

AQM 2016 Worship and Ministry Report

Friends on AQM Worship and Ministry have struggled this year with an awareness of challenges within individual meetings, where satisfactory resolution was not going to be easy. We each have differing experiences. Harmony with the divine will may be different from what each individual Friend might want to see happen. This particular clerk has struggled to be faithful to her own leadings while remaining open to the understandings of others on our committee.

As we struggled, a theme of loving gifts into being developed. This is at the core of becoming Friends that are “full of the Light” or “full of the Life” – who were once recognized for their gifts as elders/overseers. Although members of Care and Concern now serve that function, it is not a matter of human authority, but of humble seeking. The ideal is that Friends care for each one in the community and the interactions within the community as a whole.

There are Friends in every meeting (whether or not they serve on Care and Counsel) to whom others most often turn for advice. These Friends honor private conversations as confidential. When correction is needed, it comes from a place of deep care and love for both the individual and for the meeting. Each meeting has at least one such Friend, whose prayerful grounding settles them. Such Friends can often be found sitting in quiet prayer, or quietly conversing with someone, seeking what is both good for that person and for the entire community. This interaction is necessary for vibrant community life. It is something we can each do better.

This is not a new challenge. The early Christian community at Corinth struggled, too. Paul wrote

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

I Corinthians 13: 1-7. NIV

Our place is to listen, to observe, and to pray without ceasing. We can worship and pray with you, and we can pray for you all. We may offer suggestions when things go off-kilter. But the hard work of discernment and living in harmony is work each meeting needs to do for itself. If you need prayer – ask for it, as some meetings have. If you need us to be present with you, please ask. Our Quarter’s clerk is also a member of Worship and Ministry, and we strive to support her work.

We found over the past year that in addressing the needs of Friends and meetings in distress, visiting other meetings declined. For this reason, we resumed our past practice of visiting meetings as a group. Our experience over the past few years persuades us that worship, listening, and prayer are the most important parts of what we do. We can suggest resources in instances where mediation may be useful. It is up to each meeting to discern what they can use.

We spent nearly two years considering spiritual nurture and the gifts of Spirit-led eldering, but did not feel ready to proceed with a workshop or opportunity for sharing. Still, this effort grounded us, and showed us the dangers of running “past our Guide.” This consideration was a good use of time, as we learned that we each need to expand our capacity for fullness of the Light or of the Life. Many Friends still suffer the pangs of corrections done with insufficient care and love.

We need more compassion and care for each other so that even correction can be received as an expression of continuing care. In the midst of our wrestling, we acknowledged the need for loving one other, for recognizing gifts, and for learning to forgive each other when things aren't as we hope they might be.

We do not have all the answers, but we may have a piece or two that Friends might use.

Christine Greenland 1/12/2016