Indeed, the English words "believe" and "belove" are related.

In *The Heart of Christianity*, Borg concludes that belief is not about assenting to propositions or a creed but about "beloving God."

Beloving God is certainly central to the biblical tradition. When Jesus was asked to name the most important commandment, he replied, from the Hebrew Scriptures, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. . . . And a second is like it: You shall love your

neighbor as yourself" (Mt 22:37–39). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructs his followers to love even their enemies (Mt 5:44). In the Gospel of John, Jesus gives a new commandment: "that you love one another, just as I have loved you" (John 15:12). In his final post-Resurrection appearance, three times he asks Simon Peter (who had denied him three times), "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" (John 21:15–17).

In the long tradition of Christian spirituality, there is a prominent strain that teaches that we do not become better persons by obtaining more knowledge or different beliefs but by acquiring better loves. Hence, early Quakers exhorted one another to "love the Light"—even when it shows us things we would rather not see.

Elaborating on this theme, John the Evangelist writes, "Let us love one another, for love is from God. . . . God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God. . . . We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:7–19).

In the long tradition of Christian spirituality, there is a prominent strain that teaches that we do not become better persons by obtaining more knowledge or different beliefs but by acquiring better loves. Hence, early Quakers exhorted one another to "love the Light"—even when it shows us things we would rather not see.

As we seek to grow beyond an understanding of belief as a set of propositions to which we give assent, a story from the first chapter of the Gospel of John can point us in a helpful direction. After the magnificent prologue, the narrative starts with John the Baptist observing Jesus pass by at a distance, and he proclaims



Photo by sailko on commons.wikimedia.org

Domenichino, *First Calling of Andrew and Peter*, c. 1627. Fresco on the ceiling of the Sant'Andrea della Valle, Rome, Italy.

to his disciples, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” The same thing happens the next day, and this time two of John’s disciples set out to trail Jesus. Sensing that he is being followed, in John 1:38, Jesus turns to face them, asking: “What do you want?”, “What are you looking for?”, or “What are you seeking?”, as recounted in the New International, New Revised Standard, and King James Versions respectively. Jesus doesn’t ask these two would-be disciples what they know, or even what they believe. Instead, he asks them (and us): what do you want; what are you seeking; what are you yearning for; what is your deepest desire; in a word, what (or whom) do you love?

What do Quakers believe? We have probably all had the experience of being asked some variation of that question and tailoring our answer to emphasize what we think might most speak to the enquirer. Not wishing to antagonize, our reply might depend on whether we think we are speaking with an Evangelical Christian, a Buddhist, a universalist, an agnostic, or a potential Quaker. Such an approach is not always very satisfying—and carries the risk that you might misjudge the beliefs of the person with whom you are speaking.

In recent years, I have taken to answering that sort of question by paraphrasing something Paul Lacey once wrote in his Pendle Hill pamphlet,

### *Leading and Being Led:*

[A] Quaker is not someone who subscribes to certain doctrines about God or Christ, nor someone who specifically strives to obey the teachings of Jesus, nor even someone who follows certain inherited testimonies. Rather, “to be a Quaker is . . . to have met the Inward Christ”—by whatever name that reality is known.

For me, those words convey what is most central about Friends: that Quakerism is rooted in an experience, an encounter with the Divine that is “beyond what words can utter,” as Isaac Penington wrote. I have found that this answer resonates with all varieties of Christians, acknowledging our roots in “primitive Christianity revived” while placing the emphasis on the authority of inward experience rather than words in a sacred book or creed. But it also seems to resonate with those from other traditions, including nontheists and agnostics. There is something about “meeting the Inward Christ” that has the ring of universal experience while also giving ample opportunity for translation into whatever words might be most meaningful to those from other traditions.

And this answer also contains an implicit question and a challenge: How have you met the Inward Christ? What is your experience?” □

# WHAT WE CAN TRUST

Pamela Haines

Growing up in a brand-new, unprogrammed Quaker meeting, I had no experience of traditional Christianity. So when I got older and visited other churches, I was completely mystified by the recitation of belief in the Nicene Creed. I had accumulated enough biblical knowledge to recognize the trajectory of events that were being referenced—but what were the people there doing? Were they really taking in all those words and finding meaning in them?

I know from my own experience that the more I say something, the harder it is to listen to what I'm saying, and the less it means. This is a humbling realization. I treasure my early morning walks as a time of centering, and I start them now with my own version of "the words that come before all else" from the Haudenosaunee tradition of greeting the natural world with comprehensive thanks. Then I take time, as I loop around the park, to remember people in this world—known and unknown—who are struggling and whom I would choose to hold in my heart. But as my words become familiar to the ear, I can find myself saying them without attention. They may come out of my mouth while my mind is somewhere else altogether. It takes discipline to remember to listen, to connect, and to keep putting myself into the words.

So I'm skeptical about putting a lot of weight on the value of saying what we believe. In another humbling admission, I don't know the early Quakers well enough to

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*Pamela Haines, an active member of Central Philadelphia (Pa.) Meeting, is passionate about the earth, relationships, integrity, paying attention, and repair of all kinds. She is the author of Money and Soul, two Pendle Hill pamphlets, three volumes of essays for the Quaker Quicks series, and three volumes of poetry. Website: [pamelahaines.substack.com](http://pamelahaines.substack.com).*

## Reaping the Harvests of Our Shared Practice



Photos by Natalia

know for sure if they ever offered lists of things to believe in. But it doesn't sound like them. And Jesus? With a similar caveat, it's hard for me to picture him enthusiastic about a recital of beliefs.

I also worry about how easily an emphasis on clarity about what we believe—what we know to be true—can transmute into being smug and close-minded. We certainly have a cautionary tale here in Western ways of knowing. The trajectory of modern society, which has been built on things that people—mostly men—determined were incontrovertibly true, has brought us to this time of ever-growing and seemingly intractable crises.

**W**hile there are other ways of knowing that I want to consider more deeply, first I'd like to suggest another trap in putting too many eggs in the basket of belief. One reason we are hungry to identify common beliefs is



to find ways to help pull our fractured Quaker world together. I love the impetus to challenge the schismatic tendencies that have torn our society apart over the centuries, but I doubt that a focus on beliefs will ultimately prove satisfying.

All this skepticism notwithstanding, I'm quite hopeful about a project of identifying and living into a commonly held framework that helps enliven our beloved Religious Society of Friends. I wonder if the heart of it could be as simple as changing the focus from what we "believe" to what we trust.

What are the trusted foundations we can safely build our lives upon, and what are the tools and materials we trust to do that building? We don't have to look far. Many of us are already standing on such foundations with all the tools and materials at hand to shape lives that are grounded, centered, and infused with Spirit.

I see at least three powerful and deeply interconnected disciplines here: paying attention, listening, and practice. All three entwine to nurture the conditions that allow us to center deeply enough to feel Spirit moving in our lives. They combine to support us in reaching for that of God in everyone.

By paying attention, we immerse ourselves in a reality that we can trust. Whether it gives us pleasure or gives us pause, by knowing that it's trustworthy, we can build on it. We may see a wondrous facet of nature that had somehow escaped our attention thus far. We may notice an interaction that renews our faith in humanity. We may truly take in the humanity of someone we had been prone

In this process of distilling what we know experientially, there comes the beginning of a knowing that we can trust. So we listen—and then we practice. Listening, to get our practice more closely aligned with what rings true, seems so much more powerful than having a belief.

to judge. We may pay close enough attention to become aware of an inconsistency in our practice: a gap between what we profess and how we act. We may come to identify a deeper root to the dangers we are facing in this world.

This willingness to be informed by close attention to life and to make the growing understanding relevant to our spiritual lives seems to be one of the great strengths of Quakerism. Being willing to see with clear eyes is part of our commitment to integrity and to continuing revelation as well.

Then there is listening, which is at the heart of our religious practice. In an unprogrammed meeting for worship, we are not just silent; we are listening. And we are not just listening; we are listening with an ear for truth—not to whatever chatter may be going on inside our heads but to something deeper. John Woolman says it best: "Dig deep. . . . Carefully cast forth the loose matter and get down to the rock, the sure foundation, and there hearken to the Divine Voice which gives a clear and certain sound." We are listening for what rings true.

In contrast to the learning and knowing that comes through school, we're engaged in a great ongoing experiment with truth. What parts of our family and cultural narratives no longer have the ring of truth? (I, for

one, am unlearning the stories I was told that we exist on a lonely moral island, and that our worth is measured by our work.) How do we respond when what we think we know doesn't ring true? What happens when we act on our sense that something is true, as compared to when we act on a different basis?

In this process of distilling what we know experientially, there comes the beginning of a knowing that we can trust. So we listen—and then we practice. Listening, to get our practice more closely aligned with what rings true, seems so much more powerful than having a belief.

I think of what nineteenth-century Quaker Caroline Fox said at age 21: “Live up to the light thou hast, and more will be granted thee.” The concept was popularized by educator activists Paolo Freire from Brazil and Myles Horton of the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, that “we make the road by walking.” It is in the doing—in the action that grows from paying attention and listening deeply—that we grow into our full spiritual being. There are depths to claiming our practice that we have yet to fully explore.

Throughout our Quaker history we had individual ministers and prophets who were committed to traveling this road—and we are justifiably proud of them. But Caroline Fox's advice is for all of us. We need to build up our corporate practices to support this challenge, knowing that the journey will look different for each one. I am particularly grateful for the work in Central Philadelphia (Pa.) Meeting on gifts and leadings, where we have a committee tasked to pay attention, listen, and gather support around any community member who is awarably engaged with the challenge of following through on this path. I'm sure there are many other ways that groups of Quakers are practicing here.

It is in this area of practice that we may find the key to the center of Quakerism: discovering the heart of commonality and being strengthened by Friends from other branches of our religious community. We all share a peace testimony for example, yet there are Friends in East Africa who are embodying it in ways that some of us in unprogrammed meetings may never have imagined. At our best, we are all taking our practice seriously, and we can pay attention to others who are doing the same and listen for the ring of truth, wherever it may be found and however it may be clothed.

A great strength we have in our Quaker practice is that of corporate discernment, such an anomaly in a Western culture that practically worships individualism. If we're all paying attention, listening, and practicing together, we

can benefit from the clarity that each person brings, while reducing the power of distortion by individual idiosyncrasies, fixed ideas, or blind spots, thus increasing the possibility of getting to and uniting around what rings most deeply true.

I'm deeply interested in finding opportunities to become more creative, and perhaps more deeply grounded and powerful, in our practice of arriving at a faithful corporate response to the world around us. We have tended to respond by relying on our testimonies and crafting minutes about what we hold true. Our meeting has yet to come up with a comprehensive minute on climate and environmental justice, but members have gathered several times to share faithful steps they have been taking and other steps they might try if they felt more fully held. This seems like a promising start to a potentially more powerful alternative.

Perhaps this is where we follow Myles Horton, Rosa Parks, and others. Rosa Parks left a workshop at the Highlander Folk School to head home to Birmingham and sit in the front of a bus. What if our corporate witness to the world, while inspired by our past and grounded in our testimonies, is most faithfully seen as the distillation of all the footsteps our members are taking? What if we don't say anything that we're not doing, that we don't know experientially? And what if all

When we can gather together and reap the harvests of our shared practice—in spiritual nurturing; in faithful action in the world; in ministries of speaking, listening, and hospitality—we will find ourselves in the midst of great treasure.

the small steps that our members are taking add up to something worth talking about?

When we can gather together and reap the harvests of our shared practice—in spiritual nurturing; in faithful action in the world; in ministries of speaking, listening, and hospitality—we will find ourselves in the midst of great treasure. With a common foundation, shared vision, and time-tested tools, this is a bounty to be thankful for: one that we can celebrate and trust. ■

# REAL ESTATE BLUES

Four days past Christmas and the rains have come.  
From my cavern of envy, I present to you Rant # 42.  
My wife has each one numbered, you see.

This one concerns the barren cupboard of my life—self-pity  
at how we can't even dream of buying a parking space  
in the neighborhoods where we once lived.

All the houses morphed into gargantuan mansions  
while cherry trees flail their orangutan arms  
to protest the encroaching concrete.

Everyone's hustling, selling something, it seems:  
even our kid brothers are now buying up homes  
while we paw for room at the inn.

Down the hill from my parents' lies a Civil War fort  
and in the winter mist, I make my way there.  
Near an old parking meter—an uprooted weed—

I encounter the place of privation within  
and the desire to shake the meter for quarters,  
ignoring the snake eyes, flashing red.

Scouring my brain for a consolation, I recall  
the prophet with no place to lay his head,  
so I sit and breathe and watch the sun squint

through an eyelid of cloud along the Potomac,  
and in the quiet of the garden I see fear as it is:  
chimera prancing in the setting sun.

The timber of this fort has long since decayed.  
The rain washes me clean. Windows glimmer  
like serene old eyes, gratitude comes strolling by:

a stranger wandering in the dew, introducing me  
to his dancing-bear-of-a-dog, who polishes my hand  
with a sandpaper tongue. The man explains,

"She's got more than enough: more food, more love,  
more home, more fun. Each day she eats  
a chicken-and-a-half. What more could I ever ask?"

*Alexander Levering Kern*  
Somerville, Mass.

Photo by Martin Kelley

# THAT OF GOD IN OUR POLITY

Photo by Alexander Mass on Unsplash

## Rejecting the Temptations of Limited Grace

Tom Rockwell

I have worked with a range of Friends, Evangelical Friends and Unprogrammed Friends alike. The common belief I find among them is that there is that of God in everyone. Each group experiences this sense of God in each person differently and emphasizes different values from the belief.

Unprogrammed Friends are more likely to emphasize the radical inclusivity of that of God in all people. This perspective often emphasizes that none of us individually has a complete experience of God; in fact, each of us individually experiences only a small part of God's love. Therefore it is necessary for us to come together across all sorts of boundaries—class, race, gender, etc.—to have a full sense of God's call to us. While the inclusive element speaks to the Evangelical side as well, greater emphasis is placed on the living presence of God.

I am particularly interested in how our focus as Quakers on that of God in all people affects our polity. Among early Friends, polity was hardly a factor. One was Quaker if one had experienced the Inward Teacher and was trying to live into the lessons of the Light. Monthly meetings and yearly meetings were introduced later to give structure and support to the increasing number and geographic range of Friends. (Some would say they were established to assert control over this ever-increasing range of Friends.) But even before the introduction of these structures, it was clear that Friends would have a polity that stretched out into the wider world.

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*Tom Rockwell serves as the associate superintendent of Western Yearly Meeting and co-pastor at West Elkton (Ohio) Meeting. He is particularly interested in leadership development and organizational renewal. Tom lives in Richmond, Ind., with his wife, Jade (program director of Quaker Connect with Friends World Committee for Consultation), his step-son Ezra, and daughter Agatha.*

The early Friends arose out of numerous groups in the Puritan movement in England. Many of these groups settled into more rigid forms of polity structures, adhering to early forms of what became the Congregationalist polity.

The Congregationalist polity states in essence that each church or meeting has what it needs in itself to fulfill the work of God. This strict emphasis on each church having what it needs in itself stems from another theological belief, the concept of Limited Election. Limited Election essentially states that God saves only certain people and that much of the human race lives and dies outside of the grace of God. Within the concept of Limited Election, it follows that as long as every member of a church could be verified to have experienced God's grace (something early Puritan churches were quite concerned with discerning), the church might have everyone in their area that God had saved and that therefore had a part to play in God's work. The conception of Limited Election obviously sits in tension with the idea of that of God in all people.

**W**e live in divided times. It is difficult to discern that of God in all people and very easy to decide that people with whom we disagree either lack that of God or are certainly refusing to live into that of God in them.

I believe the wider division in world culture has infected Quaker culture. All sides of the theological spectrum of Quakerism have reverted to different forms of Congregationalism and, in effect, accepted the conception of Limited Election. There is an essential truth in our inability to truly experience God without the full participation of all of God's people—and that means everyone. In this sense, no congregation can really ever have everything it needs. The health of a group of Friends depends on our ability to foster more people along the path of expanding God's movements in their lives.

The range of parachurch organizations in the Quakersphere obviously testifies to our belief that global



interconnection is a necessary corollary of our theology. These bodies—service committees, educational institutions, ecumenical coalitions, mission boards—have been our way of acknowledging that no single meeting can embody the fullness of God's work. They are, in their best moments, practical expressions of the conviction that the Spirit moves across boundaries and that we cannot, in faithfulness, remain closed in upon ourselves.

Yet the segmentation of the wider culture is mirrored in Quaker culture. The past 15 years have seen formal yearly meeting splits across pastoral Friends, and the rest of Friends are segmented into the broadly politically progressive Unprogrammed world and the broadly politically conservative sphere of Evangelical Friends in the United States.

Within this grander division, I have observed an informal drift toward more Congregationalist views. Divisions make us less likely to move beyond the spheres where we are comfortable. For many Friends, the space they are most comfortable is their monthly meeting. The monthly meeting can become a space where like-minded people gather to reassure one another that they are in the right, rather than cultivating a space where we work in the Spirit of God to support each other in living transformatively.

**W**hat would it mean to take seriously that of God in everyone as a polity principle and not simply as a statement of individual dignity? It would

mean cultivating forms of communal life that refuse the logic of separation. It would mean finding ways to connect across our divides, not only in political dialogue but in structures that require us to bear one another's burdens, discern together, and be accountable to the Light we find in each other.

To insist that each meeting or each yearly meeting is sufficient to itself is to betray our own theological root. Early Friends rejected creeds, and in their place, they practiced a shared discipline. They created webs of care, traveling in the ministry, writing epistles, corresponding across oceans, precisely because they knew that truth is larger than any one gathering. They created elders to encourage

What would it mean to take seriously that of God in everyone as a polity principle and not simply as a statement of individual dignity? It would mean cultivating forms of communal life that refuse the logic of separation.

people in their attempts to deepen their connections to God's spirit in their lives.

Examples of this wider vision still exist among Friends today. In Kenya, the largest body of Friends in the world, connections between schools, yearly meetings, and international partners have produced a witness to peace building that no single meeting could carry alone. In Latin America, Evangelical Friends have partnered with global organizations to build community health initiatives. Among a range of Friends in North America, collaboration through Friends Committee on National Legislation has lifted a Quaker voice into national politics that could never have been achieved by a single yearly meeting.

These cooperative ventures show that our polity, when stretched beyond self-sufficiency, bears fruit. Yet they also show where our divisions narrow our vision. How often

do Unprogrammed and Programmed Friends labor side by side? How often do yearly meetings that disagree about sexuality or biblical authority still seek one another's Light in other areas? Too often, we retreat into silos, believing that we already have all we need.

If meetings exist only to comfort us, they will not sustain us. They certainly will not make us models of an entirely different way of living from secular culture. If meetings exist to sharpen us—to open us to the Inward Light as it is revealed through others, including those we would rather not hear—then they can still be places of transformation. This is what makes the testimony of “that of God in all people” radical: not that it makes us gentle but that it insists we cannot ignore or exclude those who unsettle us.

We live in a time when walls are going up everywhere—between nations, between political parties, between neighbors. If Quakers are to have anything distinctive to say, it is that God cannot be contained by our walls. Our polity itself should reflect this. Monthly and yearly meetings are gifts, but they are not complete in themselves. They are provisional resting places in the larger body of Christ, which includes those far outside our comfort zones.

When we choose connection over isolation, we testify to our belief that no one is outside the reach of God's love. When we risk becoming accountable to Friends whose convictions unsettle us, we testify that the Spirit is greater than our ideologies. When we stretch our polity across differences, we live into the truth that there is that of God in everyone.

The question of what we believe cannot be answered by a creed, but it can be answered by practice. If our practice is one of separation, then our belief—whether we admit it or not—is that God is partial, that grace is limited, that we need only our own. If our practice is one of connection, then our belief is that the Light is universal, that revelation is ongoing, that God is alive in every heart.

We began by refusing creeds. Our witness in this season must be to refuse our silos and our walls, not by abandoning our meetings but by insisting that they are porous, interconnected, accountable, and unfinished. In doing so, we may yet rediscover the radical core of our faith: that God is here, in all, and waiting to be known among us. ■



# BACK TO THE BOOKS

## Reimagining the Core of Our Faith

Daniel Vaughan

Quakers tend to be mystics. Across all of our differences, Quakers use the metaphor of the “Inner Light” to describe the object of their search: whether the Divine or universal reality. They believe that the Inner Light is elusive; it is easily obscured by human-created obstacles or distractions. It is easily misunderstood, or inadequately articulated or implemented.

Quakers believe, however, that if that Inner Light is diligently, carefully, respectfully, and honestly sought in the company of diverse but like-minded, well-intentioned

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*Daniel Vaughan is a lifelong Friend, presently a member of DeLand (Fla.) Meeting. A member of Southeastern Yearly Meeting, he has served and clerked on several of its committees. In the 1970s, he served two nonconsecutive terms as yearly meeting clerk. He is a retired attorney, married to Susan Phillips Vaughan for 62 years and counting.*

people, it can be trusted to guide them toward that which will give their lives meaning, purpose, joy, fulfillment, and inner peace. It will unite its seekers as one with all of life. It will guide them in discerning and removing the causes of war and conflict; it will lead them into a world of peace and mutual sufficiency.

A second metaphor common among Quakers is that of the “journey.” Life is a journey during which we can learn to discover joy through right relationships with each other and nature. From these relationships we can learn and understand the world, its evolutionary function, and our role as living beings within it.

The challenge facing Quakers today, however, is not what they believe. The challenge is how to feel and share the experience described by George Fox: “There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy

**Left: Heinrich Hofmann, *Christ and the Young Rich Ruler*, 1889. Oil on canvas.**

**Bottom: Giovanni Lanfranco, *Miracle of the Bread and Fish*, 1620–1623. 7-1.2'x14', Oil on canvas.**

condition.” His experience must be described and shared in new ways, using contemporary language.

In the beginning of his Michener Lecture to Southeastern Yearly Meeting (SEYM), in 2018, Friend C. Wess Daniels quoted from rabbi and theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel’s *God in Search of Man*:

Religion declined not because it was refuted, but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion—its message becomes meaningless.

Daniels then spoke to SEYM Friends using the concept of “remixing the faith,” borrowing a musical metaphor for reworking a familiar piece of music into something fresh, new, interesting, and inviting while preserving its original energy and emotion. In 2015, he wrote a book on the subject, *A Convergent Model of Renewal: Remixing the Quaker Tradition in a Participatory Culture*.

Many people of faith believe that religious authorities are misinterpreting the guidance of the Holy Spirit, what Quakers call the Inner Light. Quakers are being called again to “speak Truth to power.” Discerning, articulating, and implementing the guidance of the Inner Light through contemporary language and targeted actions has never been more important.

The Bible and other religious writings must be re-examined, not to recommit to historic Quaker beliefs, but to discern and articulate contemporary applications of those testimonies: to “remix” them in a manner consistent with current understandings of

science, moral psychology, and sociology. Continuing revelation is uniquely suited to that task.

Consider these examples:

Was Jesus’s feeding of 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish a miracle, or was it instead a demonstration of the evolutionary principle of reciprocity? If the former, the story loses credibility and relevance. Worse, it provides a plausible defense for inaction: “I’m no Jesus.” If the latter, however, it expresses an important truth worth further discernment in evaluating potential action.

Were the stories of the rich young ruler and of the widow’s mite examples of the value of sacrifice? Or were they illustrations of a radical new economic model that could potentially reform capitalism, with results comparable to those described in Acts 2:42–47 (NIV):

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had



Image from commons.wikimedia.org

The Bible and other religious writings must be re-examined, not to recommit to historic Quaker beliefs, but to discern and articulate contemporary applications of those testimonies.

need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The following is from Acts 4:32–35 (NIV):

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

**James Tissot, *The Widow's Mite*, 1886–1894. 7 3/16' x 11 1/16', opaque watercolor over graphite on gray wove paper.**

**M**uch of today’s political unrest is caused by income inequality and political polarization about economic issues.

Capitalism seems to be working less for the benefit of the poor and more for the benefit of the rich. Economic profit increasingly takes priority over human need. Fewer businesses honor the Rotarian motto “Service above self. He profits most who serves best.”

A return to the biblical stories of Jesus might shed new light on old problems: offer solutions made possible by new technologies, such as artificial intelligence. The times are ripe for Quakers and other faith communities to remix their historical stories, applying them to the ulcers of war, starvation, loss, deprivation, and homelessness.

Jesus’s teachings might have been his attempt to describe a different economic system: a system based on provision through human relationships, rather than based solely on economic self-interest. He said, “Take no thought about what you shall eat or what you shall wear.” Might that be interpreted as “don’t worry about those

Quakers have an appropriate—even excellent—methodology for our time: an inward search in the company of other seekers. They offer an appropriate relationship to the sources of Truth: a diligent and objective search, with respect and an open mind but not with worship for any source.



Image from commons.wikimedia.org

things”? Might he have been suggesting that we have no control over the events of our lives; whether we are born into a rich family or a poor family; whether we experience good or bad fortune. In all things, therefore, he might be saying that we should not worry about what we can’t control. Instead we should trust that our needs will be met, like the “birds of the air” or the “lilies of the field.”

Instead of worrying about how our needs are to be met, we should focus on what action our Inner Light is guiding us to take. If misfortune happens, we will respond quickly and positively to restore those in need. We should cultivate relationships because we are all in this together: “All for one and one for all.”

We should not lay up treasure for ourselves on earth (capitalism) in order to protect ourselves from misfortune. That won’t work: it can be lost, spoiled, stolen, or simply

*Continues on page 53*

# EVEN THE ROCKS WILL CRY OUT

The Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, photo by John Theodor

*As he rode along, the people were spreading their cloaks on the road; and now as he was approaching the slope of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of his disciples began to praise God aloud with joy for all the mighty deeds they had seen. They proclaimed: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest." Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He said in reply, "I tell you, if they keep silent, the stones will cry out!"*  
—Luke 36–40

If you should keep silent  
in praise of God,  
even the rocks will cry out.

The strata of the igneous,  
sedimentary and metamorphic,  
the granite, marble and limestone,  
smoky topaz and clear quartz,  
even mere pebbles, grains of sand,  
flakes of mica.

All in praise, calling forth, crying out,  
their molecules colliding  
as if clapping their hands,  
oxide rolling and tumbling,  
breathing with inorganic  
sets of lungs,  
rough facets and clefts  
ringing with song.

If we keep silent as a people,  
the half-believing, the lukewarm,  
the fearful and the non-committal,  
the logical and ill-logical,  
ones who should come forward  
but stay in the mountains' shadows,  
the coolness of caves,  
silent as if they had no tongues,  
then even the rocks will cry out,  
which have no tongues.

*Cynthia Gallaher*  
Chicago, Ill.

# YOU WILL BE TOLD WHAT YOU MUST DO



Photo by Renzo Mejia Carranza

## A Biblical Perspective on Quaker Pastors

Jasson Arevalo

One of the major historical distinctives of Quakerism has been its view of ministers or pastors, an understanding that has set Friends apart from other Christian denominations since the movement's origins. While the seventeenth-century Church of England

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*Jasson Arevalo is Salvadorean and belongs to Guatemala Yearly Meeting. He has an undergraduate degree in theology with emphasis in pastoral ministry and is currently in the third year of the master of divinity program at Earlham School of Religion. He is married with no children. He would like to rejoin pastoral ministry after finishing school. This article was translated from Spanish to English by Renzo Mejia Carranza.*

maintained a formal system of ministerial ordination and attributed a higher degree of spiritual authority to the clergy, George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, testified that God revealed to him directly that the call to ministry was entirely divine, not mediated through any human institution.

Fox's experience of divine revelation regarding the call to ministry recalls the biblical account of God appearing to Saul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–9). In that story, God tells Saul, "Rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you must do." This biblical example seems to confirm two central points of Fox's testimony: that God reveals Himself directly to human beings and that God Himself calls people to ministry. Although Jesus's call to the disciples contains similarities to Fox's experience, the episode with Saul, where Jesus was no

Karen Gregorio (behind podium) and Evan Welkin (right) representing Friends World Committee for Consultations (Section of the Americas) at San Ignacio Amigos Church in El Salvador, November 2025.

experience, the episode with Saul, where Jesus was no longer physically present, provides the closest New Testament parallel. Some other Old Testament examples also resemble Fox's experience, including that of Abraham, Moses, and Elijah.

Early Quakers developed a practice for giving public recognition to ministers, known as "recording." This consisted of noting the spiritual gifts of a particular minister in the minutes of the monthly meeting without conferring any special status or ordination. Historian Thomas Hamm explains that human beings can only recognize a gift given by God; they cannot confer or promote it, for that belongs solely to God. Another form of recognition was allowing ministers to sit on the facing benches at the front of the meetinghouse, yet this did not change the context of radical equality with the rest of the congregation. These Quaker practices stood in stark contrast to contemporary Christian groups, which maintained hierarchical leadership systems granting privilege only to a small minority.

**George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, testified that God revealed to him directly that the call to ministry was entirely divine, not mediated through any human institution.**

**T**he Quaker desire to cultivate a community of equality, where titles described a person's role but not their value and where Christ alone held preeminence, echoes the apostle Paul. In his letters, Paul introduces himself at times as a servant of Christ (Rom. 1:1; Titus 1:1; 1 Cor. 4:1) and at other times as an apostle (Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1). By using the title "apostle," Paul acknowledges his divine calling; by naming himself a servant, he expresses his full submission to God and to the church.

Early Friends also believed that formal academic preparation for ministry was unnecessary, since God Himself equipped ministers to speak God's will. Hamm even notes that preparation for preaching was not only unnecessary but forbidden; bringing a Bible to read from

during worship was unusual. Many testimonies recount early Friends being suddenly moved by the Spirit to preach in meetings or public spaces, where God used them powerfully. William Edmundson, for example, was moved to speak about the day of the Lord and call people to repentance while in a marketplace. Silence played a crucial role as well, as it allowed Friends to hear God's voice and obey.

Peter's sermons in Acts 2:14–21 and 3:11–26 resemble the Quaker belief in Spirit-led, spontaneous preaching. First, the Spirit reveals to the preacher what is to be proclaimed: notice that Peter had just been filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–13). Second, the people recognized that Peter lacked formal training to speak so boldly, confirming that his message came through the Spirit.

**E**arly Friends also held that ministers needed proven spiritual maturity. A person's public life demonstrated whether they walked in the Spirit. The Spirit had to attest to a person's sanctification before that person received the gift of ministry. Paul outlines the qualifications for ministry in 1 Timothy 3:1–7: being blameless, faithful to one's spouse, temperate, prudent, respectable, not given to drunkenness, and so on. Paul

describes someone sanctified by the Spirit, whose good fruit does not come from human effort but from the Spirit's work.

From the beginning, Friends affirmed the ministry of women, a conviction that now seems commonplace but was radical in the seventeenth century and rejected by all other Christian

groups of the time. Given Quaker egalitarianism, acknowledging that women could serve in any ministry role was not only consistent but essential. Fox defended this in his 1656 pamphlet *The Woman Learning in Silence*. In *Women's Speaking Justified* (1666), Margaret Fell, a major Quaker leader, presented a biblical argument for women's ministry, noting that Jesus appeared first to a woman after the resurrection (Mary Magdalene) and that women were the first witnesses to the resurrection. Jesus Himself confirms the legitimacy of women's ministry.

Despite lacking full-time paid pastors, early Friends were deeply committed to preaching the gospel. In *The Rich Heritage of Quakerism*, Walter R. Williams recounts the story of the so-called Valiant Sixty, a group of 54 men

and 12 women who spread Quakerism across England, Ireland, Wales, and Scotland during the seventeenth century. About half supported themselves financially, while the Kendal Fund subsidized the others. It was customary for Friends to provide basic support for itinerant ministers. The Quaker theologian Robert Barclay explained that ministers should be supplied “what may be needful to them for meat or clothing.” Paul’s ministry offers a biblical analogy: he gratefully accepted help from churches (1 Cor. 16:17; Phil. 4:16–17) yet also supported himself so as not to burden the churches (2 Thess. 3:7–8). Acts 18:1–3 describes Paul’s tent-making trade, which he practiced alongside his ministry. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul affirms a minister’s right to be supported by the church, yet he personally declined this right so as not to hinder the gospel. He accepted help but was not dependent on it,

leadership. Because they believed Christ’s return was imminent, pastoral preaching became a central tool for saving as many people as possible. Revivalist Friends eventually adopted the pastoral system, which included hiring full-time pastors who required academic preparation and instituting hierarchical structures with pastors as primary spiritual authorities.

The adoption of the pastoral system was deeply



**Bernard Picart, *Quaker Meeting in London: A Female Quaker Preaches*, c. 1723. Engraving.**

ensuring that churches did not control his ministry and allowing him full freedom to obey God.

**T**he landscape of nineteenth-century American Christianity brought major changes to the Quaker ministerial system. Revivals proliferated; many new converts entered the churches; and interdenominational collaboration grew, promoting Bible reading, missionary trips, and the establishment of institutions for religious formation. Among Friends, the first major division emerged, primarily over theological disputes, creating two groups: the Orthodox Friends and the Hicksite Friends. Although both groups initially wished to preserve Quaker identity, the Hicksites were more committed to doing so. The Gurneyite branch of the Orthodox soon introduced vocal prayers, public Scripture readings, and hymns. They increasingly embraced ecumenical collaboration, resulting in significant changes to worship, theology, and views on ministerial practices.

A revival movement among Gurneyite Friends from 1860 to 1880 was influenced by an international Holiness movement, which emphasized preaching and pastoral

controversial. Some argued that it threatened the biblical doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and undermined the conviction that only God calls and appoints ministers. While early Quaker beliefs regarding ministers can be strongly supported biblically, this does not mean that nineteenth-century developments involving human participation in ministerial appointment cannot also be justified biblically.

In Acts 16:1–5, Paul recruits Timothy to join his missionary journeys and, after a period of formation, delegates him to remain in Ephesus to teach and guide the church (1 Tim. 1:1–4). According to Eusebius’s *Ecclesiastical History*, Paul ordained Timothy as pastor of Ephesus. Paul similarly placed Titus as pastor of Crete (Titus 1:5). The letters to Timothy and Titus are rightly called “pastoral epistles,” since they instruct these leaders on methods to carry out pastoral ministry. Does this mean humans replaced God in calling ministers? By no means. Only God calls and appoints, but Scripture shows that God sometimes uses the church to do so. Thus, both early Quaker practices and nineteenth-century pastoral practices can be argued biblically.

With the pastoral system came professional ministerial training, something early Friends viewed with suspicion, associating it with the creation of “hired pastors.” Even after accepting academic preparation, Friends wished to avoid the historical-critical methods taught in universities and seminaries. As a result, they founded Bible institutes and missionary schools emphasizing biblical inerrancy. According to modern academic Isaac Barnes May, such training often lacked academic rigor. Yet Scripture offers strong support for academic preparation: Jesus conversed with the teachers of the law at age 12, demonstrating the religious education typical of Jewish boys (Luke 2:45–47). When Satan tempted Jesus at the beginning of His ministry (Matt.

conversion, it became a powerful tool for reaching educated Jews and Gentiles of high social standing. The early Quaker belief that the Spirit spontaneously reveals the message and the nineteenth-century belief that God also works through academic preparation both have strong biblical support.

The ministry of women—long a distinctive part of Quakerism—was weakened by the adoption of the nineteenth-century pastoral system. Isaac Barnes May notes that although revivalist Gurneyites claimed to uphold women’s ministry, the reality fell short. Emma Cook Coffin, an African American recorded minister and evangelist from California, presented these concerns to the Five Years Meeting in 1920; although a few expressed

worry, most responses were negative. Some determined women, such as Coffin and Esther G. Frame, did obtain ordination, but their numbers dwindled. In this

I firmly believe that Quaker beliefs and practices concerning pastoral ministry responded to specific historical contexts, and that God guided Quaker leaders in each era to discern the most faithful responses to their challenges.

Below: Members of San Ignacio Amigos Church in El Salvador along with representatives of FWCC, November 2025.



Photo by Renzo Mejia Carranza

4:1–11; Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–13), Jesus responded to each temptation by quoting Scripture, showing mastery of the text that would affirm His ministry.

The apostle Paul received one of the highest levels of religious education available (Acts 22:3; Phil. 3:4–6). Although he initially misused this knowledge, after his

climate of disadvantage, Quaker figures such as Dougan Clark and David Updegraff presented biblical arguments supporting women’s ministry. Eventually, women regained a central place in Quaker service, especially as missionaries to Central America, South America, and Kenya.

I firmly believe that Quaker beliefs and practices concerning pastoral ministry responded to specific historical contexts, and that God guided Quaker leaders in each era to discern the most faithful responses to their challenges. As an evangelical Quaker who affirms the authority of Scripture, grounding these practices biblically is a way to affirm God’s approval of them. After exploring this topic both historically and biblically, I conclude that God, who most desires that His gospel of love reach all who are in need, has always provided faithful men and women to whom He entrusts His mission. In the case of Quakerism, God revealed the appropriate forms for each era to Friends who were humbly willing to accept and obey them. God will continue calling and commissioning workers for His mission. The question is: Will there be Friends willing to carry forward the legacy of faithfulness and obedience of past generations? ■

# BLACKOUT

My singing skirt material I got cheap  
like blackout curtains  
do they have that now?

Not like my war  
the war when I was born  
in nineteen forty one  
bombers and doodle bugs

But I was safe  
down in the cellar  
just a babe in arms.

I didn't know

"Safe" Mummy said  
"My darling, you were safe."

Not like them now  
are blackout curtains any use to them?  
the mothers in Ukraine  
the babes in arms in—  
what's that place you said?  
that funny name like stars  
Ah

Let me sleep now

*Margaret Crompton*  
Lincoln, UK

# THE INTIMACY OF PRAYER

Becky Jones

If you knew I had been an interfaith hospital chaplain for 20 years, you might think I had an easy relationship with, and understanding of, prayer. But that wasn't the case. As a youngster who attended church very rarely, I understood prayer to be what the minister did with his eyes closed and head down during church services. It was never clear to me whether God was listening, and, if I'm honest, I wasn't even sure who God was. Early on, I understood that prayer was something you didn't want anyone doing for you. I couldn't tell you why I believed that; I just knew it as one of the truest things in my family. And, except for the briefest pause before holiday dinners to express gratitude for relatives gathered from distant places, our family didn't pray. I knew the childhood prayer "Now I lay me down to sleep," but instead of giving me comfort, it made me afraid of dying in the night and I worried about where God would take me.

From an early age, I was engaged in deep questions about life's meaning and why there is suffering. Or maybe more accurately, I was in despair about how much cruelty is in the world. I was drawn to chaplaincy as a way to be with people in the midst of the hard times in their lives: when they too might be wondering about life's meaning and why they were suffering, and when the deepest conversations might take place. I didn't expect to have answers for anyone, but I did expect that it would be meaningful to them and to me. Maybe a little kindness and a listening ear would help; maybe some of my own questions would be answered; or maybe we would feel held by the "something bigger than we are" that I have experienced at times in my life. It's what I mean when I say "God."

Naively, I had no idea that prayer would be part of the experience of chaplaincy. I never considered whether I would pray with people. I knew only the Lord's Prayer and was twitchy whenever the topic of prayer came up, given my familial aversion to it. It hadn't yet occurred to me that I could make one up on the spot. I didn't yet know that prayer with someone could be an intimate and tender time.

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*Becky Jones is a longtime member of Northampton (Mass.) Meeting. She served as the interfaith chaplain in her local hospital and led bereavement writing workshops for 20 years. This essay is part of a larger collection of stories and reflections about life as a chaplain and as a person experiencing life's challenges, losses, and grace.*

## Connecting Spirit to Spirit as a Hospital Chaplain

Because being in the hospital can be a vulnerable time for patients, my inclination was to shelter them from any unwanted intrusions, including my own. My upbringing and protectiveness combined to keep me from suggesting prayer very often. I wanted to spare anyone the feeling of being trapped by a visit or an offer of prayer. Occasionally, people assumed I was there to proselytize or pray for them and declined my offer to visit as soon as I introduced myself as a chaplain. In contrast, a few other times, I was sent away for not being “religious” enough. Most of the time people received me with surprising openness.

Prayer sometimes came up as an expectation and sometimes as an opening. If the person had spoken about prayer or about God’s presence or absence in their life, I learned from my colleague Ann to ask, “Would you like a prayer, or are you all set?” That way, they would have an easy out.

If the answer was yes, I asked what they wanted held in prayer. From our time together, I usually had ideas of what I would say, but often they still had unspoken concerns. The offer of a prayer—or not—gave them the chance, when my hand was on the metaphoric doorknob, to say what might be the most important thing on their mind. Then I would ask if they wanted me to say a prayer with them now or later, when I was on my own.



The author in a school photo from first grade: “The bangs were a blunt signature cut that my parents gave to us kids as we were growing up. And the dress I’m wearing was probably a hand-me-down from an older sister. I still identify with that impish—maybe about to get into trouble or cause trouble—look on my face, but I suspect part of it was just that I was covering up a missing front tooth.”

For me, the offer to pray with someone came only after connecting spirit to spirit, after we had already entered a focused time together: a time when the person could speak without judgment, when gentle questions and listening enabled them to trust me enough to reveal the depths of their heart. It is an incredible gift when it happens. In those instances, prayer had already begun before I had offered it.

When praying with a patient, I would ask God or Beloved—or whatever name or quality seemed right—for a blessing and for strength, courage, and special oversight of their worries. I always ended by thanking Spirit for the gift of our time together and for the qualities I’d seen in the person, such as courage, resilience, trust, or humor. I wanted them to know I’d seen the fullness of their condition, not just the troubles and fears they were facing now. Being with the truths of where they were, they sometimes became still enough to listen to inner guidance from the “still, small voice of God.” There was often a sense of peace within the eye of the storm, finding a lifeboat when the swirling waters threatened to drown them.

When someone asked me to keep them in my prayers, I of course promised I would, and the intention toward prayer started silently right then. But to be honest, I usually forgot my promise, not having cultivated a habit of prayer. The closest I came to a prayer practice was the six-week period decades ago during a Friend’s daily radiation treatments when I held him in the Light, which, after all, is Quaker for keeping him in my prayers. Every day I imagined loving hands holding him while rays of sunlight streamed down to escort the cancer out of his body.

After years of repeating the pattern of promising, forgetting, and then feeling guilty once I remembered, it finally dawned on me that the moment I recognized that I had forgotten could be the time to turn to prayer. Or, rather, the instant of remembering could become the prayer itself. Now, instead of feeling guilty when I remember that I have forgotten, I turn my attention to the person who made the request, beginning a process sometimes ascribed to Julian of Norwich of first looking to God, looking to the person being remembered, then looking again to God. Because I’ve come to believe that prayer travels backward and forward in time, as well as across distance, there is a small satisfaction at having fulfilled my promise. Of course, this might be magical thinking, but it does work some alchemy in me, transforming self-focused guilt into other-focused occasions for connection.

During 20 years of chaplaincy and 45 years as a Quaker, my notions of prayer have expanded. Instead of seeing prayer as a solitary activity or a corporate recitation of prescribed words, I have come to think of prayer as anything that brings us closer to a felt-sense experience of Spirit, anything that connects us to that which is larger and more meaningful than ourselves, and anything that gives us a sense that we are being companioned.

Prayer can be both the yearning and its fulfillment. When journaling about the deepest truths of my life, I feel accompanied by a loving presence. When I have been the recipient of prayer, my sense of being kept company is even greater. When I clean up after a meal and remember to turn my attention to family, friends, and the world, doing the dishes becomes the prayer. And prayer is that ping of familiarity when I meet a kindred traveler on the spiritual path.

In meetings for worship, I begin the hour by looking at every person in turn, silently saying to each one, *Friend, I hold you in the Light; please hold me in the Light*. I blanket the room with blessings while opening myself to receive others' prayers. When I get snagged in that ritual by someone who rubs me the wrong way, finding affection for them feels like an answered prayer, or what some might call grace.

In the late '90s when I was having radiation for breast cancer, friends kept me company on the daily drive to the hospital, and I always invited them to join me in the lead-lined room to see what the set-up was like. Jan Hoffman, the New England Friend who introduced me to the concept of prayer moving backward or forward in time, declined the invitation, saying, "No thanks. I think I'll stay in the waiting room to swish a few prayers to the people here." Now, instead of seeing prayer as the act of addressing God directly in anguish, gratitude, or supplication, I understood that prayer can be the gentle whisper of goodwill sent to strangers across a room, or the beam of protective love directed toward a passing ambulance.

In my experience, the effectiveness of prayer isn't measured by whether we get what we ask for; rather, it is by how much we are opened up in the process. And whether or not I ever offered a spoken prayer, the intimacy I've been privileged to enter, when I have accompanied people through illness or death, feels sacred.

When a nurse I'd known over the years—through many personal and professional joys and crises—was dying from cancer, I visited her at her hilltop home. Judy



The effectiveness of prayer isn't measured by whether we get what we ask for; rather, it is by how much we are opened up in the process. And whether or not I ever offered a spoken prayer, the intimacy I've been privileged to enter, when I have accompanied people through illness or death, feels sacred.

Photo by Jameylene Reskp on Unsplash

was skeletal and barely able to walk, but the light still shined through her eyes. Her family and I were gathered in their living room. They were leaning back into the cushions of the deep sectional couch, trying to take a break while I visited. I was sitting on the floor next to Judy, wondering how we might connect since we clearly couldn't have our usual rich conversation. Because they were exhausted and trying to be good hosts, they were also trying to get Judy to stay put. But she was restless and wriggled forward from the couch onto the footstool.

As she scooped forward, I got up on my knees to face her and found myself asking, "Would you like to dance?" Without hesitation, she put her arms around me. Judy on the ottoman and me on my knees, I returned her gentle embrace. She leaned into me, and I could feel her restlessness dissipate as I hummed into her ear and we swayed. Her husband told me they always sang on their

*Continues on page 53*

# FOLLOWING TRUTH THROUGH → COMMUNITY

Photo by Getty Images

## Discernment Mistakes to Avoid

Diego Navarro and Brenda Chung

A common query in Quaker circles asks: What is unique about Quakerism that makes you continue to choose it as your spiritual path? For us, the answer is the following: the way Quakers discern allows the revealing of Truth, which speaks to our condition. The word “Truth” is used here in the same sense as it was

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*Diego Navarro, former clerk of Pacific Yearly Meeting, is a member of Santa Cruz (Calif.) Meeting. Brenda Chung, a member of Logan (Utah) Meeting, also attends Kea’au (Hawaii) Friends. Diego gave the Carey Lecture for Baltimore Yearly Meeting in 2023, and Brenda served as his elder. The genesis for this article is their joint work before, during, and since this lecture.*

used by early Friends: divine authority that we can turn toward to guide our lives, and that is revealed to us through the Quaker way of discernment. This, we believe, is the genius of Quakerism.

### Quaker Discernment and Testimony

Quakers discern by using a process that often includes clearness committees. We use them when we want to understand a leading or concern, become a member, or get married. Clearness committee members don’t tell us what to do but instead help us with our own discernment. They ask queries and let Truth work in us; they help us understand how we are led individually and help with any necessary commitment of

support from the meeting.

Quaker discernment also takes place during worship, committee meetings, and worship on occasion of business. At these meetings, especially in worship on occasion of business, we try to get the sense of the meeting, which is the revealing of Truth that is coming through the entire group.

Paul Buckley, in his pamphlet *Quaker Testimony: What We Witness to the World*, states that for Friends, testimonies traditionally meant testifying about how Truth is affecting our lives: how we live our lives are our testimonies. In Baltimore Yearly Meeting's *Faith and Practice* section on Quaker experience, Ben Pink Dandelion states: "We are transformed individually and collectively in order to become agents of transformation in the world." So, if we attend worship regularly, and five years later we're the same person, are we Quakers? Or is there something that actually changes us as we live the Quaker way?

We make  
discernment mistakes  
due to three things:  
our socialized mindsets,  
our fallibility as individuals,  
and our corporate  
groupthink.

## Faulty Discernment and Failure to Follow Truth

If Quaker discernment leads to the revealing of Truth and living the Quaker way means following Truth, then why do Quakers make big mistakes, both individually and corporately? Quakers owned and traded enslaved persons, settled on lands stolen from Indigenous peoples, administered residential boarding schools for the forced assimilation of Indigenous children, and were instrumental in the creation of a prison system that included solitary confinement. We have benefited both individually and collectively from being part of the empires of England and the United States. Both are

imperialistic and capitalistic countries that have histories of oppression and exploitation.

Why do we make big mistakes like these? We think mistakes are caused by faulty discernment and failure to follow the Truth that has been revealed to us.

We make discernment mistakes due to three things: our socialized mindsets, our fallibility as individuals, and our corporate groupthink.

First, we all have been socialized and assimilated into the dominant society where caste and class distinctions—such as being White, male, able-bodied, cisgender, Christian, and adult—are centered while everything else is marginalized. Many of us are not aware of the extent of our own socialization.

Many of us are assimilated into the middle-class way of living, with its comfort and predictability lulling us into a trance. For example, when we get in a car, we push a button or turn a key, and it starts. Many people don't own a car, or they have one with a history of frequent breakdowns. Our expectation and entitlement of getting to where we want to be at a certain time is different from those who don't own a reliable car. When we bring these dominant assumptions and socialized norms into Quaker worship on occasion of business, we expect to complete agenda items in short time frames. We don't want the agenda to be interrupted even when harm occurs and the beloved community is fragmented.

Our straying from Truth is compounded by Quakers' close association with higher education. The culture of higher education teaches us to listen for what we disagree with and then to defend our position. We learn logic and debate skills in college. We're unaware that we have been socialized to defend our position instead of settling into the sense of the meeting as we seek Truth.

Second, we need community to discern Truth because as individuals we are sometimes misled and our discernment is faulty and fallible. Individually, we each have a will, an intellect, desires, and the ability to think, all of which can get in the way of discernment. We need to learn to use our will and intellect to support the implementation of Truth as it is revealed in our lives and community.

Our individual discernment is also fallible because each of us sees the world through lenses colored both by our lived experiences and our socialization. These lenses act like a veil, obstructing our understanding of Truth. We need each other to lift this veil so that we can see Truth more completely. "For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophesying is imperfect; but once perfection [we

would say Truth] comes, all imperfect things will disappear” (Jerusalem Bible, 1 Cor. 13:9–10).

Third, Friends are vulnerable to groupthink. This is partly the result of the lack of diversity of life experiences in our meetings due to our demographics. In addition, Quaker spaces—like other spaces dominated by societal norms—often marginalize the needs and voices of those with diverse life experiences. As a result, although many Friends may have had firsthand experiences of marginalization at some point in our lives, we do not acknowledge them, because we want to fit into “the beloved Quaker community.” Sometimes, this assimilation submerges our own capacity to access or speak Truth through life experiences that are edgy. Truth is made more robust when all the different life experiences are fully in the room. Think about Benjamin Lay’s ministry against enslavement. If he had had a clearness committee, would they have been supportive of his ministry? Would there have been more Benjamin Lays if Friends were fully living their Truth? How has the lack of Black and Indigenous voices in the Religious Society of Friends affected Quaker discernment in actions concerning African Americans and Indigenous peoples?

Consider the Bantu African idea of ubuntu, often translated as “I am because we are.” Within the collective “we” is our true and complete humanity. We need each other to be whole: to be fully awake to the movement of the Spirit and the revealing of Truth. When we lack and marginalize diversity, our “we” is incomplete. When we discern with an incomplete community, our communal discernment is fallible, just like our discernment is fallible as individuals. We need to ask ourselves: who is our Quaker “we”? Who is fully in the circle, truly equal, with all of their lived experiences acknowledged, as we gather to discern how we are led as a community?

Besides making discernment mistakes, we also make mistakes because we fail to follow Truth that has been revealed to us. A big part of this failure to follow Truth has to do with livelihoods and vested interests getting in the way. For example, many of us in the United States are aware of the destructive power of our military–industrial complex, but we still invest in the stock market and pay federal income taxes that fund war. Sometimes this failure is a lifestyle choice. For example, many of us still travel for pleasure without regard for carbon pollution, even though we know that by doing so we are contributing to the climate crisis.

Living the Quaker way  
means following Truth  
that is revealed  
to us, both individually  
and corporately.

## Avoid Discernment Mistakes: Embrace Diversity; Wake Up to Socialization

**T**his mantra kept going through Diego’s mind in the morning of his 2023 Carey Lecture at Baltimore Yearly Meeting: *You can’t do what you want until you know what you do.* Then it changed to: *You can do what you want once you know what you do.*

Just as we need our spiritual community to help us discern Truth, we also need this community to nudge us along the path to follow Truth that is revealed to us. But what can we do to avoid making discernment mistakes?

First, we need to embrace ministries carried by Friends with diverse life experiences and levels of suffering: Friends who have been marginalized by the dominant society and have experienced harm firsthand. These lived experiences foster a unique awareness and understanding of Truth, which people living in privilege and comfort may grasp only intellectually. This privilege and comfort act as a veil that hides Truth. This veil can be lifted by Truth revealed through ministries informed by first-hand experiences of marginalization.

Ministries informed by firsthand experiences of marginalization can challenge the status quo, those dominant worldviews, practices, and unspoken norms that dominate today’s Quaker culture. When this Truth is spoken, we need to be aware of our fight/flight/freeze/appease reactions: feeling defensive, taking the ministry as a personal attack, focusing on our own discomfort, using Quaker process as an excuse for dismissing or objecting to the ministry, or correcting others’ statements. These reactions can lead to harm and the fragmentation of the beloved community. For example, Diego has a friend of African descent raised in the South who would at times say “Hallelujah” when deep ministry was given in worship. People in the meeting got shook up by this ministry and told this friend afterward that “Quakers

don't do that." How is saying "Hallelujah" different from saying "this Friend speaks my mind"?

We have to differentiate what is core to Quakerism from the dominant societal norms that have been incorporated into our Quaker culture. When we're feeling uncomfortable, we need to determine if it's coming from the essence of Quakerism or something else. If we want our beloved community to be one in which diversity thrives and Truth prospers, we must be willing to move beyond our personal comfort zones. We need to become comfortable with being uncomfortable in the presence of revealed Truth.

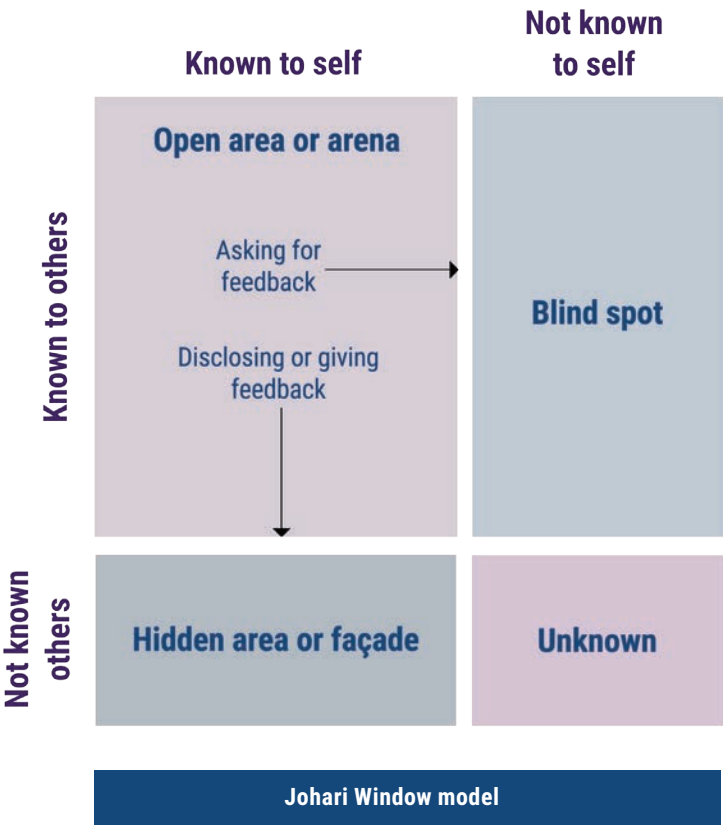
The Religious Society of Friends has difficulty in attracting people that come from marginalized life experiences. It is also losing those who do come because of their experiences in our community. Many times we're not even aware of their experiences. To understand the experience of harm, we need to make space to identify, address, and heal harm when it occurs. We need to adopt a process to identify fragmentation in the beloved community, and implement a process to address and heal harm when it occurs amongst us. To this end, the Racial Justice Subcommittee of Pacific Yearly Meeting's Ministry Committee has put together the Sacred Space Process for identifying and healing harm, using "ouch, oops, and whoa" as the stepping stones. (See "Sacred Space" by Thistle Hofvendahl and Diego Navarro in the October 2022 issue of *Friends Journal*.) Other processes in use include Friends General Conference's Guidelines for Addressing Racial Wounding and New England Yearly Meeting's Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness.

Second, we need to wake up to our socialized mindsets. Joseph Pickvance, a George Fox scholar, told Diego this story about George Fox. When Fox was an itinerant preacher, he would go into churches and speak after the sermon was over. Sometimes he would be thrown out of the churches. He'd get up off the ground and dust himself off. People would surround him, say he'd spoken to their condition, and asked how they could follow his teaching after he'd left their village. Fox gave them two instructions: first, sit in total silence for as long as it takes to feel the Spirit of Christ among you on First Day; second, at midweek, come together and share with each other how Truth is manifesting amongst you.

Early Quaker worship was an open-ended search for Truth and could last for hours. How is the revealing of Truth and the development of our sensitivity to Truth affected by limiting worship to a prescribed one-hour

period? The idea of the midweek meeting was to communally become more attuned to society norms that weren't aligned with Truth (such as tipping hats) and to bring their lives into greater alignment with Truth. What practices do we have today that are similar to these midweek gatherings to help us wake up from our socialization and come into alignment with Truth?

Besides the revival of midweek gatherings, there are other approaches to help us wake up from our nonalignment with Truth. We can do consciousness raising. One way to do that is contained in the concept of the Johari Window. This model breaks our self-knowledge into four windows, organized by what's known and unknown to ourselves and to others. When our group interactions fall in the Blind Spot, we can unknowingly harm one another. When they fall in the Hidden Area, we miss the opportunity to deepen connections by disclosing one's vulnerability.



To raise our collective consciousness, we need to understand our blind spots and decrease our hidden areas. The way to accomplish this is to receive feedback, provide feedback, and hold each other accountable. The Sacred Space process and Noticing Patterns of Oppression and

*Continues on page 54*

# When You're Surrounded by Briars, Mountains, and Cold Hearts

## Margaret Fell for Modern Friends

SHULAMITH CLEARBRIDGE

*This is the second of two articles that present the words of Margaret Fell translated for modern-day Friends. The first article appeared in the November 2025 issue.*

Margaret Fell was affectionately known as the “mother of Quakerism.” One of the ways she nurtured Friends was through her writings. She was prolific, producing sixteen books (five while she was in prison), twenty-nine tracts and public documents, and hundreds of letters and epistles.

Surprisingly, Margaret’s letters speak directly to our needs now.

When Quakers came into being in 1652, there were laws in England that criminalized activities that were central to Friends’ beliefs. Beginning in 1664, new laws were enacted in an attempt to squash Quakerism, along with other forms of non-conformism. Friends were arrested on the grounds of these, and also simply to harass them.

Reasons for arrest included interrupting a preacher (which was unfair because it was a custom of the time for visiting ministers to debate in this way and non-Friends were allowed to do so); blasphemy; refusing to bear arms; attending meeting for worship; disturbing the peace (a false accusation laid on worshipping Quakers); refusing to swear the Oath of Allegiance (forbidden to Friends by the Bible); suspicion of plotting against the King (Friends were accused of this

by officials of each king as he came into power); refusal to doff their hats to “their betters”; refusal to pay tithes to support the Church of England; and charges of traveling (to attend meeting) on Sunday.

The judicial system was in the hands of each judge. One jury twice defied a judge’s order to find two Friends guilty: William Penn and William Mead. The enraged judge threw the entire jury into jail, demanding they change their verdict. They did not.

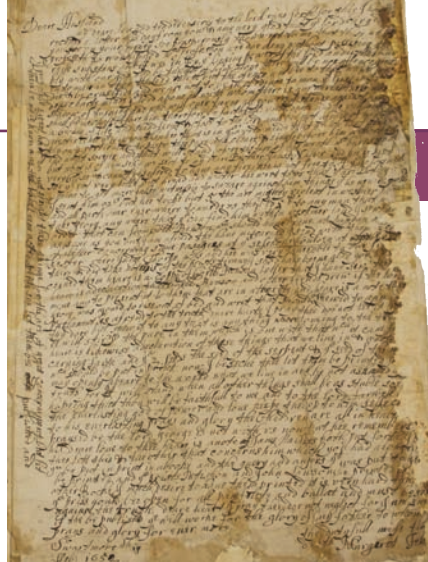
Margaret’s first husband, Thomas Fell, was a judge. That provided protection for Margaret. After his death in 1658, officials in Margaret’s neighborhood came down on her with a vengeance. She went to prison three times. The first time, in 1664, she spent six months in Lancaster Castle Gaol while waiting for a trial at a higher court. She could have waited at her home, Swarthmoor Hall, if she promised not to have any more meetings for worship there, but this Margaret would not do.

The higher court sentenced her to *praemunire*, the harshest sentence possible, which included loss of her entire estate and imprisonment indefinitely. Friends worked hard to get her out, but it took them four years.

Margaret married George Fox in 1669, when she was 55. She was thrown back into Lancaster Castle just ten days later! George asked two women Friends to speak to King Charles II on Margaret’s behalf. This worked eventually; Margaret was released after about a year.

The last imprisonment was in

Sample of Margaret’s handwriting, 1652.



1684, when Margaret was 70. She spent three weeks in prison along with her daughter Rachel, and Rachel’s husband, Daniel Abraham. After their release, Margaret was successful in convincing the latest king, James II, to do something about the officials where she lived. The King intervened, and Margaret was finally able to “live peaceably at my house.”

To help go deeper into Margaret’s words, I have adapted them into contemporary English and arranged them like poetry.

This letter was written in 1653 to Quaker prisoners James Nayler and Francis Howgill, the year after Margaret became a convinced Quaker. Most of us are not in prison or having our homes, possessions, and livelihoods taken from us. Yet Margaret’s words can speak to us just as strongly in whatever circumstances feel overwhelming.

I recommend reading only a few lines or a single stanza at a time, out loud and slowly. Then pause to let the meaning sink in. Then read those lines again, and pause again, before going on.

Dear brothers-in-spirit James and Francis, and all of you who are in prison because you are Quakers,

You are abiding faithfully in the will of God.  
Standing therein you have peace,  
you have joy,  
you have boldness.

Don’t despair—the secret work of God is going on inside people.  
Don’t get caught up in the amount of work to be done,  
don’t look at all the briars, or at the thorns, or at the mountains in the way,  
don’t lose your way because of the coldness in people.

It is this way because no one has been tending the trees  
or the fields—no farmer of the Spirit has prepared the ground  
or sowed seeds.  
Therefore the Great Friend has set you forth to do this work.  
Know that you shall not plough or sow in vain.

I pray that you all feel the sweet love of the glorious Presence and know fully Its miraculous power, so you may continue to stand without fainting and be guided, instead of relying on your own wills.

Our human will is weak, but if you keep your mind on what is purely of God within you, you will be able to continue to stand strong.

The Lord is doing great things. You will see how all the plotting against us will be broken to pieces. This rule by people living in darkness has long held sway, but now the Lord is raising up glorious light.

Therefore pay attention only to Spirit and boldly be faithful to the truth you know.

Keep treading and trampling on the deceit that is all around you.

Try not to yearn for your outward freedom. Don't get stuck on the terrible things people do or think it a waste of years of our lives. The divine Friend is doing great work through you

So look only at the Eternal God of Life and Power, which you will see is always present with you, supporting and protecting, lifting you up above whatever occurs.

Praises to the Lord God Almighty of Life and Power!

Love is never wasted. Actions you take out of love—even if you see no fruit, even if you feel harmed by the result—are never a waste, not of you, your time, or your life.

Taking action in the name of love changes us. As Sufi sage Baha'uddin said, "Your soul is greater than anything you ever lost."

*Note:* The original text is posted at [Friendsjournal.org/margaret-fell-words-2](https://Friendsjournal.org/margaret-fell-words-2), along with sources and other information.

*Shulamith Clearbridge is a member of Swarthmore (Pa.) Meeting. She is a writer and a spiritual director. Her most recent book is the 2023 Pendle Hill pamphlet Plain Talk about Dying. Shulamith offers presentations and workshops based on Margaret Fell's writings and other topics. Contact: clearbridge@fastmail.com.*



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# Led by the God of Our Experience

## Thoughts from a Quaker Solitary

DEREK R. POLZER

I first came to Quakerism after experiencing what I've heard referred to as a "conversion experience," a moment of personal spiritual clarity that radically changed the direction of my spiritual journey.

I had been raised in a post-Vatican II liberal Catholic family. I went to parochial school, received the sacraments, and dutifully went to catechism class. One evening in the "teens" group, I asked a visiting bishop about the church's position on the Vietnam War. I don't remember much about the exchange, but the question was not well-received, and an argument ensued. The bishop told me that I could be excommunicated because of something I had said. The threat really didn't bother me, and I told him to go ahead!

I saw too many contradictions within my church of origin that I was unable to reconcile, especially the church's claim of exclusivity: it being the "One True Apostolic Church." How could any institution claim ownership of God or Christ? That's when I first began my search of the spiritual landscape for a faith or practice that was less authoritarian and dogmatic. I was only 17 then, and my concerns were primarily about life

on this side of the cosmic curtain. The afterlife could wait!

During my early 20s, I took a job in a furniture factory, and while there, I had the good fortune of meeting and befriending a man who would become my spiritual mentor, who helped me discover and navigate my way through my early spiritual seekings. I began to read theologians such as Thomas Merton and other contemplatives. Some were monks; some were hermits; all were what you might call mystics within the Christ tradition. Through the writings and lives of these contemplatives, I was eventually led to the writings of George Fox.

After nine months of reading, it was time for me to move on to the next part of what I began to call my "pilgrimage." Around this time I came across a record review of an album by the F&W String Band, a New England contra dance band made up of staff and campers from the Farm and Wilderness Camps in Vermont. Being recently unemployed and a five-string banjo player, I decided to get myself hired!

As the camp had been founded on Quaker principles, I figured I should acquaint myself with what the Friends were all about so I began reading. During this time of preparation, I came

upon this statement by Fox in his *Journal*:

And when all my hopes in them [priests] and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, oh then, I heard a voice which said, "There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition," and when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy.

His proclamation resonated with me and my own moment of clarity. It was Fox's belief that by waiting in prayerful silence, it was possible for every individual to directly encounter the Light of God in Christ. This was what I had been looking for. During this period of my life, I began seriously considering entering a monastic order. The desire was very strong, but as I continued to read, it became clear that Quakerism was, at its foundation, a contemplative practice that could be practiced outside the walls of the monastery and without a monk's robe or formal vows.

My summer at Farm and Wilderness had a profound impact on me, and after returning home to New Jersey, I immediately found a nearby meeting and began attending

meeting for worship regularly, eventually becoming a member. As the years passed, however, I began to become uncomfortable with the overly political nature of the “messages”: the righteousness of these messages bothered me. My reasons for becoming a member were spiritual not political: I was seeking a refuge where I could be with others in communal worship and temporarily leave behind the chaos of the world. But after a while, the chaos had found its way into the meetinghouse. Meeting for worship had become a place for soapboxing about the urgency and centrality of a particular cause.

I understood the reality of these heartfelt concerns, but I began to wonder: when do we take time to lay down these burdens and simply rest in the Light? As a Christ-centered Friend seeking at least one weekly hour of refuge, I found myself getting frustrated, often angry, and longing more and more for peace. After visiting other meetings, requesting a clearness committee, and getting no response, I eventually decided to stop attending meeting. I felt heartbroken, and, again, I found myself wandering the spiritual desert, this time questioning if I was still a Friend.

I still believed in Quakerism’s spiritual foundation, it’s unique centering practice, so, in the manner of Friends, I sought clarity by waiting in the Light and asked: Is it appropriate to call myself a Quaker even if I practice my faith outside the walls of a meetinghouse?

Eventually clarity came when I remembered the tradition of the “solitary practitioner”—monks, hermits, and pilgrims—that had always been a part of the Christ tradition dating back to the earliest days of the church, so why not carry on that tradition and practice my Quaker faith as a solitary?

It’s the framework of Quakerism as a spiritual practice that I’ve chosen to call my spiritual home. Lately, I’ve been led to find spiritual refuge in the

perfection of Creation: within the wild places where God’s love and beauty is ever present. As Christ says in the Gospel of Thomas, “Split a piece of wood; I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there.” It is here that I’ve chosen to be present with the Christ that dwells in all things!

Through my Quaker practice, I have come to understand what Christ said in Matthew 7:3–5, that we should remove the log from our own eye before we point out the speck in another’s eye. That is to say, heal yourself first before taking on the wound of the world. I believe we have two primary obligations in this life. The first is to self-actualize by working to become the person we were born to be, and as a result of this “becoming,” we are asked to share that experience in service to others, including all of Creation.

Christ said, “In my Father’s house, there are many mansions” (John 14:2, KJV), and I believe that to be true. Truth and wisdom is not limited to any one Scripture or revelation; no religious institution or individual can claim ownership of God. I believe that we are all led by the God of our experience, and if we consciously center ourselves, wait in the Light, and then take the time to discern what has been revealed, we will find our path, which might, perhaps, lead us away from the “meetinghouse” for a time. Christ-centered Quakerism is the path I’ve been led to follow, and I will stay true to this leading as best I can by waiting in the silence and listening for Christ’s good counsel.

*Derek R. Polzer lives in the Watchung Range near the upper Passaic River in central New Jersey with his wife, Jacky. He is a poet, banjo builder and player, teacher of banjo building and woodworking, avid canoeist, fly angler, and an advocate for the revival of regional folk culture and folkways. Derek identifies as an apolitical Christ-centered Quaker anarchist.*



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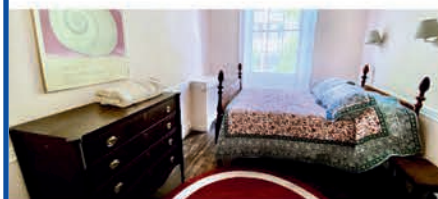
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## Eight Quaker organizations release statement saying genocide is occurring in Gaza

By Sharlee DiMenichi

After long periods of discernment, eight Quaker groups signed a joint statement calling Israel's war in Gaza genocide. "We believe with moral clarity, and in line with the definition of the crime of genocide, that the current actions in Gaza perpetrated by the Israeli government, constitute the crime of genocide," the statement reads. It was posted to the American Friends Service Committee's website on July 28.

The statement calls for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza and for Palestinians to have full access to humanitarian aid. It advocates for sanctions on Israel, including a complete weapons embargo and freezing the assets of settler militias. It also calls on legislatures to oppose any legal penalties for expressing pro-Palestinian sentiments.

The document calls on Friends to advocate for peace and justice for Israelis and Palestinians:

Friends have a long history of working for peaceful coexistence and justice for all people in the Middle East. We have witnessed times when Jews, Muslims, and Christians have enjoyed peace and cooperation in the region. Since the creation of the State of Israel, our organizations have supported nonviolent efforts among both Palestinians and Israelis to protect human rights, prevent violence, address the root causes of conflict, and promote peacebuilding. We still believe a peaceful future for all peoples is possible.

Signatories include eight Quaker groups worldwide: American Friends Service Committee, Canadian Friends Service Committee, Friends Committee on National Legislation, Friends World Committee for Consultation World Office, Quakers in Britain/Quaker Peace and Social

Witness, Quaker Council for European Affairs, Quaker Service Norway, and Quaker United Nations Office.

*Friends Journal* talked with the heads of several signatories about the decision to sign on to the statement.

"Before we determined and used the g-word there was a lot of discernment," said Joyce Ajlouny, general secretary of American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). Ajlouny is a Palestinian American, and has served as the head of AFSC since 2017.

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and B'Tselem (a human rights group in Israel) are three organizations that have determined that genocide is occurring in Gaza. The International Court of Justice determined that there is plausible evidence of genocide, Ajlouny noted.

According to the United Nations' Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which went into effect in 1951 after the end of World War II, genocide involves "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group." Actions prohibited under the convention include killing group members, severely harming group members (mentally or physically), intentionally creating conditions hostile to the life of group members,

deliberately preventing births in the group, and forcibly removing one group's children and placing them with another group.

AFSC staffers' belief that genocide was occurring was also based in part on a 2023 article by Raz Segal, program director of the Master of Arts in Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Stockton University in New Jersey, according to Ajlouny. Segal is an Israeli.

AFSC staffers in the region have also reported destruction that offers evidence of genocide, according to Ajlouny.

"Just five days ago, one of our staff had nine family members killed in an Israeli bombing," Ajlouny said on October 1. The staff member had previously lost his sister, brother-in-law, and two nieces in a different IDF attack. One staff member is undergoing their eleventh housing displacement since the war began.

Ajlouny explained that recently displaced staff members who fled northern Gaza to go to the south have been offering informal education to children who cannot go to school because of the war. They recently held a graduation ceremony for a cohort of children whose education was disrupted.

Staff members in the region cannot find enough food to feed their own families, Ajlouny explained. One



Protestors gather at a prayer service outside the Friends Committee on National Legislation office in Washington, D.C., calling for a ceasefire and an end to the genocide in the Israel-Gaza War. FCNL's legislative director for Middle East policy, Hassan El-Tayyab, is seen holding the microphone. The event took place on September 18, 2025, Global Day of Action for Palestine.

“

*We didn't stop when we were displaced.  
We are still here, and we are still  
protecting each other.*



Women Protection Team Graduation Ceremony, Zamzam, Sudan. 2023.

When Amal fled Zamzam camp, she carried only what she could. Like thousands of families in Sudan, she was searching for safety—for a place where her children could sleep without fear. The war had taken her home. It had scattered her community. But it could not take her purpose.

As a trained Women Protection Team leader with Nonviolent Peaceforce, Amal had already helped women organize for safety, accompany survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, and build violence prevention and response efforts within a camp of 300,000+ people.

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staff member has five daughters who cannot find menstrual products in the war zone. The war has destroyed infrastructure so much that survivors in Gaza lack access to toilets, cancer patients have nowhere to get chemotherapy, and dialysis patients cannot get treatment, Ajlouny noted.

AFSC also based its conclusion about genocide on a charge before the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

The ICJ is weighing South Africa's allegation that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza. A final ruling could take years. The court delivered a preliminary opinion in January 2024 stating that the genocide accusation is "plausible."

International legal processes have their place but have limitations, according to Mike Merryman-Lotze, Just Peace Global Policy director at AFSC. He previously worked for 13 years coordinating AFSC's policy and advocacy work in Palestine-Israel and the Middle East.

"It's not a mechanism for taking action and ending what is happening," Merryman-Lotze said.

Britain Yearly Meeting designated several meetings over the course of three days at this year's annual sessions in May to discern a position on whether genocide is occurring in Gaza, according to Oliver Robertson, head of Witness and Worship. Between 600 and 700 Friends attended Britain Yearly Meeting's annual sessions; it was powerful for Friends to participate in such a large community discernment even though the process was long and difficult, Robertson noted.

Some Friends thought it was not Quakers' place to determine whether Israel was committing genocide but that international courts should decide. Some Quakers believed issuing a statement on genocide could damage the public perception of them as peacemakers. Others believed that Friends can be both prophets and reconcilers, Robertson explained.

"We perform different roles at different times," Robertson said.

Other Friends expressed concern about the impact of such a statement on the wider Jewish community, Jewish Quakers, and interfaith relationships. The statement contains a section about not attacking or blaming ordinary Jews or Israelis, Robertson noted.

Signatories to the statement commit to:

Reach out in love to Jewish, Muslim and Palestinian communities, confronting antisemitism, anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian hate while refusing to be silent in the face of oppression.

Advocate for the universal human rights of all people in Palestine and Israel—ensuring they can live in freedom and dignity, without fear, and with lasting peace and security.

Jews in Britain and elsewhere struggle intensely with how to respond to the war, Robertson noted.

Friends from Britain Yearly Meeting wrote to Jews with whom they had interfaith relationships, according to Robertson.

Some of the replies included perspectives such as, "We don't agree with the wording or the language you're using, but we can see that you're not trying to hate us or divide us," Robertson said.

Britain Yearly Meeting's minute states in part:

And so, we cannot say clearly enough: it is this current Israeli government that we are led to say we believe is committing genocide. Jewish people are not committing genocide. The Israeli people are not committing genocide. We abhor, and will challenge, any attempt to exploit our words to incite, fuel, or commit anti-Jewish and antisemitic hatred or violence. We abhor, and will challenge, any attempt to use our words to question the existence of Israel or the Israeli people's right to live in peace and security.

Britain Yearly Meeting does not

take a full boycott, divestment, and sanctions position, rather they support boycotting settlement products and divesting from companies directly involved in occupying Palestinian territories, according to Robertson. AFSC and the UN keep lists of businesses involved in the occupied territories.

In their discernment, Friends acknowledged violence and trauma on both sides and also expressed concerns about antisemitism and not wanting to negatively impact Jewish communities, according to Bridget Moix, general secretary of Friends Committee on National Legislation. The organization discerned internally, and Moix discerned with other heads of Quaker organizations.

"Quakers have tried very much to be on the side of peace and on the side of nonviolence," said Moix.

Britain Yearly Meeting members have also contacted parliamentarians to urge them to discontinue military aid to Israel, Robertson noted.

"We see our actions as part of a wider effort," Robertson said.

Friends can respond to the genocide statement by contacting their elected officials to advocate for ending the war, Merryman-Lotze observed.

Eighty-four Friends meetings, churches, schools, and organizations had endorsed the statement as of November 13.

The statement can support Friends who are advocating for an end to genocide and the war in Gaza, according to Andrew de Sousa, director of Quaker Council for European Affairs.

"We hope that it will give courage to those who are doing it, to continue the work," de Sousa said.

*This story was shortened for print. Readers can find the full version online where links to sources are also included.*

*Sharlee DiMenichi is a staff writer for Friends Journal. Follow all our news coverage at [Friendsjournal.org/news](https://www.friendsjournal.org/news); send us tips at [news@friendsjournal.org](mailto:news@friendsjournal.org).*



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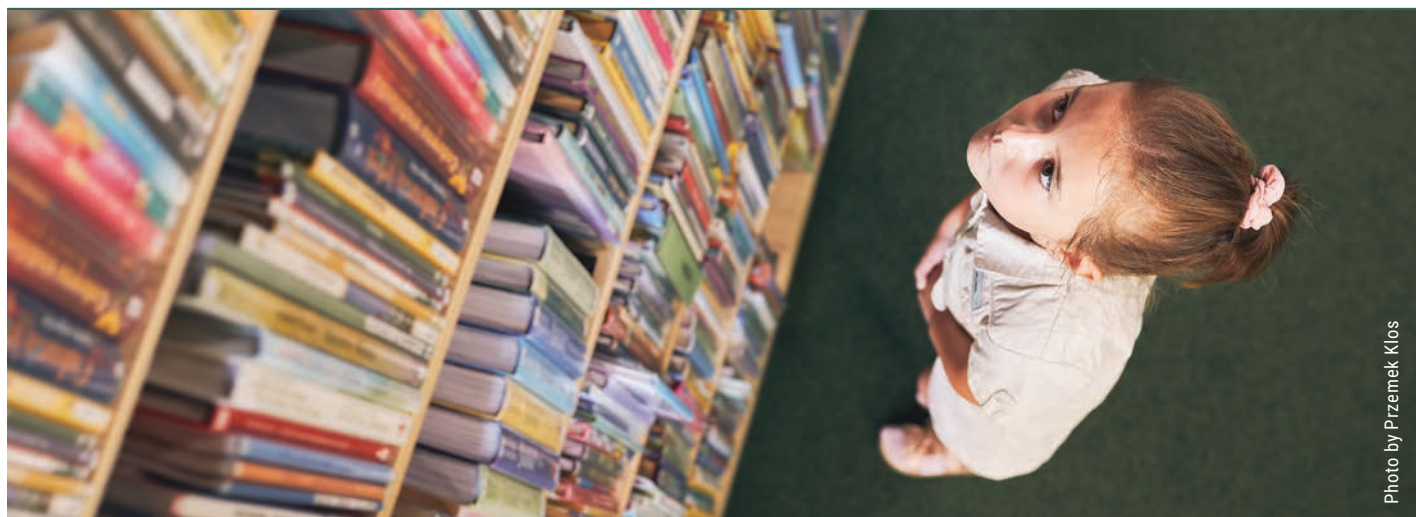


Photo by Przemek Klos

# Young Friends Bookshelf

Our column usually includes many books that reflect Quaker values. For example, *The Littlest Drop* never mentions Quakers or Quakerism; nevertheless, it seems to capture values many of our readers share. This particular column is unusual in that we have reviewed three books that each give us a glimpse of the Quaker world. For example, *The Lost Book: An Allen House Mystery* is a true story of a large Quaker family living in a log cabin in North Carolina. Then we have *Fearless Benjamin: The Quaker Dwarf Who Fought Slavery*. As the publisher of this biography of Benjamin Lay states, he “fought slavery when almost everyone else accepted it.” The mother of the main character in *Answers to Dog* is a Quaker. The view of her Quaker meeting is not flattering, but it could provoke some thought and discussion about how our young people might describe their place of worship. This column also includes books for dog lovers, books for budding scientists, a book about birds, historical books, poetry, and even a Caldecott Medal winner. I hope you will find something of interest to you.

—Eileen Redden  
Young Friends Book Review Editor  
yfbbooksed@friendsjournal.org

Ages 3–7

## The Lost Book: An Allen House Mystery

By Jean Parvin Bordewich, illustrated by Seren Llunet. Palmetto Publishing, 2024. 38 pages. \$19.99/hardcover; \$12.99/paperback.

Reviewed by Shelia Bumgarner

Long before the Allen House (a typical log cabin in the backcountry of North Carolina) was moved by preservationists in 1966 to its current location on the grounds of Alamance Battleground State Historic Site, it was home—ironically enough—to one of the country’s oldest Quaker families. In the community of Snow Camp, N.C., John Allen built the one-room cabin with a loft around 1780. Marjorie Allen, the narrator of this “Allen House mystery” (as told to her daughter, Jean Parvin Bordewich), was the last child born in the cabin.

Handed down over the years, the family story in *The Lost Book* takes place in the 1930s in a rural and predominantly Quaker village in Southern Alamance County. The cabin is introduced by young Marjorie, who also introduces her family (she is the youngest of ten children) and, most importantly, her love for reading. One

day Marjorie checks out a book titled *A Day with Susan* from the school library. She becomes fascinated by Susan’s life as an only child in faraway New York City. What shocks Marjorie most is that Susan does “not even [have] a cat to keep away mice!”

Marjorie wants to finish the book, but she is interrupted by her sister Olive Mae who wants her to play basketball. (I learned from a local historian that basketball was equally popular among girls and boys during that time.) The mystery begins on a Sunday, the day before the book is due, when Marjorie discovers the book is missing. The family quickly becomes involved as the siblings help the youngest sister find her book. This shared mission allows the reader to see how a family of 12 occupied such a small dwelling. The search takes the family outside as they explore all of the possibilities. Through



text and illustrations, the reader sees “mama’s beautiful garden,” various animal pens, and even the smokehouse.

As the search continues, Marjorie becomes distraught and on the verge of tears. When her father arrives home, he joins the hunt too. I won’t give away how it all unfolds, but the library book is eventually found, Olive Mae finally gets to play basketball, and the siblings grow closer together. There are plenty of opportunities for readers to look for clues and predict the ending.

Beautifully illustrated by Seren Lunet, this book is a delightful way for children to learn about rural life and the impact of both sports and books in the 1930s. We recognize the magic of *A Day with Susan* in how it transports Marjorie all the way to New York, showing her how people live differently there. The book also includes a brief history of the Allen House and Marjorie Allen’s family. It is a great read for Quaker families as it shares a history of one of North Carolina’s oldest Quaker villages that continues to thrive today.

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*Shelia Bumgarner is a member of Charlotte (N.C.) Meeting. She recently retired from the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library after 35 years of service. She grew up near the setting for this book.*

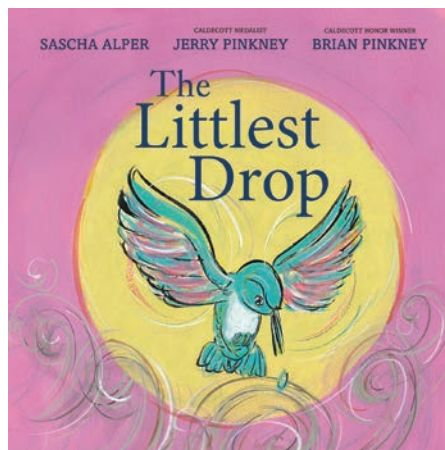
## The Littlest Drop

*By Sascha Alper, illustrated by Jerry and Brian Pinkney. Anne Schwartz Books, 2025. 40 pages. \$18.99/hardcover; \$10.99/eBook.*

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**Reviewed by Melinda Wenner Bradley**

A simple tale, *The Littlest Drop* brings our attention to how everyone has something to offer, and in working together, using those various gifts, we can overcome obstacles. Set on an African savanna “home to all of the animals”—a place where there is “room for everyone,” big and small—we meet a hummingbird building her nest in preparation for laying eggs. Not far away disaster strikes when a small spark lands on a leaf and grows into a raging



inferno. The animals shelter near the river, except for the hummingbird who begins to carry water in her small beak one drop at a time to the fire. The climax of the story comes not when the fire is finally extinguished by a collaboration of all the animals but when the community confronts the hummingbird in disbelief and derision at her small efforts, telling her, “You are just a small bird,” to which she responds, “I am doing what I can.”

Generational love is woven through the story. The tiny mother-to-be is first joined in her efforts by a grandmother elephant who recognizes what the fire will take from her grandchildren. Soon all the animals are doing what they can. The story does not shy away from the challenges the animals face, even after they begin to work together. Their fear is named; the fire rages and roars despite their efforts; the animals tire. Readers and listeners will find feelings and experiences they may relate to, especially children who often hear the word “just” used to describe them and their actions: “just” a child, “just” playing, “just” learning.

This story’s message about the importance of contributions from all sizes of creatures holds questions for us humans, too. How can children contribute to our care of the earth and one another? What particular gifts might they bring to worship and witness in a community of Friends? When we expand to include young voices alongside older ones—valuing

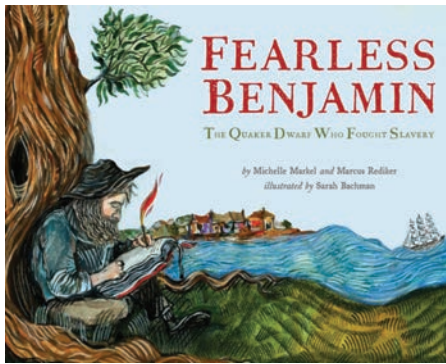
both the littlest drop and a trunk full of water—we are stronger at our tasks, including listening for Spirit.

In the author’s note, we learn that Sascha Alper was inspired to write this book by a parable she heard from one of her heroes, Wangari Maathai, who herself first heard the indigenous Quechua people’s story in Japan and carried it into her environmental activism in Kenya. The Green Belt Movement, founded by Maathai to address deforestation, is a topic Friends might explore in children’s religious education programs, as it aligns with concerns for stewardship, social justice, and peace. I recently read the picture book *Seeds of Change: Planting a Path to Peace* by Jen Cullerton Johnson (2010) to the children gathered at a quarterly meeting, and we found many connections and questions to wonder about as Friends. The two books would be wonderful to read side by side as part of a thematic exploration of caring for the community and the earth.

Picture books can truly be for all ages, and adults who read this one to a child will find delight in the gorgeous, rollicking artwork. Here, too, is a generational story of co-creation and love. Artist Jerry Pinkney passed away before finishing the project, leaving behind unfinished sketches; his son Brian completed the work. This collaboration seems fitting for a story about seeing a need and taking up the cause: working together in shared spaces to make the world a more just, safe, and beautiful place. It is a message of hope and love that we need to share with our children these days and always.

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*Melinda Wenner Bradley lives in southeastern Pennsylvania and is a member of West Chester Meeting. She cofounded the Quaker Religious Education Collaborative and Faith & Play Stories. The leadings of her public ministry include nurture for children’s spiritual lives, care for families, and encouraging all ages to worship together in meeting communities.*



Ages 4–8

## Fearless Benjamin: The Quaker Dwarf Who Fought Slavery

By Michelle Markel and Marcus Rediker, illustrated by Sarah Bachman. PM Press, 2025. 32 pages. \$19.95/hardcover; \$9.95/eBook.

Reviewed by Eileen Redden and Gail Whiffen

This illustrated biography for children is an interesting account of one fearless Quaker's life and his demand for immediate abolition of slavery. Born in a small farming village in England, Benjamin Lay (1682–1759) became an early abolitionist largely due to his strong religious beliefs. “The lad is fiercely Quaker,” the opening spread reads, “he believes that all humans are born equal, that he should disobey wicked laws, and trust his heart to know what’s right.”

As a young man Benjamin leaves home and has many experiences that shape his convictions. He spends 12 years as a sailor, seeing the world and working alongside shipmates who swap stories and help each other survive: “In the wooden world, it’s ‘one and all.’” He and his wife, Sarah, also a Quaker, spend time in Barbados, where they first witness “the greatest wickedness in all the world. Slavery.” They are horrified at the practice, and Benjamin resolves to “get people to change their wrongful ways.”

He reads and studies ancient philosophers and early Quakers to learn how to effectively protest so the public would pay attention. He and Sarah sail to the Pennsylvania Colony and settle in the “City of Brotherly Love,”

Philadelphia. But he soon discovers that “many of his fellow Quakers are enslavers! Some are respected leaders. . . . Benjamin’s fury could fill the Atlantic Ocean.”

Most Friends today know how the story ends: Benjamin’s statements and actions were considered radical, and he was disowned by Friends. Eventually, the Quakers decided to disown members who engaged in the slave trade. It took years, but thanks to activists like Lay, Quakers became the first religious group to ban slavery in their own ranks.

The folkart-inspired painted illustrations by Sarah Bachman feature dreamy brush strokes that draw the reader further into not only Benjamin’s life but the lives and perspectives of those he encounters: sailors, sugar planters, enslaved Africans, and Quakers. Benjamin Franklin is also referenced as the publisher of Lay’s “honest, furious, and courageous” book, *All-Slave Keeper . . . Apostates*, which greatly aided the abolitionist mission. Readers should be aware that there is a mention of suicide when later in his life Benjamin remembers and weeps for the enslaved people he met in Barbados, including a man “who killed himself because he was beaten.”

Historian Marcus Rediker, a coauthor of this book, seems to be on a quest to bring Lay’s inspiring story to the public in as many forms as possible. He earlier wrote for an adult audience *The Fearless Benjamin Lay* (2017), which is now available in paperback. He collaborated on a graphic novel, *Prophet Against Slavery* (2021), and cowrote a play, *The Return of Benjamin Lay* (2023). He has also given talks and appeared in documentary videos on the topic, including a 2024 QuakerSpeak video. It would be possible for everyone in a meeting to learn about this extraordinary man. And perhaps, that could be followed by a field trip by the community to a museum or exhibit related to slavery.

Eileen Redden attends meeting with the Lewes Worship Group in Lewes, Del. She serves as the young Friends book review editor for Friends Journal. Gail Whiffen is associate editor of Friends Journal.

## Chooch Helped

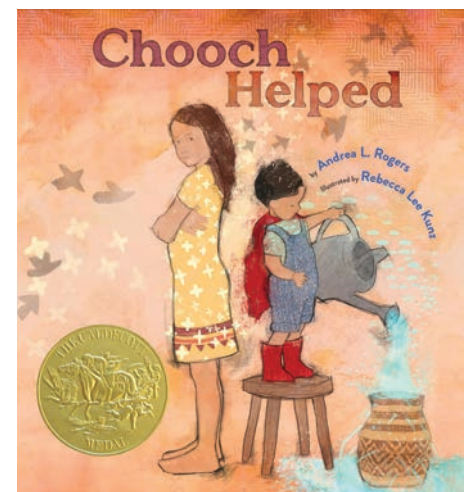
By Andrea L. Rogers, illustrated by Rebecca Lee Kunz. Levine Querido, 2024. 48 pages. \$18.99/hardcover; \$11.99/eBook.

Reviewed by Katie Green

This picture book presents a charming story of sibling rivalry in a present-day Cherokee family living in the United States. Both the author and the illustrator are citizens of the Cherokee Nation, and the book includes words and imagery from Cherokee language and culture.

The story is told from the older sibling Sissy’s point of view. Her younger brother, Chooch (a shortened form of the Cherokee word for boy or son, *atsutsa*, pronounced *ah-choo-jah*), has just had his second birthday. Like most two-year-olds, he is curious about everything and wants to be included in the family’s daily life. He tries to help many family members: painting a mural with Elisi (Cherokee for grandmother), sewing pucker-toe moccasins with Etsi (mother), making grape dumplings with Edutsi (uncle), and planting the garden with Etlogi (aunt). While Chooch is old enough to *want* to help in these household activities, he is too young to *actually* be helpful. Sissy watches him make a mess over and over.

Sissy loses her temper when Chooch ruins a clay pot that she’s making.





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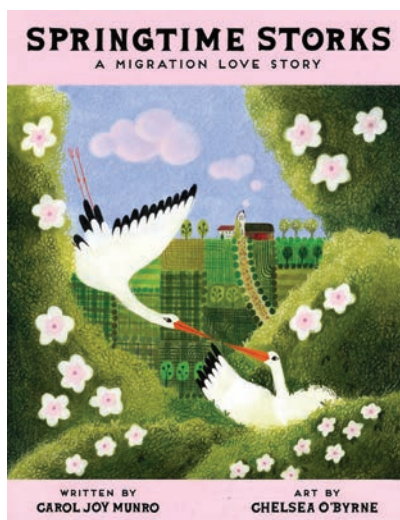
Her parents tell her, “Shouting is no help!” When Chooch comforts her when she cries, Sissy realizes that Chooch can be helpful after all. The story ends with Sissy teaching Chooch how to make a clay pot. Sissy finds the joy of having a little brother.

There is a glossary in the appendix that provides translation and pronunciation of the Cherokee words used, along with a note about how the word changes according to the family relationship. There are also illustrated instructions for how to make your own pinch pot using air-dry clay.

Andrea Rogers’s author’s note provides the reader with cultural links to the story and the Cherokee experience, such as an explanation of grape dumplings, a Native American dessert made by boiling grape juice and dropping dough in it: “this is probably a dish that came into existence after the Trail of Tears,” Rogers writes, “as it uses flour—a food that was most widely introduced to Native Americans through government rations.” The artist, Rebecca Lee Kunz, explains the significance of some of the tribal symbols infused in her illustrations; we learn, for example, that Sissy’s dress is decorated with ribbons inspired by Cherokee ribbon skirts. The warm palette selection of reds, oranges, yellows, and browns emphasizes family love and the Native American connection to the natural world.

Earlier this year, *Chooch Helped* was awarded the 2025 Caldecott Medal for the most distinguished American picture book for children, bringing this lovely and deserving book to a much larger audience.

*Katie Green is a member of Clearwater (Fla.) Meeting, Southeastern Yearly Meeting, and New England Yearly Meeting. She is a storyteller, an artist, a retired speech and language pathologist, and an activist for social justice issues.*



## Springtime Storks: A Migration Love Story

By Carol Joy Munro, illustrated by Chelsea O'Byrne. Minerva, 2024. 40 pages. \$18.99/hardcover; \$10.99/eBook.

Reviewed by Margaret Crompton with Nicola

“There’s lots of imagination, lots of nature,” observed my co-reviewer, Nicola (age nine), upon seeing the cover of *Springtime Storks* for the first time. Two white storks, beaks nearly touching, are surrounded by green leaves and pink flowers against an imaginary landscape of fields, trees, and sky; a farmhouse sits on the horizon.

The book is based on the true story of two storks who became lifelong mates after tragedy. While migrating from Croatia to South Africa in 1993, Malena was shot down by a hunter. A man named Stjepan Vokić took her home to his farmhouse. Although her wound healed, she could not regain the ability to fly distances. In 2002, Stjepan built her a nest on the roof, and there Klepetan mated with her. They raised a total of 66 chicks. After the autumn migration, Klepetan’s return every spring was watched and recorded by over two million observers via a livestream and through photos and videos on social media.

Nicola was impressed that Stjepan was inspired to write to the president

of Lebanon asking him to enforce laws protecting migratory birds. The author’s note shares that Lebanon’s Beqaa Valley is where more than two million birds are illegally killed each year while flying their migration routes. There is also information about other birds mentioned in the story, including the collared flycatcher and the moustached warbler.

Nicola liked the way the author adapted true events, introducing imaginary elements such as the farmer’s granddaughter. I see this as a help to connect young readers with the experience of people in the story. Nicola’s parents are Polish. She and her mother, Wioletta, told me that when they’re exploring the Polish countryside, they enjoy searching for storks and their nests.

The sensitive narrative expresses loss and pain, sadness and separation. The female stork, Katerina (the fictional name for “Malena”), tells her story. Although she regains enough strength to fly, she recognizes that her wings will never endure long migratory flights: “Not now, not next week, not ever.” Not even when her mate, Luka (the fictional name for “Klepetan”) takes their fledglings south in the autumn. However, Luka, like his real counterpart, always returns in the spring “when the magnolias bloom.” Storks represent hope and new life.

We agreed that it’s good to include such feelings and experiences. Thinking about loss, Nicola suggested that the story could help children to know that even when you lose someone, you may meet other people and feel happy again. She added that it is helpful for children to know they can express what they feel.

Feelings, both human and avian, are clearly represented in the illustrations, made using chalk pastel and colored pencil. We were impressed by the range of expressions suggested in depictions of the storks, which did not violate their essential “birdness.” Most pictures are double-spread. We found them beautiful, especially the sequence

showing five stages of Katerina's attempts to fly, with encouragement from the farmer's granddaughter; soft white clouds in a warm blue sky resemble flying storks.

We recommend this sensitive and beautiful book and advise sharing as we did. Nicola suggests extending the publisher's age range to four through ten, and I suggest to 84 and beyond. My husband and I searched for storks when we lived in Poland, admiring great nests supported on high-set wheels that welcomed storks as they returned in the spring, bringing hope.

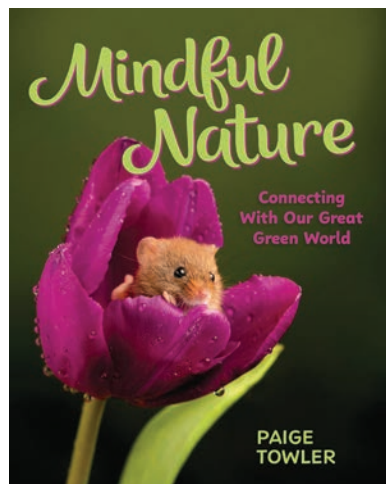
*Margaret Crompton's (Britain Yearly Meeting) publications include Children, Spirituality, Religion and Social Work (1998) and the Pendle Hill pamphlet Nurturing Children's Spiritual Well-Being (2012). Recent publications include poems, short stories and flash fiction, and plays for Script-in-Hand Theatre. Nicola often spends time in Poland, and she has seen storks. This is her first book review.*

## Mindful Nature: Connecting with Our Great Green World

By Paige Towler. Magination Press, 2025. 32 pages. \$21.99/hardcover; \$9.99/eBook.

Reviewed by Rebecca Robinson

In this picture book, simple text written by Washington, D.C.-based poet Paige Towler sprawls across color-saturated photo spreads, gently teaching mindfulness along with basic lessons



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about the natural world. Although the term “grounding technique” is never used, that’s what each page teaches: to pay attention to the sights, sounds, smells, and textures around you, while also engaging the imagination as small children love to do.

Published by the American Psychological Association in partnership with the National Wildlife Federation, *Mindful Nature* offers opportunities for inquiry about different species of animals, their habits and natural habitats; four of five senses (taste not included); and a plethora of vivid descriptive words to teach the youngest readers what to observe about the creatures and natural features that share their world. Flowers are sweet-scented and dewy; sand is smooth; air is chilled; wings swish.

The book prompts readers to pretend to be a meerkat lying in the warm sand, or a snowy owl soaring through cold air. Opposite a stunning photo of the white bird mid-flight above snow, the words “Bring your wings up, up, up” curve in an upward line, while “and gently back down” slope downward beneath them. “In and out. Hoot softly . . .”

The sensuous but accessible language forms varied shapes across the pages in shifting, easy-to-read typeface, which, together with the satisfying visual imagery, makes a book that is lovely to look at and a good choice to read aloud in a group.

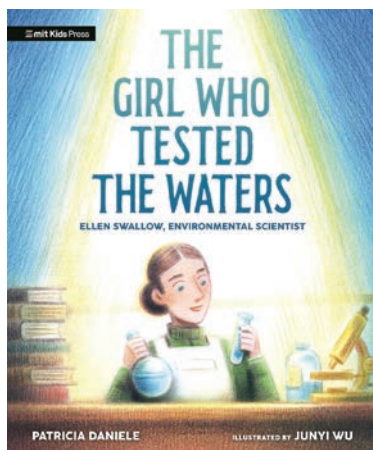
A “reader’s note” at the end by clinical child psychologist Julia Martin Burch provides greater detail for parents and teachers about what mindfulness is and how to use it with children.

*Rebecca Robinson is a member of Richmond (Va.) Meeting.*

**Ages 5–9**

## The Girl Who Tested the Waters: Ellen Swallow, Environmental Scientist

*By Patricia Daniele, illustrated by Junyi Wu. MIT Kids Press, 2025. 40 pages. \$18.99/hardcover or eBook.*



## Magic in a Drop of Water: How Ruth Patrick Taught the World About Water Pollution

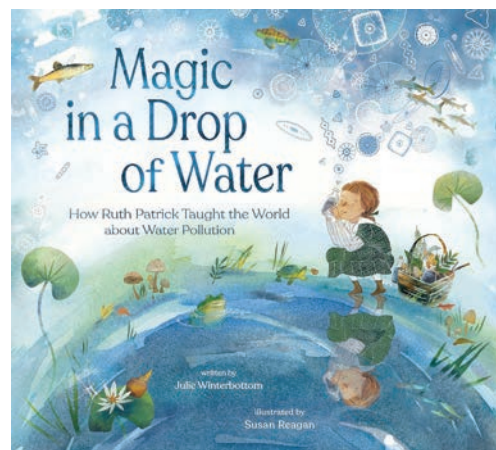
*By Julie Winterbottom, illustrated by Susan Reagan. Rocky Pond Books, 2025. 48 pages. \$19.99/hardcover; \$11.99/eBook.*

**Reviewed by Laura Barrosse-Antle**

Ellen Swallow (1842–1911) and Ruth Patrick (1907–2013) were environmental scientists and pioneers in their fields, and, if you’re like me, you probably never heard of them. Two new books bring these women’s stories to life for the next generation of young scientists: highlighting curiosity, insight, perseverance, and passion for making the world a better place.

Ellen Swallow was the first woman admitted to MIT and was segregated from her male peers for over a year, studying in a basement with lessons slipped under the door for her to complete. Patricia Daniele chronicles Swallow’s childhood education and career with an emphasis on Swallow’s dedication to using science to understand and improve the world around her. In addition to breaking barriers as a woman first studying and then pursuing a career in chemistry, Swallow is notable for completing the first large-scale study of water sources around Boston, Mass., in the 1870s, ultimately helping to establish the first water quality standards in the United States.

*The Girl Who Tested the Waters*



is meant to be read aloud, rich with alliteration and onomatopoeia as well as figurative language playing on Swallow’s name. (She “arrived in the world in 1842, tiny as a bird, with lungs that could hardly pump air.”) Textured illustrations in colored pencil by Junyi Wu help young readers visualize pivotal moments in Swallow’s life.

*Magic in a Drop of Water* is less biographical and focuses more on ecologist Ruth Patrick’s joy of discovery and the way she thought about the process of science than on the details of her education and career. Patrick “fell in love with pond scum” at a young age and went on to study pollution and biodiversity with a focus on diatoms: ubiquitous single-celled organisms with beautiful crystalline shells that are very sensitive to their environments. As a scientist myself, I loved how Julie Winterbottom described Patrick’s curiosity and scientific problem solving. Winterbottom’s framing of scientific discoveries as stories within the overarching narrative of Patrick’s life is engaging and accessible to young and old readers alike.

While both books emphasize wonder and curiosity, *Magic in a Drop of Water* is particularly successful in communicating these themes, due in part to the large-scale watercolors by Susan Reagan. Patrick’s first sight of diatoms, for example, is laid out in a zoomed-in illustration spread over

two pages, as if we're also looking through the microscope: "Jewel-like shapes glided to and fro, ovals made of beads, circles filled with pearls, shimmering stars and lacy triangles." The reader is invited to wonder, as Patrick does, "What [are] these beautiful gems?"

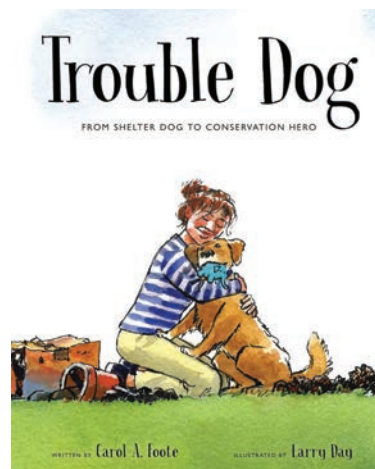
Both women faced discrimination as women breaking into predominantly male-dominated fields. Swallow's admission to MIT was known within the institution as "the Swallow Experiment," one that was expected to fail. While Patrick benefited from entering higher education in the 1920s (she got to attend a women's college) rather than in the 1860s, she worked without pay for over ten years to pursue her chosen career. Gender inequality is a main focus in the text of *The Girl Who Tested the Waters*, while *Magic in a Drop of Water* waits until the postscript to detail the barriers Patrick encountered.

Friends will appreciate both books'

focus on stewardship and community. *The Girl Who Tested the Waters* ends with a quote from Swallow proclaiming the importance of individuals living "in harmony with their environment—defined first as the family, then with the community, then with the world and its resources." In *Magic in a Drop of Water*, Patrick's groundbreaking work on biodiversity as a measure of the health of the ecosystem is presented in terms of getting to know aquatic communities. To understand pollution, "she had to listen to all of them. Not just one voice, but the whole chorus of water dwellers."

I strongly recommend both books; they both deserve a place of pride on the shelves of the young Friends and scientists in your life.

*Laura Barrosse-Antle lives in Washington, D.C., where she has been a chemistry teacher at Sidwell Friends School for 14 years. She is the proud aunt to one curious scientist-in-training.*



## Trouble Dog: From Shelter Dog to Conservation Hero

By Carol A. Foote, illustrated by Larry Day. Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2025. 48 pages. \$18.99/hardcover.

Reviewed by Sandy and Tom Farley

*Trouble Dog* is a composite story taken from the lives of two real,



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exceptional dogs who shared the same characteristics: playfulness, tenacity, obsession with a particular toy, unstoppable energy, and curiosity. Carol Foote bases her depiction of trouble dog's dedicated trainer on the two actual dog handlers she interviewed.

In this book, Tucker, the trouble dog, is returned to the shelter several times as unsuitable for adoption, because he is so energetic and destructive. A conservation worker named Laura recognizes these traits as ones that could be harnessed for good. Laura works with Tucker for several months teaching him to recognize scents ranging from snails to bear scat, and then to find them in more and more difficult situations.

*Trouble Dog* is richly illustrated in watercolor and ink by Larry Day, who captures the energy and playfulness of Tucker and contributes to making him a truly lovable protagonist. Foote and Day show us Tucker working for conservation organizations to search out endangered species and invasive critters in far-flung places around the world. Tucker follows his nose to rosy wolf snails in Hawaii, endangered turtle nests buried underground, and cheetah scat in Zambia.

We find in this story a metaphor for appreciating people who don't quite fit into the ordinary school and work situations. Someone needs to recognize their natural skill sets and direct them toward suitable niches in society so they can be valued for who they are. Our son's sophomore year math teacher was one of those people for him. Children with ADHD may particularly identify with Tucker and find hope in his story.

In a four-page addendum, Foote gives the source stories of the two dogs and their handlers, who are two of the four co-founders of the nonprofit Working Dogs for Conservation ([wd4c.org](http://wd4c.org)). She answers common questions about conservation dogs and the work they do, sharing interesting

facts such as what makes a dog's sense of smell so special (it's tens of thousands of times more sensitive than any human's) and a list of animals they have helped to protect (anteaters, bees, gorillas, iguanas, rhinos, salamanders, among others).

A *Trouble Dog* activity kit for educators is also available from the publisher, complete with prompts to create your own hero dog, reflect on the feelings in the story, and take a quiz to test your knowledge.

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*Sandy and Tom Farley are members of Palo Alto (Calif.) Meeting's San Mateo Worship Group and coauthors of the Earthcare for Children curriculum. Many dogs are walked past their house and stop to greet them and Shira, their resident garden cat.*

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**Ages 6–12**

### **Finding Rebecca: The Forgotten Life of Dr. Rebecca Lee Crumpler, America's First Black Female Doctor**

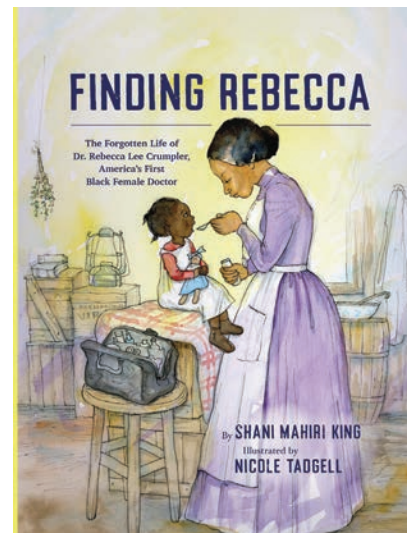
*By Shani Mahiri King, illustrated by Nicole Tadgell. Tilbury House Publishers, 2024. 64 pages. \$19.99/hardcover; \$17.48/eBook.*

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**Reviewed by Jerry Mizell Williams**

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It is a challenge to reconstruct the lives of individuals whose history is riddled with information gaps. In the case of nineteenth-century doctor Rebecca Lee Crumpler, the incompleteness is more pronounced because few family records have survived. Born in Christiana, Del., in 1831, she had little information of her early life recorded. There is evidence her parents sent her to an aunt in Philadelphia, Pa., whose work as a community health worker greatly impressed her young niece. At age 17, Rebecca began studying at West Newton English and Classical School outside Boston, Mass., where principal Nathaniel Allen nurtured her interest in the natural sciences.



In 1852, Rebecca married formerly enslaved Wyatt Lee and focused her budding nursing practice on caring for mothers and young children. In 1860, the New England Female Medical College accepted Rebecca as its first Black student. Wyatt Lee died in 1863, and Rebecca married Arthur Crumpler in 1865. The couple traveled to Richmond, Va., and worked for the Freedmen's Bureau for four years. They then returned to Boston where they welcomed the birth of daughter Lizzie in 1870. Although Rebecca retired in the 1870s from her practice in midwifery and pediatric care, she found time to teach at West Newton School.

Rebecca is remembered for being the first Black woman physician to publish a treatise on medicine, *A Book of Medical Discourses*, in 1883. In the book, she advocated for women's study of medicine, but there are few details about the author and her family. The book is dedicated to "mothers, nurses, and all who may desire to mitigate the afflictions of the human race." Its two parts consist of infant care up to age five, and womanhood and complaints of both sexes. Rebecca strongly championed equal access to medical care for both the rich and the poor. Her death in 1895 might have been the end of her story, were it not for the research of *Finding Rebecca* author,

Shani Mahiri King, and others.

As a way of countering the lack of records, King tactically centers Rebecca's experiences to reflect the context of sociocultural values and political realities of the nineteenth century for a free Black woman. With the aid of informative marginal notes, King engages students in the life of free Blacks in the border state of Delaware: travel restrictions Blacks endured, the presence and force of Quaker abolitionists, and educational opportunities in the North. The result is a book that captures the imagination of readers and invites them—as budding historians and researchers—to participate in discussion and writing activities designed to have them reflect on how to uncover the past. Beautiful illustrations by Nicole Taddell draw readers closer into the narrative as we picture Rebecca in her professional and personal worlds.

Friends, teachers, and librarians will appreciate the work King has done to uncover the lost story of Dr. Rebecca Crumpler and bring greater awareness to her achievements. In recent years, her legacy continues to be honored at state and national levels, including the city of Boston proclaiming a day to officially honor her (February 8, her birthday), and by medical schools for her pioneering work with women and infants.

*Jerry Mizell Williams is a member of Green Street Meeting in Philadelphia, Pa., where he serves as archivist. He is the author of numerous books and articles on colonial Latin America.*

### If I Could Choose a Best Day: Poems of Possibility

*Selected by Irene Latham and Charles Waters, illustrated by Olivia Sua. Candlewick Press, 2025. 64 pages. \$19.99/hardcover or eBook.*

### Reviewed by David Austin

Once upon a time, the editors of this interesting and inspiring anthology



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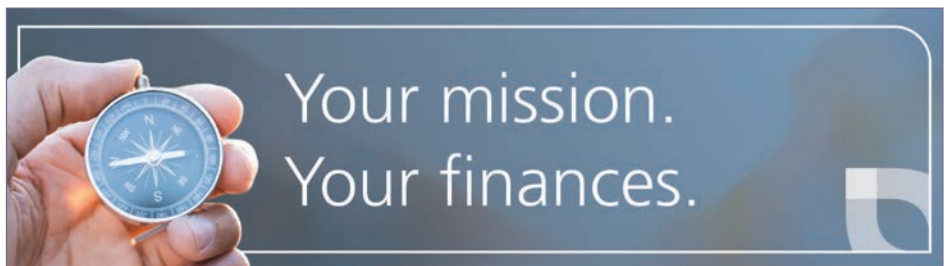
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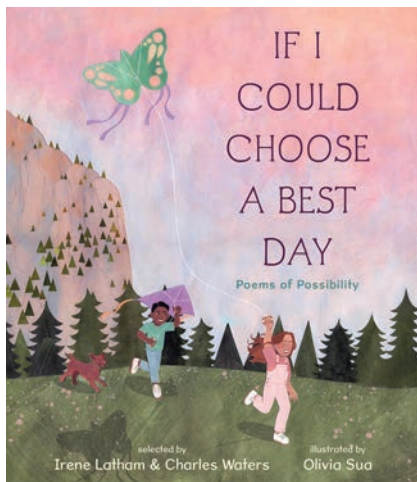


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put out an open call on social media for poems for young readers. Nearly 400 submissions and what I'm sure was a lot of reading and contemplation later, they settled on the 30 poems in the book. The collection features a variety of poems—from previously unpublished poets all the way to a selection by Emily Dickinson.

The collection is divided into four sections. The first consists of poems about the “everyday magic” in ordinary things, such as a pencil, a firefly, or even a rock. “The Power of You” is made up of poems which deal with the concept of “if,” as in, *what might happen if*. . . ? This is where we find Dickinson's contribution: “If I can stop one Heart from breaking.” The section “Kinfolk and Companions” consists of poems about community, family, and the power found in groups. And finally, “Anything Is Possible.”

I enjoyed reading all the pieces in this collection. However, there's one poem that stood out to me as a Friend, and I believe it represents the tone of the whole book: “If We Listen” by Joseph Bruchac, a storyteller who writes about Indigenous peoples. The first two stanzas suggest listening to the birds and our elders for wisdom; it ends:

Look to the light.  
You are not alone.

Listen to the birds,  
to the bright life

all around,  
and you may find  
your own hymn.

Olivia Sua's beautiful cut-paper and painted-mosaic illustrations for each of these poems are like poems themselves: seemingly simple, yet complicated at the same time, and they match this collection perfectly.

These “poems of possibility” are all about asking the question, “What if . . . ?” What if we allow our imaginations to run free? What if we allow ourselves to dream without limiting those dreams to what *might be* allowed and instead dream about what *can be*? The poems in *If I Could Choose a Best Day* pose those questions and more, and in doing so, the editors have given us more than a set of clever and thoughtful poems. They've opened the door to a conversation that's definitely worth having.

*David Austin is a member of Medford (N.J.) Meeting, and he lives in Marlton, N.J. He is a retired teacher. His middle-grade novel in verse recounting the true story of a Holocaust survivor, Small Miracle: A Holocaust Story from France, is available from Fernwood Press.*

**Ages 9–12**

## Answers to Dog

*By Pete Hautman. Candlewick Press, 2024. 240 pages. \$18.99/hardcover; \$9.99/paperback or eBook.*

**Reviewed by Neal Burdick**

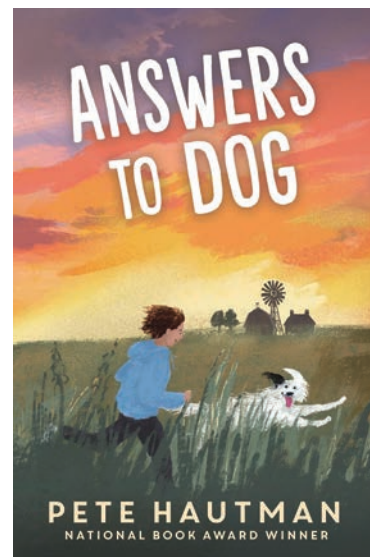
*Answers to Dog* is on one level a formulaic story about a boy and a dog. A deeper dive, however, reveals that it's really about right relationships across genders, generations, socioeconomic backgrounds, and even species.

There is a direct allusion to Quakerism, although it's not a focus: Evan's generally discontented mother attends a Friends meeting, the one place she can go “and not be judged for her silence.” She has dragged her son along a couple times, but he finds it boring: a bunch of old folks just

sitting there, looking like they might be asleep.

The story line is standard. Lonely boy meets mistreated dog who has no known name (he “answers to dog”); they bond; they have both sedate and scary adventures; they grow, causing others to grow; and everybody lives happily ever after. But it is the transformations and how they come about that give this book its special value. An outwardly Type A sports coach proves to have a soft spot; the hard-bitten co-owner of a struggling kennel demonstrates a conscience; a father absorbed by his career finally opens his eyes; and kids with physical and behavioral differences look past those differences and come closer. Evan begins to understand what motivates his parents' remoteness; his mother's turnaround may be motivated by her Quaker principles; and, in the end, “Dog,” an extremely energetic border collie who turns out to have a name after all, brings the family together.

Despite some concerns like advanced words for fourth through seventh graders to hurdle (“alopecia”) and some stereotypical characters, *Answers to Dog* has a lot to offer its intended audience. I recommend reading it with the young Friends in your life, perhaps as a Junior Gathering book club pick, for its good lessons about openness,



mutual understanding, overcoming differences, caring, and hope.

*Neal Burdick is a member of St. Lawrence Valley (N.Y.) Meeting, under the care of Ottawa (Ont.) Meeting, and an attender at Burlington (Vt.) Meeting. He and his wife, Barbara, have enjoyed the company of nine dogs over their lifetimes.*

Ages 10-14

## The Pecan Sheller

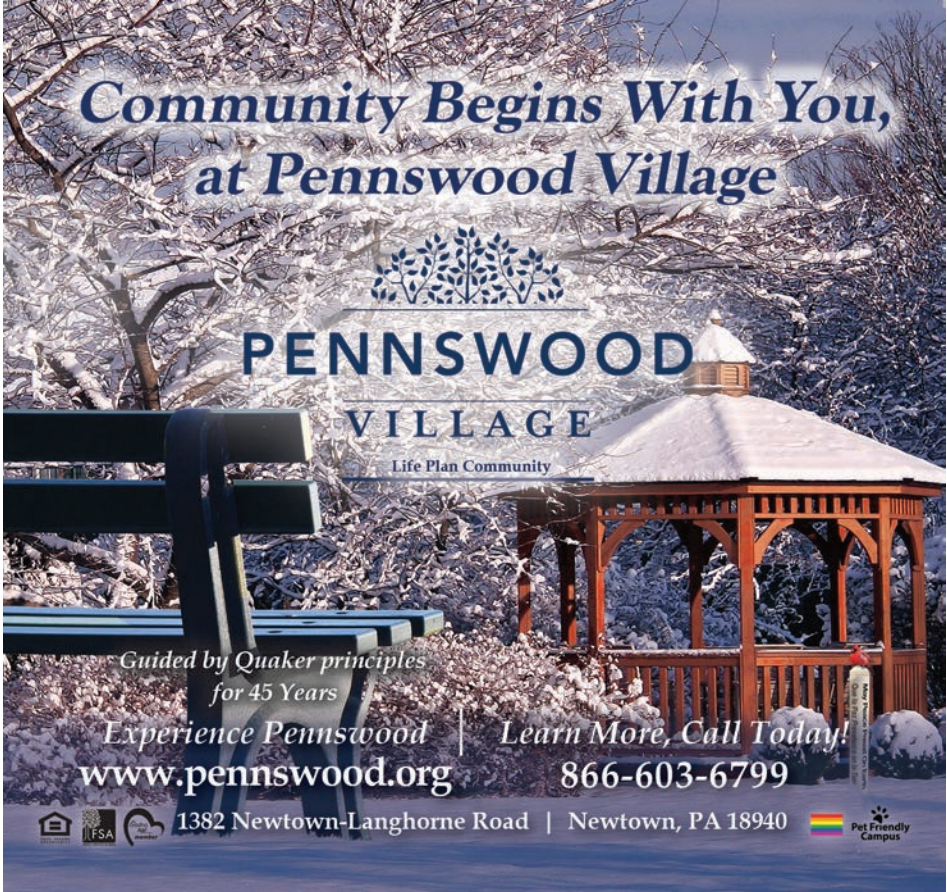
By Lupe Ruiz-Flores. Carolrhoda Books, 2025. 256 pages. \$19.99/hardcover; \$9.99/eBook.

Reviewed by Cassie Hardee

If you know Texas, then you know the beauty, flavor, and importance of the pecan tree. On the 300 acres in north central Texas that I grew up on, 25 of that was in a low area along a creek bed that my family dubbed “the pecan bottoms.” Two-hundred-year-old pecan trees grew there in abundance, and every October, my sisters and I would take a ten-gallon bucket and go pick the fruit of the pecan trees. We picked them for fun and for the occasional extra buck we could earn selling the pecans to family or friends.

Lupe Ruiz-Flores has created a culturally impressive story of power, hope, and resilience centered around a fictional 13-year-old girl growing up during the real-life pecan shellers’ strike that took place in San Antonio, Tex., in 1938. A daughter of Mexican immigrants, Petra dreams of nothing more than to be a writer. After her father’s sudden death, Petra has to drop out of school to help her family survive. She goes to work as a pecan sheller, enduring horrendous working conditions. Friends her age die of tuberculosis, which spreads easily due to tight quarters and poor ventilation in the factory. Employees are cheated by their bosses. Petra feels no matter how hard she works, she will never be able to achieve her dream.

When a 21-year-old labor activist

A winter scene with snow-covered trees and a wooden gazebo. The text "Community Begins With You, at Pennswood Village" is at the top. Below it is a logo with a leaf design and the words "PENNWOOD VILLAGE Life Plan Community". At the bottom, it says "Guided by Quaker principles for 45 Years", "Experience Pennswood | Learn More, Call Today!", "www.pennswood.org", "866-603-6799", and "1382 Newtown-Langhorne Road | Newtown, PA 18940". There are also small logos for ILFSA, a pet-friendly campus, and a rainbow flag.A photo of a man in a lab coat and safety glasses working with a student in a lab. The text "Uncommon Faculty-Staff-Student Relationships" is at the top. Below it is the Guilford College logo with the word "UNIQUELY" above it. At the bottom, it says "Brilliant, creative, and passionate — faculty and staff choose to work at Guilford because small classes mean real connections." and "www.guilford.edu/uniquely".



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named Emma (based on the real-life Emma Tenayuca) organizes a union meeting for the workers, Petra is reminded that “[c]hange would never happen unless they made it happen.” Petra joins thousands of pecan shellers in a strike for better wages and working conditions. Not long after the strike, the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 was passed by Congress, which set the federal minimum wage. Petra with the strength and love of the community around her helped make the change that she never could have accomplished alone.

Ruiz-Flores dedicates the book to her late mother, Victoria, who was a former pecan sheller. *The Pecan Sheller* takes a forgotten yet powerful piece of history and gives it life. Through the bravery of a young girl, we are taught the power of resilience, community, and, above all, love.

*Cassie Hardee is a member of Fort Worth (Tex.) Meeting and is the American Friends Service Committee representative for South Central Yearly Meeting. She recently moved to Los Angeles, Calif., to work in engagement and outreach at an international K–12 school. Cassie is a writer, a nature enthusiast, and passionate about ending LGBTQ+ youth homelessness.*

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## Back to the Books

*continued from page 18*

be insufficient. Rather we should place our treasure in heaven (for example, human relationships) where others can create a GoFundMe to address the emergency confronting us. That is how the people described in the passages from Acts lived. That was the reported source of their joy and abundance. That was “heaven.”

Could Jesus’s instruction to the rich young ruler have been an assessment that what the young man lacked was purpose and joy? He was bored. He was just asking, “Is this it?” Perhaps Jesus was suggesting a possible solution: that he add some risk by selling all of his possessions and giving the money to the poor. That would give him a purpose (to feed himself). At the same time, it would give him the experience of joy inherent in the act of giving. In turn, the poor might find a way to reciprocate (see loaves and fishes above). At least, they would spread his story through succeeding generations, thus giving him a form of the “eternal life” he sought.

His suggestion might have been made not as an order, as the apostles misunderstood, but as pointing to the path of joy and meaning he sought, leaving it up to the young man to decide.

Quakers have an appropriate—even excellent—methodology for our time: an inward search in the company of other seekers. They offer an appropriate relationship to the sources of Truth: a diligent and objective search, with respect and an open mind but not with worship for any source. Such an open and objective search can lead to new insight, meaning, relevance, and

applications consistent with new knowledge and understanding of the physical world of which we are a part.

Quakers are not alone in that search. There are other efforts to reform (remix) Christianity in light of its diminishing relevance. What is sometimes called the Emerging Church is an effort to reach others who feel injured or alienated. New resources in that movement can aid our search for new understandings of ancient Truth.

People need to hear what Quakers offer in their remix. Quakers must express and demonstrate what they learn through language and action. Historical traditions should be updated in a manner consistent with current knowledge in order to inform these actions.

In addition to active nonviolent resistance, Quaker words and actions should be offered in culturally diverse groups formed around mutual interests unrelated to politics and committed to respectful conversation (see for example, Braver Angels, an organization dedicated to healing the partisan divide through conversation). In his book *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again*, Robert D. Putnam (a Swarthmore graduate) illustrates that process; a documentary about his books, *Join or Die*, is available on Netflix.

When we are guided by the Inner Light in a congregative search for Truth and patiently wait for a resonating manifestation of that Truth, way will open. That is what this Quaker believes. □

## The Intimacy of Prayer

*continued from page 27*

way to church.

I didn’t grow up singing hymns, but I knew “Amazing Grace” and a few other songs from my childhood and sang those softly into her ear. Her daughters and husband joined in when we got to “Happy Birthday.” They sang with just the right amount of playful and serious, not the usual dirge that it can be. I could feel Judy’s smile against my face. When we came to the end of that song, her older daughter said, “One of her favorite songs is ‘Peace Is Flowing like a River.’” I wish I had thought fast enough to ask them to sing it to her, which I imagine would have been sweet for all of us. Instead, I sang a similar-sounding song from my camp days:

Peace I ask of thee o river, peace,  
peace, peace.  
When I learn to live serenely, cares  
will cease.  
From the hills I gather courage,  
visions of the days to be.  
Strength to lead and faith to  
follow, all are given unto me.  
Peace I ask of thee o river, peace,  
peace, peace.

I sang the song three times, each time a little more slowly and a little more quietly. We were a prayer in motion, swaying our dance in time with the music until we eventually came to stillness, the doors of our spirits wide open to each other. When I got ready to go, Judy and I looked deeply into each other’s eyes and smiled. With no need for words, I kissed her cheek and enfolded her, her husband, and their two daughters in a warm group hug, all of us blessed to be accompanied by the Presence that is greater than us. □

  
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## Following Truth Through Community

*continued from page 31*

Faithfulness both have elements of consciousness raising aligned with this model.

Another way to help us wake up from our nonalignment with Truth is to develop body awareness. Our bodies don't lie. They can give us biofeedback to Truth as we become more somatically sensitive. There are a number of somatic methodologies, psychotherapies, and mindfulness practices that we can use to help us become more sensitive to our bodies and what they are trying to tell us. For example, yoga practice can teach us to pay attention to breathing by relating our movements to our breath. In the Feldenkrais method, we can learn to rely on our skeletons to hold our weight against gravity and use our muscles to move us from one position to another.



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## Parting Thoughts

**A**s Quakers, we believe our communal discernment can lead to the revealing of Truth. We know this process is not risk-free, and we have made many mistakes. To avoid making discernment mistakes, we need to wake up to our socialized mindsets, and foster a culture where diversity thrives and Truth prospers. Living the Quaker way means following Truth that is revealed to us, both individually and corporately.

*Diego's Carey Lecture ended with suggestions for further action, which can be found at [tinyurl.com/FJ-TruthDiscernment](http://tinyurl.com/FJ-TruthDiscernment).* □



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FOUNDATION FOR TOMORROW

## The Sweet Benefits of Pruning

When my wife and I purchased our home in Elkins Park, Pa., back in 1999, she was pleased to discover on the grounds that there was a mature pear tree that we had overlooked in the inspection. As we moved in during late August, the tree was virtually groaning with ripe pears. They were plump and unblemished, but when we picked one to taste, we were disappointed in its bitterness; it seemed as if the flesh was bereft of sugar. All of them were like this.

Puzzled, we consulted an arborist who informed us that the tree had to be pruned in order to bear the kind of fruit we wanted. Skeptical but obedient to his expertise, we did as we were told, and miraculously, after cutting away about a third of the tree, next year's crop was flush with sweet, ripe pears. The idea of cutting away healthy, thick plant tissue to produce healthier tissue was a strange concept for me, but after 20 years on the property, pruning has become a fall and spring ritual for all of our plants, empirical evidence that less may often mean more.

As children, we produce more connections—synapses—between brain cells than we need. During puberty, the body carries out a kind of neural topiary, cutting away synapses and allowing others to strengthen. As many as half of these brain junctures are cut away by our bodies, resulting in more efficient, sophisticated, and richer cognitive activity. It was once believed that this pruning stopped in our late teens, but it is now accepted that this neural pruning continues into our late 20s and beyond. Quantity is sacrificed for quality, even in the physiological vineyard of the very cells

that constitute human consciousness.

I once thought of this sitting in meeting for worship as I was looking at some of the senior members. One couple in particular who were in their late 80s were hale, hearty, and cogent as tax attorneys. They once owned a huge house and raised a family, but in their own words, they consciously pruned back their lives as they reached the age of 70: selling off what seemed unnecessary, perhaps even counterproductive, and moving into a small apartment. Both husband and wife say that the last 20 years of their lives have been the richest they can recall: the spiritual fruit of their lives laced far more heavily with the sweet and subtle scent of self-awareness and connection.

It is hard in our culture to talk about death. Often it is seen as morbid or negative and depressing, and I suspect that this social quieting makes the prospect seem even more terrible and isolating. As I sit in silence and look at the beauty of the elders in our meeting and then glance at the inchoate longings of the children and younger members, I think perhaps that even rich souls must be pruned away to make way for new ideas, new directions, new possibilities. It is the way of things, nothing more.

Viewed in this context, death does not perhaps lose its sting entirely, but it certainly gives us a possible way of understanding that connects us more deeply to the miraculous nature of creation: death and rebirth, its myriad cycles and processes. Death isn't personal; it's just a part of the business of life.

*Ralph Lelii*  
Jenkintown, Pa.

many veterans desperately need. The thoughtful way he reflected on shame, healing, and personal transformation is genuinely inspiring. This isn't just a story—it's a lifeline for others who may be struggling with similar burdens. I'm thankful for him for sharing such a deeply personal insight.

*Douglas Theil*

### Forum

*continued from page 5*

Combat" (*FJ* Sept.) is incredibly moving and courageous. His willingness to speak openly about the long-lasting emotional and spiritual wounds of combat creates a space for understanding and compassion that

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## MILESTONES

### Deaths

**Alden**—*Darita Rose Alden*, 75, on May 12, 2024, after a long struggle with cancer in Eugene, Ore. She was born on April 12, 1949, the oldest of six children, in Toledo, Ohio. The family moved to Palo Alto, Calif., during her adolescence. Raised Catholic, Darita Rose became interested in Quakers and began attending Palo Alto Meeting when she was in high school. She graduated from the University of California, Santa Cruz with a degree in comparative literature. Darita Rose would later pursue additional spiritual paths and would remain a deeply spiritual person all her life.

Darita Rose worked at Stanford Research Institute after college. Later she married and had two children. She moved to Eugene in 2004 and became a member of Eugene Meeting.

Darita Rose struggled with poor health and chronic pain for most of her adult life. She faced these challenges with patience, courage, and hope. She had a lively intellect, was a voracious reader with an encyclopedic memory, and had great curiosity. Among her interests were history, philosophy, religion, and music. Darita Rose loved to have long, in-depth conversations. She didn't drive and so for years Friends took turns taking her on weekly shopping trips.

Darita Rose was loved and is missed by her Friends community.

**Bowles**—*Grace Chawner Bowles*, 89, on May 4, 2025, peacefully, in Greensboro, N.C. Grace, who went by the name Gay for much of her life, was born on January 19, 1936, to Lowell and Lucia Chawner in Washington, D.C. Gay spent her much of her childhood in Washington. During her early high school years the family moved to the Los Angeles, Calif. area as Lowell was part of Eisenhower's economic development team in postwar Korea. The family moved to Tokyo for about six to twelve months before returning to the D.C. area. Gay graduated from Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School in Bethesda, Md., and later attended Earlham College in Richmond, Ind., for three years, where she met her husband of 58 years, John Bedell Bowles. After marrying in 1958, the couple moved to Honolulu, Hawaii. Gay later graduated from Central College in Pella, Iowa, in 1976.

Gay and her family lived in Honolulu, Hawaii; Oskaloosa, Iowa; Lawrence, Kans.; and Pella, Iowa. After John's retirement, the couple moved to San Marcos, Tex., after a brief time in Austin, and then later moved to Greensboro, N.C., to be closer to family and friendlier weather. Gay was a member of Friendship Meeting in Greensboro.

Gay held several jobs throughout her life, including secretary and librarian, but her most cherished and meaningful role was as a loving mother and later grandmother and great-grandmother to four children, five grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Gay was adventurous and endlessly curious. The family took several road trips across the United States. In 1971, 1973, and 1975, Gay and John drove all four of their children from Iowa to the Yucatán Peninsula, as John was a faculty leader in a foreign study program with Central College.

Gay never encountered a stranger. Every person she met was another person to connect with and get to know. She loved to hear in great detail anything that anyone was passionate about, any curious thing, or funny story. Gay loved to host. Over the years as the wife of a college professor, she reached out to many of the students, both from the United States and from overseas, to invite them for meals.

Gay loved to knit, and was a huge fan of sunflowers and otters. She taught with a smile the importance of creating connections with people in the community.

Gay was predeceased by her husband, John Bowles, in 2016; a sister, Martha Chawner; and two children, David Bowles and Sandy Bowles.

She is survived by two children, Nan Bowles (Tom Kirmeyer) and James Bowles (Heather Drennan); five grandchildren; two great-grandchildren; and two sisters, Lydia Hadley and Priscilla Ketscher.

**Murdock**—*Martha Allen Murdock*, 97, on December 17, 2024, at a retirement community in Branford, Conn. Born on February 17, 1927, in Asheville, N.C., Martha spent her childhood summers living with her family in a canvas tent at the Daniel Boone Boy Scout Camp. Her father, Alfred Allen, helped build and run the camp for many years. It was her time there that sparked her love for nature and taught her the names of all plants and animals. Martha also achieved an NRA Marksmanship certification during her time there. She loved to camp and was adept at starting campfires in the rain.

She attended North Carolina Women's College; the University of Illinois Chicago; and Pratt Institute in New York City, where she received her master's degree in library science. At the University of Illinois, she met and married Keith Chad Murdock, with whom she had two sons. In 1957, Martha and Chad moved to Pearl River, N.Y.

Martha had a passion for folk music, and could often be found leading songs around the campfire. She became involved with the Pearl River Public Library and later went on to become both a research librarian and the library's art director for many years.

Martha was an active and adored member of Rockland Meeting in Blauvelt, N.Y. Her home was always open to children of all ages. She loved leading the children from her neighborhood on nightly walks in the spring where they would find frogs and identify them by their songs.

A part of Martha's heart always remained in the Appalachian Mountains, where she often visited her sister's family in Swannanoa, N.C.

Martha was predeceased by her husband, Chad Murdock, in 2014; and her sister, Harriet

Estelle Allen Styles.

She is survived by two children, Keith Murdock (Shaoli) and Neil Murdock (Faith); two grandchildren; one niece; and one nephew.

**Parks**—*Barton A. Parks Jr.*, 86, on October 12, 2024, peacefully in his sleep, at Friends Homes at Guilford in Greensboro, N.C. Barton was born on March 29, 1938, to Barton A. Parks Sr. and Dora Belle Priour Parks in Corpus Christi, Tex. He had an older sister, Barbara, and a younger brother, Clarence. Barton spent his first 12 years surrounded by an extended family that included 23 first cousins—a time he cherished for the rest of his life.

After graduating from Alamo Heights High School in San Antonio, Barton earned his bachelor's degree in philosophy at Rice University in 1960. From there he went to the University of Texas at Austin where he met his wife, Evelyn Louise Bailey. They married on November 30, 1963, in Ballinger, Tex., and would enjoy more than 60 years of marriage. Barton and Evelyn spent their honeymoon driving to the State University of New York at Buffalo, where Barton would earn his master's degree in 1965 and his doctorate in sociology/social theory in 1973. They have two daughters, Lisa Marie Parks and Amanda Jean Parks.

Barton taught sociology at Middlebury College and Windham College in Vermont, and at McMaster University in Ontario, Canada. He taught criminal justice at Indiana University, moving in 1980 to Greensboro, where he would chair the Justice and Policy Studies Department at Guilford College. Barton served as clerk of the faculty from 1989 to 1991, and was the keynote speaker when the Hege Library addition was dedicated in 1989. Throughout his 29 years at Guilford College, Barton increasingly branched out into the community and brought lessons he learned from the community into his classes.

In 1982, Barton helped found One Step Further, a mediation center for adults, youth, parents, and families to take positive steps during times of personal crisis and conflict. In 1987, Barton led the effort to open a Delancey Street Foundation site in Greensboro, a rigorous self-help approach for alternative sentencing of offenders. He was the founding chair of Project Greensboro, an organization designed to restore safety and security to neighborhoods with high crime and low income. In 1996, Barton was honored by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro with the Charles Duncan McIver Medal, which recognizes North Carolinians who have rendered distinguished public service.

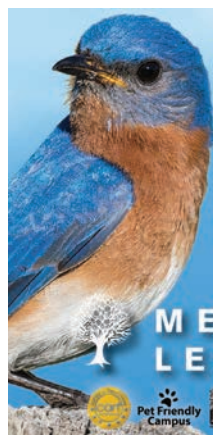
After Barton's adventurous spirit led him on an Outward Bound course in his late 40s, he helped start a ropes course at Guilford College and was one of its first course facilitators. On his seventieth birthday, he was thrilled to skydive. He had an appreciation for travel and immersion in diverse cultures. His time with Evelyn in Rovinj, Croatia; and

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**February 2026: *Open Issue*.** Reservation due Dec. 15. Copy due Dec. 21.

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Contact Margaret Wood with your reservation or questions: [margaret@friendsjournal.org](mailto:margaret@friendsjournal.org)

Prague, Czechia, held special places in his heart. He enjoyed teaching three semesters abroad: London '73, Guadalajara '96, and Shanghai '13.

In their retirement, Barton and Evelyn were active attenders at New Garden Meeting, including several worship sharing groups. Their presence added immeasurably to the life of the meeting.

In 2018, Barton and Evelyn moved into Friends Homes at Guilford. After two strokes in 2020, they moved to assisted living, and in 2024 to memory care when both were affected by mild dementia.

Barton was predeceased by his sister, Barbara Lynn Parks Zelle; and his brother, Clarence Milton Parks.

He is survived by his wife, Evelyn Bailey Parks; and two children, Lisa Parks and Amanda Parks.

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**Stewart**—*Bruce Blakely Stewart*, 85, on January 26, 2025, at home in Chattanooga, Tenn. Bruce was born on January 22, 1940, in Lynn, Mass. Bruce's passion for education was ignited early. The son of a Scottish immigrant with a third-grade education, Bruce graduated from Lynn English High School in 1957 before earning a bachelor's degree in economics from Guilford College in Greensboro, N.C., and a master's in counseling from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He was first exposed to the tenets of Quakerism at Guilford, which became the guiding force for both his personal and professional life.

Bruce's nearly five-decade career in education was marked by an unwavering commitment to fostering opportunity for all students. He began as a social studies teacher and counselor at Walter Hines Page High School in Greensboro, where he played a pivotal role in the school's first efforts at integration following the landmark sit-ins at Woolworth's in 1960. His lifelong dedication to equity in education was shaped by that experience, fueling his determination to ensure that every student, regardless of background, had access to a quality education.

He was a founding member of the North Carolina School of the Arts, where he served as its first dean of student affairs and a special assistant to the president. Eventually he returned to work at Guilford College where he held multiple roles, including director of admissions, acting academic dean, and ultimately, provost. While at Guilford, he cofounded New Garden Friends School, a preschool through twelfth grade Quaker school in Greensboro. Additionally, he played a pivotal role in the development of the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics, a public boarding school in Durham.

In 1984, Bruce moved to Pennsylvania to serve as head of Abington Friends School, and in 1998, he became head of Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C., where he served until his retirement in 2009. He treasured his time at Quaker independent

schools where he said he learned so much from faculty, staff, trustees, and students about academic excellence, ethical leadership, and environmental stewardship. He always championed diversity, working consistently to increase financial aid and broaden access for students of all backgrounds. During his tenure at Sidwell, the construction of the LEED Platinum-certified middle school set a national precedent for sustainable school design.

Bruce's influence extended far beyond institutional achievements. He was a mentor, confidant, and unwavering advocate for students, faculty, and families alike. His presence was felt in every corner of the campuses where he worked—from picking up trash on his daily walks to attending meeting for worship, where he offered wisdom and guidance to generations of students. He listened, encouraged, and inspired those around him to strive for excellence while remaining grounded in values of compassion and integrity. As a speaker, fundraiser, and storyteller, Bruce had a rare ability to captivate audiences with his warmth, intellect, and deep love for the institutions he served.

In his retirement, Bruce moved to Chattanooga, Tenn., to be near his daughter, son-in-law, and three grandsons. He never missed a game, competition, or race, and regularly encouraged all of them to "let their lives speak." A treasured experience for the family was the involvement of three generations in the development of the Ed Johnson Memorial, a lynching memorial with a focus on honoring the truth of the past to promote racial reconciliation.

Bruce was most recently a member of Chattanooga Meeting.

He was predeceased by his wife, Andra Jurist. Bruce is survived by four children, Kathleen Stewart Hunt (Peter), Lindsay Jurist Rosner (Jason Fox), Marney Cohen (Robert), and Mark Thompson; five grandchildren; and a host of nieces and nephews.

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**Weatherby**—*Betty Jane "B.J." Watkins Weatherby*, 91, on October 10, 2023, at Friends Homes in Greensboro, N.C. B.J. was born on September 30, 1932, to Roscoe M. Watkins and Margaret Elizabeth Leckey Watkins in Grant, Neb. She had a twin brother, two older sisters, and a younger sister. B.J. loved being part of a big, loving family. She enjoyed cheerleading, dance, and playing the saxophone and piano.

B.J. began her college career at the University of Colorado. An early marriage ending in divorce caused her to drop out. She completed a bachelor's degree in 1980 and a master's degree in 1984 at New York University. In Princeton, N.J., B.J. worked for Educational Testing Service and for James Conant, managing a staff that was conducting a Carnegie Foundation study of American high schools.

In 1958, B.J. met Philip Grandin Weatherby III in New York City. They married on December 4, 1959, in New York. Phil had

two sons by a previous marriage, Michael and Craig. The family made their home in Darien, Conn., where their daughter, Tracy, was born in 1961. B.J. developed policy and curriculum goals for the Darien School System.

In 1966, the family moved to Saint Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands. B.J. helped found the League of Women Voters in Saint Thomas and served as its second president. In 1972, she was elected to the Board of Elections. In addition, she served on commissions related to land use and capital improvements.

In 1974, B.J. was serving on the Board of Trustees of Antilles School, a private school where Tracy attended. B.J. was appointed headmistress and served in that role for five years.

In 1980, B.J. and Phil moved to Detroit, Mich., where she was headmistress of the Friends School of Detroit. Phil died in 1982. In 1985, B.J. moved to Greensboro, N.C., to serve as headmistress of New Garden Friends School. There she found a wonderful community, which included Friendship Meeting. She joined the Board of Visitors for Guilford College.

In 1987, B.J. formed a desktop publishing company, Friendly Desktop Publishing. She did the layout for *Friendly Woman*, which was produced at that time by Friendship Meeting and New Garden Meeting. She did projects for other Friends' organizations including North Carolina Yearly Meeting, North Carolina Friends Historical Society, and Friends Homes. B.J. had a thriving business producing brochures, handbooks, and books for many years.

In 1988, B.J. reconnected with her high school boyfriend, Vernie Nielsen. They had not seen each other for 40 years. Following three weeks of letters and one visit, on November 25, 1988, they married under the care of Friendship Meeting. With marriage to Vernie, B.J. gained another daughter, Nanette Sue. B.J. joined New Garden Meeting.

In 2012, Vernie and B.J. moved to Friends Homes at Guilford, where B.J. continued her activism by organizing and moderating candidate forums and working on Greensboro land use planning. She loved travel and celebrations with friends and family.

B.J. was diagnosed with dementia around 2017, but it progressed slowly. In 2021, she moved into skilled care at Friends Homes.

B.J. was predeceased by her second husband, Phil Weatherby; her twin brother, Billy Bob Watkins; and three sisters, Martha Jeanne Watkins Pierpoint, Barbara Beth Watkins Aten, and Frances Rowena Watkins Beers.

She is survived by her husband, Martin LaVerne "Vernie" Nielsen; four children, Michael Frederick Weatherby, Craig Nelson Weatherby, Tracy Dianne Weatherby, and Nanette Sue "Nan" Nielsen Hong; and several grandchildren.

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*It's easy to say there is that of God in everyone, Kat Griffith suggests, "but how often do we really believe it?" When she opens herself to really listen to other people across the political divide, her understanding of this simple Quaker truth deepens.*

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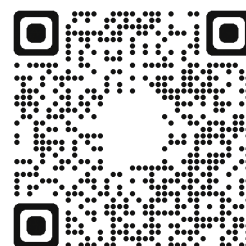


“There have been a number of moments where I have felt led to open myself up,” Kat says, “and I have been changed—and I have sometimes fought that. Sometimes I’ve been dragged kicking and screaming into that kind of openness, but I’m taken there over and over again, so I think that’s where God wants me.”

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