

ON VOCAL MINISTRY



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Introduction

BY CAROLE TREADWAY

LAST YEAR A FRIEND IN NORTH Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) brought to our Representative Body meeting a concern that we, as a yearly meeting, are hiding our light under a bushel. We are a very small part of the wider body of the Religious Society of Friends, and, in fact, many people who are otherwise acquainted with Friends, do not know we exist or assume we died out. But we are still here and I believe we have a role to play within the wider body of Friends. We have regular visitors at our annual sessions who have encouraged us to make ourselves known more widely. It was proposed that a way to become more visible, and better understood and appreciated, would be through an occasional journal. In this medium we could describe who we are through personal narrative and reflection and thus make plainer both to others and to ourselves who

we are and how we live out the purpose to which the Holy Spirit has called us. North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) [NCYM(C)] approved the proposal. We hope that the results will be informative and inspiring.

The editorial board named by the yearly meeting at its annual sessions in Seventh month 2000, selected the theme of “vocal ministry” for our inaugural issue, believing that this is one of the most important and distinctive elements of Conservative Friends’ way of worship. The “Advices to Meeting of Ministry and Oversight” in the Faith and Practice: Book of Discipline of NCYM(C) is a door into the subject as it lays out what our ancestors in the life of the spirit have found to be marks of authentic vocal ministry across the generations, even though changes are inevitable as the circumstances of our lives change.

The Advices express our hope for

and expectancy of authentic vocal ministry and spell out the conditions for our hopes to be realized.. “In the exercise of the ministry, wait for ... the Holy Spirit; be careful not to exceed the measure of your gifts, but proceed and conclude in the spirit and authority of the Gospel.” This is the essence of the advices to ministers, but there follows more particular guidance which, if followed, results in inspiring, instructive, or convicting ministry. Ministers are advised to be humble, to “present the life and teaching of Christ Jesus, ... reverently seeking wisdom from God, that you may be enabled rightly to interpret the Word of Truth.” Rhetorical devices that create a false atmosphere of authenticity and bring undue attention to the minister are to be avoided inasmuch as “. . . the baptizing power of the Spirit of Truth accompanying the Word [is] the true evidence” of spiritual authority. “Prayer and

thanksgiving are an important part of worship,” but should “be offered in spirit and in truth, with a right understanding, seasoned with grace,” and they should not be formal or set prayers. Rather, in prayer, as in all other ministry, it should be offered with “a reverent sense of Divine guidance.”

Five members of NCYM(C) have contributed to the first issue of the Journal of North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative), writing from their experience and/or from their reflection on and study of vocal ministry as it has been practiced traditionally and as it has evolved in response to changing conditions. Louise Wilson and Deborah Shaw, both recorded ministers, write of the development of their vocal ministry, the encouragement and acknowledgment they have received for their gift, as well as how it has affected their lives and the lives of others. Deborah Shaw’s vocal ministry most often is sung, a rarity among Friends. Older Friends may remember the common practice of ministers speaking in “tones,” in which the message was chanted, each minister in a unique style. This may be a natural effect of speaking under the inspiration of by the Holy Spirit and may even be related to the phenomenon of speaking in tongues. It may be effective or it may be more than a little distracting. Our Discipline advises against it, but only because it can draw undue attention to the speaker and distract the hearers from the message. As Deborah Shaw makes clear, inspired

singing in meeting is as authentic as inspired speaking and can make a contribution to worship that goes beyond words.

Lloyd Lee Wilson, also a recorded minister, reflects on the role of the minister and ministry, traces the process by which a gift of vocal ministry is formally recognized and acknowledged, and describes the covenant relationship that is established between the minister and the minister’s meeting. He also reflects on how a faithful response to the call to vocal ministry changes and challenges the minister’s life. He explores the way that traveling ministers have influenced the Religious Society of Friends and discusses what our meetings gain when they acknowledge and nurture a gift of vocal ministry and what is lost when our meetings do not acknowledge the gifts given to them through particular individuals.

A common assumption is that a meeting in which there is seldom any vocal ministry is a meeting in spiritual decline. Richard Miller tells a different story as he recounts his experience in a small meeting with infrequent vocal ministry. He describes the value and opportunities of a normally silent meeting.

The most important mark of an authentic life in the spirit as Conservative and other Friends understand it, is to live in “holy dependence on God” in every aspect of our lives. David Beckett explores what that means for vocal ministry and for meeting life where the commitment is made to such a

radical release of personal and corporate control in favor of Divine guidance. He also cautions us that life in the spirit weakens when secular values creep in to replace dependence on God.

As Paul so eloquently says in his first letter to the Corinthians, love is the underlying and prevailing condition for the right use of all of the gifts given to the body of Christ through its individual members. “If I speak in the tongues of mortals and angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, . . .but do not have love, I am nothing” (I Cor. 13:1-2). We hope our readers will see that love is the underlying and prevailing motif in all of the articles we present in this inaugural issue.

Carole Treadway is a member of
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Vocal Ministry of One Friend

BY LOUISE WILSON

“THE GIFT” of vocal ministry was a term used in North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) when I was growing up. As a child I thought those who sat on the facing benches and spoke often, sometimes more than often, must be the gifted ministers. They did not seem gifted to me; they sounded like a broken record. They quoted the Bible, talked about God’s love and how we should love one another. I wonder where those words really came from, and I wondered why they said the same words most every week.

As I grew old enough to no longer play with mother’s gloves in meeting for worship, I found myself pondering – pondering the meaning of the messages I felt as though I almost knew by heart. What did it mean to love one another? I wondered if it were possible. And I hated the excuse that you don’t have to like one another – just love one another. It didn’t make sense to me.

One day at recess, we were playing hide and go-seek. We got more and more excited; we began to push and pull one another. A girl in my class and I ran into each other. We both fell down. As I started to get up, I looked down at her and I saw she was crying, and her nose was bleeding. Without remembering that I didn’t like her, I went down on my knees and held her head as I comforted her. I wiped her tears with my stained handkerchief, and I used my skirt to wipe her nose. She stopped crying. I looked into her eyes and she looked into my eyes. We saw each other for the first time. I felt my heart pounding. I felt something I had never felt before, a love that wasn’t mine, a love that seemed to flow through me.

During the following meeting for worship, I remembered what had happened on the playground. I remembered those words I’d heard in meeting about loving someone you did not like. With no thought, I

realized I was speaking in meeting! I told about how I had loved someone I didn’t like.

After I got home I went to my quiet place and asked, “God, was it your love I felt?”

I very seldom spoke in meeting after the time noted. I spent more time in the attic watching the breeze blow through the leaves of the huge tree outside the window, wondering how leaves turned an orange-like color before falling to the ground. And how could the leaves come back in the spring? I remembered the fun my brothers and I had tumbling in the leaves.

Is it possible the seed of vocal ministry was planted in me during those early days as I pondered the “whys” and “hows” of life?

I entered Westtown Friends School in the tenth grade. We went to mid-week and First day meetings for worship. I enjoyed going to meeting with boys and girls near my age, even though I pretended to

For many modern unprogrammed Friends, responding to this immediate call to speak is often an important step in the process of “conversion” that is, the turning of our lives to ever closer and closer attention to and faithful response to the Will of God. Hopefully, this immediate sense of calling takes places each time a person speaks in meeting.

– William P. Taber, Jr. from a Pendle Hill lecture (*Vocal Ministry: The Inward Motion and the Razor’s Edge*) delivered during the Fall of 1996

them I didn't like it. After a short while I found myself speaking in meeting – not often – but from time to time I'd be on my feet before I realized it; a message seemed to be spoken through me. I never thought it to be anything special; just a sharing of thoughts that came to me.

During college I attended a programmed meeting sometimes. Along the way, a meeting for worship based on silent waiting was held in the a small building on the campus. I often attended, but do not recall speaking.

Bob Wilson and I married in June 1941 and became a part of High Point Friends Meeting. I may have spoken a few times during the short time set aside for waiting worship.

It was after we moved to Virginia Beach in 1952 that the seeds planted in my early life seemed to break through. The newness of life exposed the need to bring my scatteredness together, to know for myself how to follow the path that lay before me. I began consciously to spend more time reading spiritual books, including the Bible, and in prayer and meditation. It was during this time that I saw the vision of a meetinghouse in Virginia Beach. I began to be given words and thoughts that did not come from my mind. I felt that I was being taught awake and asleep. On the first First day in Third month, 1954 Virginia Beach Friends Meeting was a reality.

To quote from my book *Inner Tenderings* (p. 27):

These meetings for worship were precious to me. I looked forward to them with expectations and a kind of excitement. I began

to speak in meeting quite often. I was amazed at some of the messages: short, yet far beyond my understanding. I spent time waiting upon the Lord, paying attention to every little prompting, no matter how faint. It was a surprise the first time I heard myself praying out loud! Where were those words coming from? They didn't sound like me. I continued to be faithful to the still small voice, never sure what God would ask of me next.

To further quote from *Inner Tenderings* (pp. 29-31):

On March 19, 1955, I was awakened before dawn. As I lay in my bed, I saw myself standing before a large group of people. A man who appeared to look like the president of Guilford College stood right behind me. He prayed to God that I might be purified. As he touched my shoulders an electrifying power flowed through my body. I felt cleansed. The man behind me became (was) Jesus Christ himself. I felt the power in his hands, and felt it flow through me. At the moment I became aware of myself in him and I got up, I reached for my journal and recorded what had happened as well as I could.

During the day I pondered the experience, not at all sure of its meaning, but knowing that I had been touched by Christ. I wrote a friend who was out of the country, recalling the experience. In a few weeks a letter came from him saying that I had been anointed by Christ as a minister. I smiled and thought that unlikely. A few days later a copy of a letter from Rich Square Monthly Meeting (my home meeting) came stating I had been recorded as a minister in the Religious Society of Friends on March 19, 1955.

I was hesitant to accept what I had been given. God tendered my spirit. Slowly I

came to know that the recording was imprinted on my heart and mind. Gradually I accepted the gift God had given me.

Usually I felt a pounding in my heart that would not go away until I stood to speak. At times I had a warm feeling, one of being held and needing to share at the same time. I found that the spirit moves within ever so quietly. My vocal ministry and my journal writing were filled with simple, yet profound realizations: God IS love. God is in the midst of everyone and everything. I would speak with illustrations of Truth at times and remain quiet at others.

The experience confirmed that I had not chosen this path; God had offered it, and I accepted. The passion I felt for the Society of Friends expressed itself through me in many meetings and gatherings across North America. My vocal ministry was during meeting for worship, when speaking to groups, and when leading retreats on prayer and the inward journey. Most of all I appreciated being with Friends from all walks of life.

At this time in my life I do not speak often. I feel it is my time to be still that others may hear God for themselves, to be still that I may receive what God waits to unfold to me. Ministry has become more precious to me as I am present one-to-one in God's presence.

Louise Wilson, a recorded minister, is a founding member of Virginia Beach Monthly Meeting in Virginia Beach, VA.

Accountability and Vocal Ministry

BY LLOYD LEE WILSON

THERE ARE MANY SPIRITUAL gifts. The one shared by Friends corporately is the charism of prophecy – of hearing the word of God and declaring it to the world through our words and deeds. Though one often hears the Society of Friends described as a society where everyone is a minister, it would be more accurate to say that all Friends are prophets – or at least, should be. *Principles of Quakerism* says this: “[The Religious Society of Friends] may almost be described as a society formed for the express purpose of receiving and preserving the prophetic gift [that was given] to the Christian Church.... The Society is therefore also a Society for the practice of what may be called the prophetic life....”

Though all Friends have the opportunity to offer vocal ministry at every meeting for worship, not

every Friend speaks in every meeting (thank goodness!). In fact, it soon becomes obvious to even the most casual observer that the bulk of the work of vocal ministry is carried by a group of relatively few persons. Over any extended period of time, most Friends will speak in worship, but some will speak much more often than others.

Some speakers will, in their messages, give evidence of having received a spiritual gift in vocal ministry – of speaking the Word of God in ways helpful to those gathered in worship. When this becomes apparent to the faith community, it is important to take steps to nurture and preserve this gift, to promote its proper development and exercise. Among Friends, this process of acknowledging the presence of a spiritual gift is usually called recording.

The gift in vocal ministry that is the subject of this discussion is not necessarily a gift of frequent ministry, and is rarely, if ever in these modern times, a gift of lengthy ministry. Of course some recorded ministers speak in meeting frequently, and some messages are longer than others; but it is the quality, not the quantity, of ministry that gives evidence of a spiritual gift.

Recording a Friend as a minister of the gospel acknowledges the presence of this gift and establishes a covenant relationship between the Friend so named and the meeting community. This covenant relationship has responsibilities on both sides, but its most important aspects are those that make the recorded minister accountable to the monthly meeting to which (s)he belongs.

This accountability relationship makes explicit that the minister is

the servant of the meeting, not someone set above the meeting in any way. The word minister comes from a root word meaning *to serve*. This relationship is true because the spiritual gift is bestowed on the community, not the individual. As the body of Christ, the faith community receives a full range of the spiritual gifts that are necessary to the community's well-being. These gifts are entrusted to individuals as stewards, but they are the community's gifts, in the care of individuals.

The Friend who recognizes and accepts a gift in vocal ministry must, to be faithful, make some important changes in personal orientation. Before, the Friend could focus primarily on personal spiritual growth – or, if a parent, on the spiritual well-being of his/her family. After, the emphasis is on how to develop and exercise this spiritual gift for the welfare of the meeting community. Personal spiritual well-being and that of one's family are of course still very important, but the minister's whole life comes to be concerned with the spiritual welfare of the meeting community in a unique way. This new orientation and purpose on behalf of the meeting community calls for a new relationship of accountability to the community which the recorded minister serves.

Samuel Bownas addressed this issue directly in his classic work *A Description of the Qualifications Necessary to a Gospel Minister*. In his introduction to that work, William Taber explains that "Qualification,

as [Bownas] uses the word, implies that one has gone through a process of personal transformation which reorients the ego, the will, and the attention so that one can be trusted purely to receive and purely to give forth an inspired message." Taber goes on to say "To be a Quaker minister then meant that one had accepted a vocation, a calling, which was more important than one's economic vocation and which often determined it or frequently interrupted it, as was true with Samuel Bownas."

This process of personal transformation continues over a period of many years after one accepts the vocation of ministry. It would not be overstating the case to say that it continues for the rest of the Friend's life. Guidance for this process comes in the main from two sources: more seasoned recorded ministers, who have personal experience of the challenges and rewards of faithfulness in this new vocation; and the meeting community as a whole, which can see more clearly how the individual minister's words and deeds are affecting (for better or worse) the welfare of the meeting. In order for this guidance to have its proper effect, the minister must be willingly accountable to these two groups of Friends.

The minister is accountable primarily through the meeting of ministers and elders – in most meetings now called the meeting of ministry and oversight. This group of wise and experienced Friends have the insight to guide the minis-

ter in so ordering his/her life that there is opportunity for the gift to become fully developed over time, and so that there is nothing in the rest of his/her life that would lead Friends (or others) to discount or discard the vocal ministry that is offered.

The ministers and elders also give guidance over the exercise of the gift – not only when and where it is exercised, but also how and why. In the close and supportive group of ministers and elders, one feels freer to share one's inner condition and struggles to be faithful than in the meeting at large. This stems from the strengthening of friendships that comes from long shared experience and from the shared dedication, expressed in each life, to the good of the monthly meeting. In this supportive setting, it is possible to discuss how one's personal style helps or hinders the ministry, whether particular messages seem to have been rightly ordered, and how one's life circumstances may be affecting one's ability to be a faithful minister.

It is easy, especially at the beginning, to be carried away with the importance of one's giftedness and to feel that one has a message to give to one's meeting or to Friends generally or to an even wider audience. One feels divinely chosen to deliver God's word to a specific group of people. In the absence of a clear system of accountability and association with more seasoned ministers, one can do considerable harm in this way. More seasoned

Individuals in the meeting (as well as the meeting as a whole), need to take responsibility. We bring to meeting on First Day our collectedness or our scatteredness, and help or hinder the meeting accordingly.

**–Elizabeth Watson
"Worship That Comes From Silence in the General Conference Tradition"**

When we talk about the 'gift' of ministry, we must be careful, for the word can be taken in a number of ways. People are said to have a gift if they enjoy a certain skill or talent, but also, someone has a gift if they have received a present from somebody else. Among Friends, the call to minister is understood as a divine gift in the latter sense.
– John Punshon, *Reflections From the Quaker Tradition, 1987*

ministers can help the less experienced Friend remember that ministry is not so much carrying the word of God to a group of Friends as agreeing to gather with a group of Friends in the expectation that, if one is faithful, something divinely good will happen. That divinely good thing may or may not involve one's speaking oneself.

Other issues of ministry are under the oversight of the monthly meeting for discipline, which has come to be known as the monthly meeting for business. The clearest example of public accountability to the monthly meeting for business in matters of vocal ministry involves the desire to make a "religious" visit to distant Friends.

The minister who feels led to travel outside the boundaries of the yearly meeting follows a similar procedure at the yearly meeting level. If the meeting for business approves, it issues a certificate for travel in the ministry. The certificate states that the minister in question is a member in good standing in his/her local meeting, and has shared the leading for this trip with the monthly meeting, and that the monthly meeting has found unity with the proposed journey.

Traveling in the ministry has been a vital part of the Quaker experience since George Fox and the Valiant Sixty evangelized the British Isles in the first years of the movement. Over hundreds of years, traveling ministers have knit scattered meetings together across continents and oceans, encouraging isolated Friends

and invigorating larger meetings with a new sense of the gospel message. The traveling minister called special meetings for worship for Friends and for other people, visited families in their homes, and was often called upon to adjudicate disputes or settle matters of disagreement among local Friends. The meetings being visited went out of their way to provide hospitality and local guides, to publicize called meetings and, when needed, to rent suitable space for "public" meetings.

How was a local Friends' meeting to know whether this stranger at their door was truly led to this traveling ministry – or for that matter, that this person was even a Friend? The certificate for travel in the ministry was evidence that the traveler was a Friend in good standing, and that the traveler's motivation for embarking on the journey was, in the best discernment of his or her home meeting, a true leading of the Holy Spirit.

Issues considered before approving such a certificate range far beyond the question of whether the motivation for the trip seems to the meeting to be a true leading. The meeting considers whether the traveler's family will be properly provided for during the journey, whether the traveler's business affairs are in good order, and whether there are sufficient financial resources to make the trip and pay necessary expenses at home. Members of the meeting may take on some of the traveler's responsibilities in order to release the

traveler for the journey.

The use of the term "traveler" rather than "minister" in the preceding two paragraphs is intentional. Especially in current times, certificates for travel are issued for Friends not recorded as ministers more often than for those recorded, if only because so few Friends are recorded ministers at present. The procedures followed are the same, whatever the designation of the traveling Friend. At one time, a request for a certificate releasing a Friend to follow a leading to travel in the gospel ministry would be sufficient impetus to begin considering whether this Friend had a gift that should be recorded, but the link is not as close now as it once was.

It is a vital strength of the Religious Society of Friends that the divine inspiration to vocal ministry may fall at any time on any individual in meeting for worship. It is also true that the strength and vitality of our society has depended for centuries on a relatively small group of individuals for whom vocal ministry became a divine vocation, and who re-oriented their lives around that vocation. If that strength and vitality are to continue into the new century, we must be willing to encourage and assist those Friends who receive this calling, and they must be willing to enter into this relationship of accountability with their faith community.

Lloyd Lee Wilson is a recorded minister and a member of Rich Square Monthly Meeting in Woodland, NC.

On Doing Without Vocal Ministry

BY RICHARD MILLER

FOR THE PAST SEVENTEEN YEARS, I have worshipped in a monthly meeting where there are usually fewer than five adults present each First day. So, in my experience, a meeting for worship with no vocal ministry is normal. The silence may be deep and fruitful or it may be shallow and occupied by stray thoughts about mundane existence, but it usually proceeds without any speech.

For a few years, we had a member of our meeting who did have a genuine gift of vocal ministry. He spoke often in worship, and it was clear that he spoke out of his experience of the living Christ and not in order to give outward form to his own personal thoughts and opinions. This Friend's vocal ministry was valued while he was here to share it with us, and its absence was felt when his

career took him elsewhere.

Completely silent meetings once again became the norm for us.

It is clear that some miss the presence of vocal ministry more than others. A whole hour in complete silence seems too long to some, and the contrast with the busyness of our ordinary lives is too extreme. The cares of the world are hard to lay down. When we are not in meeting for worship, there are always plenty of outward distractions to distract us from our worries. During an hour of complete silence, these inner worries can fill our minds without having to compete with new stimulations. Having set aside the outer distractions of radios and cell phones, we find that the inner distractions of worry, anger or sadness threaten to overwhelm us. It can seem too hard to hand over these

inner noises to the one who knows where and why each sparrow falls. The inner strains and tensions of an unbalanced life show up in the protracted silence.

To other Friends the silence poses a different sort of challenge. Instead of stress and worry, the inner life may be characterized by dryness. Life does not seem overwhelming; rather, the source of insight, inspiration, and comfort seems to have dried up. God seems to have turned his attention elsewhere and left us painfully alone. At such times, Friends can find the silence too much, and long to return to the noise of normal life. Under such conditions, any vocal ministry can seem welcome. Even if the vocal ministry is merely some musing about politics or the news, it can offer a distraction: Do I agree with what was said? Was it well said?

The second matter the journals confirm is that to receive a message itself is not the same as to receive the call to give it, and that these are separate and distinguishable stages. When Phillip Neri says, "O, Lord, keep a firm hand on Phillip today," the word might well be spoken by one who often ministers in meeting. A further question may arise as to what happens to a message that has come but that one has not been at liberty to share. My own experience has been that nothing is ever lost. —Douglas Steere, *On Speaking Out of the Silence*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet #182, 1972

How are others reacting?

Discomfort with the unbroken silence will lead some to experiment with vocal ministry. Perhaps the silence goes on so long only because some of us are ignoring a leading to speak. Such leadings should be tested. It is the only way in which some people who do have a gift of vocal ministry will discover it. When people find their gift and come to share it, the meeting flourishes.

It is also a good thing when someone who does not have a gift of vocal ministry discovers that he or she does not. To discover that this is not your gift, as I have, is a blessing as well. It freed my mind from worrying about whether I was ignoring a leading to speak. Once I was sure I had no gift of vocal ministry, I could settle into the silence and pay proper attention.

A meeting for worship without vocal ministry is not a failure. The complete silence is probably not due to our ignoring God, and it is certainly not due to God's ignoring us. No matter why the protracted silence seems uncomfortable, it has a reason and should not be wasted. Instead of trying to use the hour to worry about a problem or to devise possible solutions we should humbly hand the problem over, like a child handing a broken toy to her mother. Or the hour can be a time to reflect on the needs of others and whether we have been faithfully attentive to them.

Richard Miller is a founding member of Greenville Monthly Meeting in Greenville, NC.

A Holy Dependence Upon God

BY DAVID BECKETT

IF YOU ASK SOMEONE ABOUT A recent meeting for worship, the response will usually focus on the nature of the silence and a recount of the vocal ministry. Robert Barclay suggested that this may be confusing the means with the outcome when he wrote, “Our worship consists neither in words nor in silence as such, but in a holy dependence of the mind upon God. For such dependence, it is necessary to begin with silence until the words can be brought forth which arise from God’s Spirit.” Although these words were published in 1692, they capture a truth that still resonates more than three centuries later.

Barclay may have been blessed with a glimpse of truth, but his words are difficult for many to carry into their daily lives. It is likely that the phrase “holy dependence of the mind upon God” holds little meaning for many. We live and work in a world defined by concreteness and usefulness. Society’s reward systems encourage each of us into a results-driven dependence upon our minds, rather than encourage our minds to

be dependent upon the Divine’s leadings. It is no small wonder then that we have a tendency to use our minds in worship rather than to subordinate them to leadings of Spirit, and fail to recognize that little of what Friends do makes any sense without first waiting upon God. Deep and genuine worship requires that we place all of our being, including our minds, into a holy state of waiting dependence.

In their 1992 Swarthmore Lecture and their subsequent book *Images and Silence*, Brenda Clift Heales and Chris Cook considered ministry in the Religious Society of Friends and wrote of meetings that had shirked their responsibilities with regard to their meetings for worship. As a result, these meetings became better characterized as meetings-for-counseling or meetings-for-conversation.

This may surprise us, but when we think about it we can see how it would be so. Friends are relatively few in number, and our ways are uncommon. For the most part what we do in worship remains invisible and left unsaid. In the absence of

the saying, most people would continue to operate in the manner in which they are familiar.

One Friend recently related that she remembers when her meeting was smaller and the meetings for worship were characterized by an awe-filled reverence. As the meeting swelled and those familiar with Friends’ ways became relatively small, the quality of meeting for worship seemed diluted. This Friend realized that gradually and subtly, the meeting for worship had more often than not come to resemble a group therapy session – with messages reflecting compassion for someone’s illness, praise for another’s social actions, or indignation about social injustice. Missing from these messages was the simple authority associated with drawing from the Divine.

I have heard many such messages and wonder who could help but feel warmth and sympathy. I also wonder if such messages portray a false sense of both worship and community. It is my observation that a common mistake with our vocal

While it has been productive scientifically to view man as a socialized animal, this leads to a dead end spiritually if we do not give equal weight to that which goes on inside a man. I will go further and say that man will come to a spiritual dead end if he does not allow time apart and in solitude for things to happen inside him.

—Josephine Whitney Duvencek, *Daily Readings from Quaker Writings Both Ancient and Modern*, 1978

The decline of a prophetic type of ministry in the twentieth century in that part of the Society of Friends which attempted to preserve a free, unprogrammed ministry cannot be attributed to the elders. They took extreme precautions to guard the living spring from all contamination. Its decline is due primarily to the high degree of intellectualism and secularism which appeared in all religious groups. Higher education, particularly college education, became more general. A self-conscious, rationalistic point of view frequently approaching humanism has resulted. The vocal ministry has increased in intellectual content. For the most part, this has been a gain. There has, however, too often been a corresponding decrease in spiritual content. There is no real reason why the intellectual and the spiritual should not develop together and reinforce each other. Human reason and the Spirit, which is more than human, are both essential, but the balance is not easy to maintain.
 —Howard Brinton,
Friends for 300 Years,
 1964

ministry is the freedom we take in creating an emotionally comfortable atmosphere away from the world's outer conditions. When we provide ourselves a sanctuary for God rather than provide ourselves a sanctuary from the world, we are rewarded with those magical results against which all other pales.

In his *A Testament of Devotion*, Thomas Kelly spoke to this mistake when he wrote, *The sooner we stop thinking we are the energetic operators of religion and discover that God is at work, so much the sooner do we discover that our task is to call people to be still and know, listen, hearken in quiet invitation to the subtle promptings of the Divine. Our task is to encourage others first to let go, to cease striving, to give over this fevered effort of the self-sufficient religionist trying to please an external deity. I am persuaded that religious people do not with sufficient seriousness count on God as an active factor in the affairs of the world. 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock,' but too many well-intentioned people are so preoccupied with the clatter of effort to do something for God that they don't bear Him asking that He might do something through them.*

Several years ago I attended a Friends General Conference workshop led by Pat Loring. In that workshop, she instructed the group to engage in a retired meeting for worship, one where we were relieved of the responsibility for vocal ministry. Pat told us to be mindful of that place in the deepening process of worship where we reached a level of agitation, what Friends used to call "the Creature," and to relax

through it. We were able to be aware of that agitation. On my part, it required more time to move beyond.

It is a rare person who does not face the task of settling his or her inner restlessness upon entering into silence. This restlessness can assume many guises, including a mistaken call to vocal ministry. Peter and Carol Fingesten brought memorable words to the difference between mental restlessness and a call to vocal ministry in their 1987 article "Let The Silence Speak For Itself" in *Friends Journal*. "Silence can spill over into speech as our utterances can spill over into the silence. When the silence penetrates the words with its own quality it enhances them, but when words spill into the silence they may diminish it unless they are truly inspired and give it new meaning the moment they are uttered."

Friends have discovered that the mind becomes agitated when searching for something it cannot find. As an example, the mind often begins to search for satisfaction or fulfillment in the wrong direction – in the realm of thinking and sensory experience. Older Friends may remember being cautioned against "a sot for the senses," something that fills our awareness and directs our attention away from God. Not until the mind is calmed and the attention gets turned 180° inward does the person begin to taste a little of the fulfillment sought. Then the mind is spontaneously drawn on to deeper levels of its own accord. As the deepening takes hold, one gets directed towards the soul; each per-

son's portal to the Divine, its promptings, and the true wellspring for strong vocal ministry and Divine leadings.

The poetry of John Greenleaf Whittier speaks to the condition of allowing one's distractions and promptings to fall aside so as to reveal the power of the Presence that continuously resides within each of us:

*Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
 Till all our strivings cease;
 Take from our souls the strain and stress,
 And let our ordered lives confess
 The beauty of Thy peace.
 Breathe through the pulses of desire
 Thy coolness and Thy balm;
 Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
 Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
 O still, small voice of calm!*

I remember a seasoned old Friend who spoke of the power of vocal ministry that stems from such a worshipful, still place. She said that when a message gets delivered, she carries it as deeply as she can, and then she shakes it until all the words fall off. There, she rides the message as far as it will take her. Hers is the message of the resurrection and the opportunity for the Divine to come alive through each and every one of us.

David Beckett is a member of Durham Monthly Meeting in Durham, NC.

You Might Have Warned Us!

BY DEBORAH SHAW

P*SALM 98 SING TO THE LORD A new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; make music to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn – shout for joy before the Lord, the King. Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; let them sing before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.*

I grew up singing. My mother, a convinced Friend, taught my sister and me the songs that we sang on our way to meeting for worship. “Jesus Loves Me,” “Jesus Wants Me

For A Sunbeam,” “Sleep Little Seed,” “Jacob’s Ladder,” “The God Who Cares For Me,” and “Five Little Birds” (with hand motions!) were among those we knew. My sister, Ruth, and I remember that we always sang them in the same order.

At First Day school, which we attended before going in to the full hour of meeting for worship, we sang some of those same songs. Outside of First Day we would sing rounds and songs out of those little paperback camp songbooks from the 40’s: “Song Of Peace,” “English Country Garden,” “Zum Gali Gali,” “The Ash Grove,” “Green Grow The Rushes.” They are simple folk tunes that were easy to sing harmonies to, simple words reflective of love of friends, of the earth, of God. Our family’s Christmas eve tradition included selected readings from the Bible interspersed with certain carols. As we grew older, Ruth organized annual caroling parties – a first for the neighborhoods where

we lived in Tucson, Arizona. We both still use the song sheets that my mother typed up and we each continue the tradition of caroling parties in our different towns. Ruth taught herself to play the guitar and we moved on to folk songs, show tunes, music from the Medical Mission Sisters, and the Singing Nun. Throughout our school years we were both involved in choir – culminating in our participation in the Guilford College Choir under the amazing leadership of Ed Lowe, a much beloved choir director whose musical selections were most often of a religious/spiritual nature, ranging from masses to spirituals. After Ruth moved away from Greensboro, our visits together would always include some time to sing together.

Psalm 108:1 My heart is steadfast, O God; I will sing and make music with all my soul.

Psalm 96:1-3 Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing

It is no light matter to break the living silence. This should be done only with a sense of humility. Spoken words should not come as an interruption of the silence but rather as a component part of it. The tone of voice and manner of the speaker must harmonize with the character of the meeting.
—Howard Brinton,
Friends for 300 Years,
1964

to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.

After choir opportunities diminished, I began singing with three other people, working mostly on ballads and bluegrass music. I enjoyed harmonizing and singing regularly, but found myself growing uncomfortable as the group moved forward in pursuing paying engagements. I began to feel uncomfortable with some of the selections that we started working on – the content and the intent of the lyrics. I soon told the group that I could no longer sing with them. My husband, Sid, had started playing the guitar again and he and I began to work on folksongs, gospels, and other spiritual music. It became clear that I was called to be singing songs that would promote life in the Spirit.

Psalm 95:1-2 Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.

The first time I remember hearing a song offered as vocal ministry was while I was a student at Olney Friends Boarding School. Several times a year Olney students would attend worship at Stillwater and it was during one of these meetings. I don't remember what was sung – I do remember that the person was a young man working as an apple picker at the Rockwell Orchards. I was surprised that someone was singing in Stillwater Meetinghouse

where Friend's tradition and practice stretched back to a time when singing would not have been approved as vocal ministry, a carry over from when Friends felt that music in worship was a distraction. I found myself moved by the beauty of the voice and song being lifted up to God, so clearly an expression of worship.

Psalm 47:6-7 Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise.
Psalm 33:1-2 Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him. Praise the Lord with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy.

I don't remember the first time that I sang in meeting for worship. I do remember the first time that I was called to sing in a meeting for worship at Stillwater. Even though I knew that I wouldn't be the first to sing out of the worship there, I found myself worrying about what people's reaction would be, found myself struggling even more than usual with my leading, trying to be very sure that it was God's leading. Since that first time, I have returned to Stillwater and have been called to sing in worship on several occasions. An elder of the meeting spoke to me on one of these occasions, commenting that while the sung ministry was unusual it always seemed rightly ordered to her. I gratefully felt an affirmation of my obedience in this comment.

1 Corinthians 14:15 So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind.

Carole Treadway, a member of Friendship Friends Meeting shares the following thoughts: "In my experience of ministry in song I have found that often it has the effect of gathering the worshipers into one body and deepening the worship. The music and the words come from a different level of mind than words alone do (unless they are poetry) and they speak to the heart. It is my feeling that when it springs from the deepest place, where inspiration is received, singing is a benediction on the meeting."

Psalm 57:7-8 My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn.
Psalm 59:16-17 But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble. O my Strength, I sing praise to you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God.

When I am called to vocal ministry in meeting for worship it is most often in song. Sometimes I think about how people are able to hear theological themes voiced in a song that they would have difficulty hearing comfortably if the same theme were shared as spoken ministry. There are times when I am led to sing early on in a meeting for worship – very often with the feeling that what I am being given to sing is a call to worship. On one

occasion this was very literally the case. I was at a Pendle Hill retreat and the appointed hour for the closing meeting for worship had come and gone. Several of us were in the meeting room in the Barn, centering down as best we were able, but many were just outside in the entryway, conversing joyously and loudly. Before I knew what was happening I was on my feet singing “Cause Me To Come To Thy River, O Lord...” very loudly. Friends heard the call and came quietly in to join the worship. There are times when what I am called to sing brings solace or comfort for a pain or hurt that has been expressed in the vocal ministry, or is present but unspoken, confirmed afterward by comments of persons present. It has been given to me to express ministry in song at some of the meetings that I have occasion to visit once or twice a year. Quite often, if I have been called to sing in that meeting on a repeat visit, one or two Friends will come up to me afterward and say that they had hoped or prayed that I would be moved to sing. There are times when what I am called to sing seems to bring some resolution to the previous messages or ties the themes together in some manner.

Psalm 89:1 I will sing of the Lord's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations.

Three years ago, when way opened for me to go on a spiritual pilgrimage in England, I remember feeling some concern regarding the

possible reaction of English Friends if it should be given to me to offer song in meetings for worship. My sense was that sung ministry would be much more unusual in England than it was here. Michele Tarter, my helpsmeet and companion on this pilgrimage, and I had asked Friends to come and worship with us in the evenings as we traveled around the 1652 country. As it happened, I felt called in vocal ministry in every meeting for worship, some spoken, but most often in song. In general the reaction, at least what was shared with me, was positive. Often it would have been the first time that Friends had heard song offered as vocal ministry. The Friends that did speak to me would often state that despite the unusual method, they felt that the message was “well led.”

Psalm 5:11 But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy.

The title of this article comes from an experience I had when Sid and I were serving as Friends in Residence at Woodbrooke in the autumn of 2000. I was led to sing in worship on one particular weekend. The next day one of the participants came up to me in the hallway and asked me if I had been at a particular meeting two years ago. Indeed, the meeting named had been one that Michele and I had visited on our pilgrimage. The Friend said, “I thought so. You sang there, too, and I didn’t recognize you until you sang here. You might have warned us!”. I responded that it wouldn’t have

occurred to me to warn anyone, anymore than it would occur to me to warn Friends in a meeting for worship that I was intending to offer spoken ministry.

Psalm 147:1 Praise the Lord. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him!

Ephesians 5:19-20 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Barbara Gosney, a member of Rich Square Monthly Meeting, shares the following experience about singing in meeting for worship. The Gosneys were visiting a young meeting at which there was some disunity that they had no notion of. She noted that the meeting for worship felt extremely unsettled. Suddenly Barbara (a non-singer by her own reckoning) found herself singing the first verse of “Oh God Our Help in Ages Past.” After singing this verse, the meeting settled. Afterwards several Friends thanked her for her ministry. Barbara states that the words and melody were more eloquent and sensitive to the needs of the meeting than any other vocal ministry she could have shared. I, too, have often felt that sense of “settling” after being led to sing in meeting; that after the song, the silence feels deeper, stiller.

Barbara also shares her thoughts concerning earlier Friends’ chant-style vocal ministry – that this was

There is, in fact, such a thing as ministry that can be so finished and rounded off that members may hesitate to attach other messages to it. Perhaps if not “five or six” but even one or two main points can be touched upon – and the ministering Friend sit down, the very openness or the one-sidedness or the angularity of what was said may be the very thing that will draw out others to complete it in a way that the speaker could never himself have done. –Douglas Steere, *On Speaking Out of the Silence*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet #182, 1972

an unstated, subtle acknowledgment of the importance of the “rhythmic, tonal” elements present in true communication. She adds that current brain research confirms the importance of patterns in bringing about understanding, and shared the following quote: “This desire to form some kind of meaningful pattern out of learning seems innate.” (Eric Jensen, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*)

Barbara and Bob Gosney said that they both feel that true “singing as vocal ministry” as distinguished from “just singing” in meetings for worship speaks to individuals and the meeting in ways different from ordinary speaking or prayer. At times singing as vocal ministry brings a particular clarity; at other times it is the catalyst by which the meeting becomes more gathered.

Psalm 66:1-2 Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious!

As someone who is often called to sing in vocal ministry, I am always moved and delighted when I hear someone else being called in song. Of especial note was hearing a woman from Ohio Yearly Meeting who sings Biblical texts to tunes that are given to her in the meeting for worship. At times I have been asked to sing as part of a program. I have come to respond to these requests with the assurance that I will pray about it, after which, if I don’t feel a block against it, I will tell the person that I will be there and hope to be led at the time, that

I will pray to have the voice that is given to me in meeting. I pray I never presume upon the gift that God might choose to send through me. I pray that I will be obedient when God calls.

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Deborah Shaw is a recorded minister, and a member of Friendship Monthly Meeting in Greensboro, NC.

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