

DISCERNMENT
Living Under Divine
Guidance

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OF THE
NORTH CAROLINA YEARLY
MEETING
(CONSERVATIVE)

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Discernment: Coming Under the Guidance of the Holy Spirit

by Lloyd Lee Wilson

Each of us faces the question, “What to do?” multiple times each day. Sometimes the question is deeply ethical, sometimes it is a choice between two or more seemingly good possibilities within the scope of our daily lives, and sometimes it is whether or not to undertake some wholly unanticipated action. As people of faith we would like our choices to be the ones God would make on our behalf. The branches of Christianity have developed several distinct methodologies for assisting this attempt to discern God’s will. The Roman Catholic Church offers the accumulated wisdom and experience of the institutional church (the magisterium), while Protestants place primary emphasis on the guidance contained in Holy Scripture. Taking a different approach, Friends make choices under “the immediate and perceptible guidance of the Holy Spirit”¹. Quaker discernment is the name for the practices that facilitate our efforts to perceive this guidance accurately in all our choices of “What to do?”

We understand discernment as a particular way of knowing. We seek to know what to do by recognizing the divine guidance that God makes available to us without intermediaries. While Friends respect the rational and the intellectual, our understanding is that authentic discernment is more than and different from rational analysis or intellectual assent. It is also different from an emotional affinity with a newly perceived possibility or proposal. Authentic Quaker discernment is felt physically as much as emotionally or intellectually; it is a three-fold yes to the perceptible voice of divine guidance.

¹ Discipline of NCYMC, 1983.

Listening for and hearing God's voice of guidance is difficult in the contemporary world. There are a myriad of other voices, other sounds and noises that compete for our attention. Just as one might turn off the radio or move into a quieter room in order to hear a soft-spoken friend more clearly, Friends have learned that removing spiritual distractions is essential for hearing God's voice in discernment. Simplicity is the name we give to our effort to free ourselves to give full attention to God's still, small voice: the sum of our efforts to subtract from our lives everything that competes with God for our attention and clear hearing. When I realize that some part of my life is acting to distract me from hearing God's guidance or following that guidance wholeheartedly, it is time to simplify my life by subtracting that distraction. There is no predetermined checklist for a distraction-free life. Trying to remove that something others recognize as a distraction before I fully realize for myself that it is a distraction can in fact leave me more distracted than before.

Listening for and relying on God's direct guidance in our decisions can be a real strength, keeping one's spiritual life fresh and open to new developments – the putting forth of new growth. At the same time, it is possible to misunderstand what God is saying, or even mistake one's own wants and desires for God's voice. This can lead to incorrect decisions or in the extreme to Ranterism – the assertion that the individual is free to do whatever might be desired, since there is no external guide or authority to gainsay that desire. Poor discernment has been a persistent problem for Friends, as individuals and as a group, since the days of George Fox and James Nayler.

James Nayler's behavior at Bristol in 1655 and his subsequent trial and conviction for blasphemy raised difficulties that led Fox and others to develop an understanding of guidance and leadings that balanced individual and corporate discernment of the divine will. This new understanding was made manifest in the monthly meetings George Fox set up all over England in the

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wake of Nayler's downfall. The discernment of a group of Friends could supplement or correct an individual's discernment because by listening together those Friends could perceive God's guidance as clearly, or sometimes more clearly, than the individual alone.

Friends understand that the one God is concerned with all aspects of every person's life, and that God stands ready to converse with each of us about the divine will for us at this moment in time – to speak to our condition. As God is one and is ready to be in conversation with all who seek it, then other persons are also able to discern or feel the divine guidance being extended specifically to one individual. Sometimes the group will feel that a leading expressed by one individual is really guidance intended for the entire group, and sometimes the corporate discernment will be simply an affirmation that the individual has correctly understood his or her individual leading. This last also includes the possibility that the corporate discernment is that the individual has not correctly understood the leading, in some or all aspects.

Corporate discernment by the meeting or faith community is therefore both an affirmation and a constraint on the discernment of the individual. It is an affirmation because the unity of the community with the leading felt by the individual enables that individual to move forward with increased confidence. The community may discover that it has a role in the individual leading as well, to support it in material or spiritual ways, or even to participate in carrying it out.

Corporate discernment can be a needed constraint on individual leadings, acting as a corrective lens to clarify what the individual may have perceived imperfectly. The gathered body's discernment may suggest that the leading be carried out somewhat differently, or at a different time, or perhaps even by a different Friend. The discernment of a group of seasoned Friends might have discerned a way for James Nayler to enter Bristol

without provoking the charges of blasphemy that led to his punishment and the accusations that spread to all Friends.

Timing is probably the most nuanced corrective that corporate discernment offers. Often when the individual hears “No”, and even when the community actually says “No”, what both should be hearing and thinking is “Not now.” Years ago an elderly Friend in Baltimore Yearly Meeting confided to me that her leading to become a missionary in Africa had been delayed for fourteen years before way was finally clear – but that was exactly the right time for her to go.

Those occasions when the community or the meeting does not feel complete unity with a leading strongly felt by an individual are occasions of stress between the two. Particularly in contemporary North American culture, which places great emphasis on the autonomy of the individual, the meeting’s inability to unite fully with a leading shared by an individual can strain or harm the relationship between the two. Great care is needed by all involved in the corporate discernment process to ensure that personal feelings of worth (by the individual) or innocence (in the corporate body) do not interfere with the shared search for Truth.

Sometimes a divine leading is for one individual, and the community may affirm the leading without becoming deeply involved. Usually both the individual and the meeting as a body can easily accept this limited involvement. A Friend’s leading to travel in the ministry may be affirmed, while other members are not engaged directly other than to ensure that financial needs are met, the hay is harvested on time, and the goldfish are fed regularly.

At other times, a leading may invite or call for general commitment and involvement by the meeting community, and when this is not forthcoming the individual Friend may feel frustrated or even alienated from the meeting, rather than feeling released from the demands of the leading. The individual may even feel the leading more strongly than before.

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My own experience in situations like this is that the individual's task becomes serving as a continuing witness to the Truth embodied in the leading, being careful to "Give no offense in anything, that the ministry be not blamed."² The meeting community becomes the "mission field" for the individual's gospel labors, as the individual helps the community into greater Truth. At the same time, the shape and the message of the individual's ministry has time to develop and mature, preparing for a more effective witness when the hoped-for day arrives and Friends agree the leading is ready to be shared with the larger world. Patience is the watchword for situations like this, and a constant remembrance that everything works best on God's time, *kairos*, rather than our human time, *chronos*.

Friends are doers of the word, and our leadings are commonly leadings to act in a certain way. My sense is that we are led into prophetic actions – acts/deeds that advocate for the Kingdom of God which has already begun but is not yet complete. When we as Friends accept the authenticity of a leading and act to follow its guidance, we are stepping into the prophetic role. The rule for prophecy, according to Scripture, is that if the thing does not take place or prove true, it was not a true prophecy (Deut. 18:21-22). The ultimate, definitive test of a leading, this says, takes place after the leading is carried out.

How, then, can we undertake to determine whether a leading is authentically from God ahead of time? As mentioned above, one crucial indication is whether the individual and the community reach unity about the leading. There are at least three other guides: whether the leading is consistent with the witness of Scripture; whether looking backwards, we can see that "the road is straight" leading up to this moment, and whether this leading is consistent with the ways Friends have been led in the past.

² Discipline of NCYMC, "Advices to Meeting of Ministry and Oversight", 1983, p.36

Consistency with the witness of Scripture as a test or indication of the authenticity of a leading may come as a surprise to some. It is true that Friends have denied that Scripture is the ultimate authority for Christians, saying that it is words of God but not the Word of God. It is also true that Friends have always affirmed Scripture as the most excellent of secondary authorities and that no true leading would be contrary to the witness of Scripture.³ The standard to be applied is not comparison to any single passage in Scripture (as would be the case in proof texting), but to the overall witness. The Bible is a text in dialogue with itself, and there are many passages that appear to be in conflict with each other. Scripture as a whole, however, has a message, a meaning, a witness about the nature of God and God's relationship with us all. John Woolman's meeting was able to discern the unity of Scripture with his leading to travel among slaveholder Friends because his sense of the dignity and worth of every human being was consistent with the overall witness of Scripture, not because his leading agreed with I Timothy 6:1⁴ (which, of course, it did not). Friends apply this principle of consistency with Scripture because the one God who inspired the writers of the various books of Scriptures also inspires us with divine leadings, and God's nature is not self-contradictory (though our understandings of God may be). Therefore, if we search the Scriptures under the guidance of that Holy Spirit that gave them forth, we will indeed see how any authentic leading, if truly understood, is consistent with the witness of Scripture. It is not our task to figure out why God is leading us in a certain direction, or to focus on the results of faithfully following that leading to its conclusion. Our responsibility is to discharge our obligation, to do what we have been authentically led to do. As Scripture reminds us, a prophet's

³ Barclay, Robert, *An Apology for the True Christian Religion*, Proposition III.

⁴ "Let all who are under a yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled." (ESV)

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task is to say what God has given to be said. What the people do with those words is the people's responsibility, not the prophet's. It may appear that God has given us a particular leading for a certain purpose, but appearances may be misleading. Sometimes God's purpose behind a leading is quite different from what we presume. This was brought home to me in dramatic fashion some decades ago when I struggled to discern whether God was really leading me to leave home and friends in order to take a new job which had been offered to me. Was there some great future event that moving would make possible? Was I being removed from a place where harm would come to me? Why? The answer came to me in words spoken in my mind: "If you can't do this, how will you be able to do the next task I have for you?" This leading, although good in itself, was preparation for the next leading.

God's nature is self-consistent and self-revealing, not contradictory and intentionally hidden. God prepares us for the tasks which are later given to us as leadings, so that when the time comes we can look back and see that "the road is straight behind us", and seemingly unconnected events have in fact been a procession of preparations to bring us to the present moment, when a new leading is being offered. Being able to perceive God's hand in the events which have brought us to this present moment is one way we can test a new leading – is it consistent with the ways God has been guiding me in the past? Can I perceive a pattern in events? Do I recognize the familiar voice of my shepherd in this present leading?

Finally, Friends expect authentic leadings in the present day to be consistent with the witness and testimonies of Friends in the past. Consistency in this case does not mean exact repetition, but an extension and expansion of the ways Friends have acted under divine guidance in past generations. Can one imagine George Fox, Mary Dyer, or John Woolman carrying out this leading? If not, it would be well to spend as much time as needed to understand why not, before one moves forward.

One aspect of discernment that has changed over the past century or so has to do with the agreement or harmony between

one's own will (or ego) and an authentic leading. During large parts of the 19th century, Friends emphasized the importance of overcoming one's own spiritual willfulness in making oneself truly open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. This was in many cases extended to become a negative test of a leading: if this leading felt like something I might personally enjoy doing or might choose to do on my own, it was understood as probably not authentic. The preferences and desires of one's own will were perceived as obstacles to spiritual growth and faithfulness, to be avoided. One's own will was seen as so out of harmony with God's will that leadings from God would normally be at odds with the human will.

Friends of the late 20th and early 21st centuries assume a closer harmony between the divine will and the individual ego than did their predecessors, and therefore do not assume that an authentic leading must almost always work against our own desires and preferences. The underlying danger of mistaking my will for God's will is still present, but it is not considered as important a threat as it was in past generations.

Contemporary Friends can therefore say, "I feel this leading is authentic because I can see how I am personally prepared for it (by God's previous work in my life)". God has been equipping me for this leading by God's previous presence and actions in me – the road is straight behind me. Earlier generations would have been more likely to say, "I feel this leading is authentic because there is nothing in me or my personal history that would make me feel personally qualified to carry it out or want to try to carry it out."

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When these conditions have been met, a Friend or group of Friends can move forward in confidence that they have discerned God's will correctly for this time and place, and that the leading discerned will, if followed closely, advance the Kingdom of God. How it will do so may remain God's mystery, as we are called to faithful obedience, not apparent success, but it will in its way bring the world or some part of it closer to the Gospel Order which God has always intended.

Lloyd Lee Wilson is a member of Cedar Grove Preparative Meeting of Rich Square Monthly Meeting, Woodland, North Carolina

"A Move by Faith Alone:" A Story of Divine Guidance

by Carole Edgerton Treadway

In November 1921, Horace and Anna Edgerton sold their prosperous dairy farm in Columbiana County, Ohio, and, with their four younger children, moved to Randolph County, North Carolina. They left behind their oldest child (a student at Friends Boarding School in Barnesville, Ohio), their parents, brothers and sisters, their meeting, and their friends. This sacrificial move was made, they believed, in obedience to a call of the Holy Spirit. This paper is an examination of the spiritual process that resulted in the change. It is based on the account written by Anna V. Edgerton Hampton many years after the event.

The Holly Spring community to which the Edgertons relocated was in the central part of the state, an area that was mostly rural. The first white settlers, many of whom were Quakers, came in the second half of the eighteenth century and Quakers were still a strong presence in the region in 1921. Friends in the community where the Edgerton's settled belonged either to Holly Spring Friends Meeting or Holly Spring Friends Meeting (Conservative). It was to the latter that the Edgertons moved their membership early in 1922.

The Narrative

Anna Edgerton's narrative is an account of a leading and the call for which it laid the groundwork. The leading came in the fall of 1920. Anna, at that time was thirty-seven years old; Horace, thirty-nine. Their children ranged in age from fifteen years to newborn with the next youngest being only two years old. Horace and Anna had lived all of their lives in Ohio as part of the Wilburite Conservative Ohio Yearly Meeting. Both had been educated in Friends schools and were active in Upper Springfield Monthly Meeting (in Damascus,

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Ohio), and in Salem Quarterly Meeting. Horace's father, Walter Edgerton, was a minister who had married, as his second wife, Anna's widowed mother Beulah Cameron. Horace and Anna purchased the farm that had belonged to her parents. At this point in their lives, Anna states that she and her husband were "desirous of becoming useful members of the church millstone." She notes that Salem Quarterly Meeting had "several true gospel ministers [who] were alive and diligent in their labors and a great encouragement to the young who were desirous of walking according to Christ's directions." Thus in the early middle years of their lives, their family well started, and their financial circumstances secure, they began to look beyond their immediate surroundings and to have concerns not only for their own spiritual well-being, but also to find their place in the work of the church in the wider world of the Conservative branch of the Religious Society of Friends.

In the fall of the previous year, Horace and Anna Edgerton had thought of attending North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) with their parents, but circumstances prevented them. In the following summer of 1920, they gave little thought to going to NCYM because a baby had been born to them in June and, with a two-year old as well, they felt, "pretty closely tied to home." Everything changed one day in the Tenth Month [October] when, as Anna remembered, "Horace was gathering apples in the lovely fall weather and I was watching him with the baby in arms, it suddenly came over me with unusual sweetness and tenderness that we might attend N.C. Yearly Meeting this year." She went to the house to check the calendar to see when yearly meeting was to be held [the next month], and wondered why the plan had been presented to her so soon. The answer from within came promptly: "In order to have time to get ready." She told Horace what she had been given to see and they proceeded to make preparations to go if it still seemed right when the time came. She reports that "During this time it [the leading to go to NCYM] came before me at times with such sweetness that I thought I could understand what

ministers meant when they visited in the 'Love of the Gospel.' "The preparations were made despite the negative advice from friends who thought it was too risky to take such a young baby on a long trip and to leave the two-year-old at home. On the very day they were to leave, there was snow, the baby had a cold and was croupy, and "things in general seemed to go backward." But they tried to "keep an eye single to the first appearance of this trip." At the last minute a door latch broke and had to be mended. Somehow this snag seemed to break the hold of the doubts raised by all of the circumstances that would stand in their way. She reports that they "all had a good laugh ... [and] we all felt better." The long trip by train was "overshadowed by the sweetness that had been the accompaniment of the prospect all along ... a bright spot in life never to be forgotten."

Yearly meeting was held in the village of Woodland in northeastern North Carolina at Cedar Grove Meeting, a preparative meeting of Rich Square Monthly Meeting and synonymous with it. Of the yearly meeting sessions Anna says only that they were "impressive." What seems to have been of the most importance to her and to Horace were the warm and welcoming hospitality they received and the friends they made "who later were to mean much more to us." There were familiar faces as well-- North Carolina ministers who had journeyed in the ministry to Ohio previously--and ministers from Ohio such as Cyrus Cooper from their own quarterly meeting. Cyrus Cooper, Anna notes, was an intimate friend of Horace's father Walter Edgerton and a mentor ("Father in Israel") to them.

The Edgertons had planned to return home at the conclusion of yearly meeting, but near the end, Horace told Anna "in much tenderness after a favored meeting that he had felt... that [they] should stay" to attend Eastern Quarterly Meeting, scheduled to meet at Snow Hill Meeting fifty miles away immediately following yearly meeting. Cyrus Cooper, observing their obedience and harmony in following the way as it was opened to them, came to them and said, "'You are learning to be led as a horse by the halter. " At Snow Hill, as in Woodland, they

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felt welcomed and fed, not only by generous southern hospitality, but even more so by the companionship of friends gathered together in the Spirit. As they returned home, Anna notes that they "carried the sweet savor of peace home with us and found all in order at home."

In the months that followed, Horace and Anna treasured the memory of their time with North Carolina Friends and received "encouraging letters" from them. Cyrus Cooper traveled again to North Carolina, this time to attend Southern Quarterly Meeting in the central part of the state. When he returned, he invited Horace and Anna to come to his home to hear more about the visit. Anna notes here that after their return from the North Carolina trip, some of their friends and relatives asked them if they "would like to go to N.C. to live; and we told them we had no thought of such a move, but that it was an interesting place to visit."

On the evening of the next quarterly meeting, Anna was sitting by the stove holding her two youngest children who had fallen asleep. The older children and their father were doing chores in the barn. She recounts that:

I was thinking over the favors of the day, when I was overshadowed by a solemn feeling and almost overcome by a light which shined toward the neighborhood of Holly Spring in N.C. with a feeling that we should go to that place. It was entirely overcoming, and I began to look for excuses. The first was that we couldn't live in a spiritual way without the help of the concerned friends around us. And then thinking of the home we had bought which was my parents' before us and all that we had done to build up a home there, with the feeling, 'This is ours--we have worked for it, and it is a part of us,' and immediately the answer came: 'Lovest thou me more than these?' [John 21:15]--so clear and plain and penetrating. I answered, 'Yes, Lord, I do,' yet still clinging to the ties which bound us. Such was my exercise, with 'Here we have no continuing city' ringing in my ears. [Heb.13: 14] These two sentences continued in my ears for

some days. The children coming in and I wishing to be in the quiet, went to the barn and stood in the doorway, looking toward the house. In the moonlight, the home looked more lonely than ever. I was enabled to promise to follow wherever He would lead us, if He would make a way for us all through it. I thought I would keep it to myself but told Horace of it soon afterward, and he took it quietly, being willing to wait and see how it came out. From then on we were under a heavy load in regard to it, not feeling free to mention it to anyone for months afterward. But in this time many things happened to point toward this move and it was a time of breaking the ties which bound us there, so that when the time came and all had been finished there, we felt no regret, but rather looked forward toward the land where we felt called. It was a move by faith alone, not without some misgiving as to the outcome, but comforted by the almost continual reminder, 'They that trust in the Lord shall not be confounded.' [Ps 22:5]

In the weeks that followed, Horace and Anna told no one of their prospect but received many intimations that they had a true leading by the inspired comments of trusted ministers, friends, and mentors. One Friend, Harry Cooper, brother of Cyrus, "who had a discerning spirit[,] in the course of conversation in regard to insurance, looked up and said, 'If you should feel required to go to N. C. to live and followed the guidance and were finally settled in a home there, you would not need any insurance.' This ... hit on a tender spot and got no response." During Ohio Yearly Meeting that fall, Cyrus Cooper [reflecting on his visit to Southern Quarterly Meeting] ... looked keenly at me and said, "Some of us are going to have to move down there." A visiting minister from Philadelphia spoke in meeting of the "kin[e] who took the ark back to the children of Israel, leaving their calves and went lowing on their way." [1 Samuel 7:12] The minister said, following the account, what impressed her was the kin [e] being willing to leave all that was dear to them and go into a strange country." Anna felt that this

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ministry was intended for her and Horace, an "example of ministry not being intended for all." At another time, a minister from Iowa who was visiting in their meeting "preached a powerful sermon on Faith, saying the mountains of opposition would be removed, and a way made where there was no way."

During the summer, Horace had a sudden intuition that they would move in the Eleventh Month.[November]. Nevertheless, as late as in Tenth Month [October], they still saw no way to make the move. One of the most difficult stumbling blocks was their anticipation of the reaction of their parents. Walter and Beulah Edgerton depended on them, and Horace and Anna were sure they would not give their consent. Finally, an opportunity came to tell them -- and they supported Horace and Anna in their decision. However, Walter Edgerton advised them to rent their farm rather than sell it so that if things didn't work out, they could return to it. Anna replied to him that she "felt that it wouldn't be a complete sacrifice if we kept the farm, as it were, holding on with one hand and that we should give up completely if it was to be acceptable." Yet, she and Horace agreed to consider this option out of consideration for their parents' feelings. After an uncomfortable night, they consulted Horace's uncle Jesse Edgerton, a minister in their meeting. Anna reports that, "He gave us encouragement to follow the pointing of the Finger of Truth." His encouragement was supported by that of "worthy friends of our meeting who had been intimate friends of our family for many years."

Late in October, still having told very few people, Anna dreamed about "the sacrifices prepared by Elijah and the Prophets of Baal and of Elijah's acceptance, with the feeling that if we prepared the sacrifice, there would be a way for its acceptance." [I Kings 18: 16-40] Soon thereafter they made their concern known and the way began to seem more open. They sold their farm equipment and stock on Thanksgiving Day and then the farm within two weeks. The remaining belongings were packed up and shipped by train to North

Carolina while the family drove to Woodland in order to attend NCYM before they traveled on to Randolph County. They were escorted by Anderson Barker, a minister of Holly Spring Meeting, to his home, where they lived until they located a place of their own.

At this point, the account ends, mid-sentence--the rest of it has been lost--but enough remains to give a vivid picture of how one couple received a leading that would change their lives profoundly, how they tested it and wrestled with their own doubts and fears. Horace and Anna Edgerton remained in North Carolina. They helped to build up the meeting and establish a school in the community. It was an important center for Conservative Friends for about fifteen years and attracted a number of other families from half a dozen other states. There was a constant stream of visitors. A paper, *The Friendsville Current* was published from 1926 until 1955. Conservative Friends and their sympathizers in this country and several foreign countries subscribed. The meeting began to decline in the forties or perhaps even earlier and continued to do so until it was laid down in 1981.

Why North Carolina?

Why did the Edgertons feel so drawn to North Carolina? I will not try to explain their motivation solely in terms of social, cultural, or economic forces. However, spiritual leadings do not occur in a vacuum. There were social, cultural, and religious dimensions to the spiritual leadings and I think it is important to try to understand that context, in part because it adds to my appreciation of how God works in our lives.

Horace and Anna were part of the smallest and the narrowest of the branches of Quakerism. Both had grown up in its culture and were imbued with its assumptions about what constituted authentic Quaker faith and practice. The Conservative Ohio Yearly Meeting had come into being in 1854 as a result of the division between Gurneyite and Wilburite

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Orthodox Friends. Wilburite Friends continued the Quietist tradition of Friends that marked them in the eighteenth century. Their emphasis was on the authority of the Holy Spirit in worship and in daily life, as contrasted with the Gurneyite tendency to elevate biblical authority. Conservative Friends did not discount the Bible. Indeed, their religious framework was biblical through and through. But as Wilmer Cooper explains in *A Living Faith, Conservative Wilburites* "espoused dependence on the Holy Spirit informed by scripture." They detected in the other Orthodox branch of Friends a drift toward mainstream and evangelical Protestant beliefs and practices. Wilburites claimed that the essence of Quakerism as it had been understood and lived in the early days of the movement was being diluted and threatened with extinction. They viewed this trend as being "out of the life," lacking in reliance on the guidance of the Holy Spirit in all things, and offering a spurious way of salvation that avoided the lifelong and difficult inward transformation wrought in each soul by following the way of the cross--the way of sacrifice and purgation of self-will.

North Carolina Yearly Meeting was the last yearly meeting to divide over the Wilburite/Gurneyite issue. Damon Hickey, in his master's thesis "*Bearing the Cross of Plainness : Conservative Quaker Culture in North Carolina*," observes, however, that unlike the earlier divisions in the Northeast and in Ohio, where doctrinal matters were the stumbling block, the later divisions in the Midwest and in North Carolina were precipitated more by the adherence of the Conservatives to the traditional form of worship and the austere way of life that avoided change. The specific event that was the last straw for North Carolina Conservative Friends was the adoption of a new "uniform" Discipline by North Carolina Yearly Meeting in 1902. The Conservative Friends refused to follow it or to recognize the yearly meeting's authority to impose it on them. Like-minded Friends in other eastern North Carolina meetings and then in meetings in the central part of the state, principally in Randolph and Alamance Counties, also formed monthly meetings and

became part of the yearly meeting. The Conservative Holly Spring Meeting was established in 1910 but did not have its own meeting house until 1926.

Conservative Friends everywhere perceived themselves as a faithful remnant struggling to be a living witness to a way of life threatened by cultural accommodation. They strengthened and supported one another through their writings, both published and private, and through frequent visitations, especially by ministers. This may be the key to understanding why the Edgertons felt that they would be most useful in the "church millstone" in North Carolina. The correspondence and published writings of other Conservative Friends demonstrate a concern to strengthen and build up the young yearly meeting. Minutes of quarterly meetings in North Carolina show that nearly every quarterly meeting gathering had one or two ministers from Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Canada, or elsewhere in attendance. Their friendship with the Barker family led the Edgertons to Holly Spring Meeting, within the Southern Quarter. The meetings of Southern Quarter were the most radically conservative of the North Carolina Conservative meetings. It was there that the Edgertons could do the most to preserve the way of life and manner of worship that was precious to them.

Was It A True Leading?

Anna Edgerton's leading to go to North Carolina Yearly Meeting and the call to move to North Carolina were sudden and compelling intuitions. The manner in which she experienced them carried the weight of authority. Furthermore, they were accompanied, in the one case, by a feeling of "sweetness," and in the other by an overshadowing solemnity and a light that nearly overcame her, pointing to the neighborhood of Holly Spring. In each instance she was at rest, physically and mentally, perhaps in a near-meditative state, open and ready to receive what might be given to her even though she had not prepared for it consciously. Her readiness to receive also, no doubt, came from her lifelong

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practice of being attentive to the movements of the Spirit in the silence as well as from her desire to live according to God's will for her and her family. Hugh Barbour, cited by Paul Lacey, identifies four characteristics that mark a true leading: moral purity, patience, self-consistency, and bringing people into unity. Do Anna Edgerton's leadings possess these characteristics? I think they do, inasmuch as they apply to her particular case.

Moral purity involves "not fleeing the cross," obeying difficult or humiliating calls, or calls that are contrary to self-will. I believe that Anna and Horace Edgerton's responses to her leadings met this test, and I believe that for her and for many others, there was another reason for making these hard choices. It was their desire to be faithful to the vision that was given them from a Divine source. The leading to go to NCYM opened the way to something she desired to do; the call to move to North Carolina was, at first, utterly contrary to what she desired in her earthly life and it required her to wrestle with her attachment to her home, her family, and her friends. The spontaneous memory of Jesus's words to Simon Peter after the Resurrection referring to the other disciples immediately recalls her to her priorities. She echoes Simon Peter's response, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." [John: 21: 15] She displays this commitment again when Walter Edgerton urges Anna and Horace to rent their farm rather than sell it, just in case the move was not successful. She rejects that option as being less than wholehearted faithfulness to the call.

Lacey tells us that "Patience is a sound test, since 'self-will is impatient of tests.'" Suzanne Farnham agrees that the willingness to exercise patience is one of several conditions that make discernment of God's will more likely." Anna did not hesitate to share her vision with Horace who, as she remembers, "took it quietly, being willing to wait and see how it came out." Their willingness to wait not only to take action but to tell anyone what was working in them rewarded them with several signs that they had a genuine call. As Anna says, "... many things happened to point toward this move." She reports on four

separate incidents in which it appeared to them that others were speaking to their concern without having a conscious knowledge of the call. Not until very close to the time of their actual move did they tell anyone else or make any preparations for the move. When the way seemed pretty clear to them, they took action. They began to tell family and some friends of their intentions, and when they received encouragement from them, prepared to sell their goods and home, a process that unfolded very quickly once started.

The third test suggested by Barbour is "self-consistency of the spirit," meaning that "the Light will not contradict itself by leading different people to conflicting actions." Horace's immediate acceptance of the validity of Anna's vision testifies to this consistency. As they waited and trusted the Divine will to be made clearer, one after another ministers and elders had the same intuition for them or encouraged them to be faithful to follow the "pointing of the Finger of Truth." Anna does not report anyone giving them completely contrary advice. The principle source of opposition that she encountered appears to have been within herself, although surely Horace shared some of her doubts and attachments.

The fourth test, "bringing people into unity," does not appear to apply to this case since there does not appear to have been any disunity or discord occasioned by Horace and Anna's proposed move.

Another test implied in the discussion so far is consultation with members of one's faith community. The Edgertons did not request a "clearness committee" in their meeting as they might if they were making such a decision today, but the couple did seek the advice of Walter and Jesse Edgerton and of the "worthy friends of the meeting who had been intimate friends of our family for many years." The only time the meeting as a whole was consulted was when they requested a certificate to transfer their membership to their new meeting. The request came shortly after the move. If the committee appointed to prepare the certificate had found any

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evidence of unsettled financial affairs or other unresolved matters, it might have recommended that the certificate be withheld until matters were concluded satisfactorily. There does not seem to have been any objection to their move.

Anna does not report having consulted with Cyrus Cooper prior to the visit to North Carolina Yearly Meeting, but in his Memorial to Cyrus Cooper and Bertha A Cooper, Samuel Cooper writes that, "in the spring of 1920 ... Horace and Anna V. Edgerton came ... for counsel about a concern which they felt toward North Carolina...they found Cyrus reticent in giving advice. This was characteristic, as he usually refrained from influencing others about matters of personal duty, but consistently encouraged them to "follow the Guide." Jesse Edgerton's advice to them in the following year to "follow the pointing of the Finger of Truth," is similar. This advice indicates, perhaps, a reluctance to be held accountable for someone else's mistakes, or more likely, an inclination to distrust human reason, even their own, in matters of spiritual experience. Michael J. Sheeran in *Beyond Majority Rule: Voteless Decisions in the Religious Society of Friends*, observes this tendency and cites J. William Frost in contrasting Friends with the Puritans in the use and defense of "'all possible tools of man in learning about and communicating the contents of revelation' " He continues ... "' the Friends admitted only supernatural means in evaluating supernatural matters. '" [Sheeran sees this as a weakness in Friends' way of discernment. It focuses too exclusively on only one of the ways God communicates with us and guides us. Its demonstrates the Quietist tendency toward a dualistic view of the nature of humankind in which spirit is in opposition to mind and flesh.]

Scripture is an important factor in Anna's discernment process, and her use of it is distinctively characteristic of early Friends and of Conservative Friends. For her, scripture is her frame of reference; her language; her storehouse of symbol, metaphor, and story; her touchstone and guide. It is not, however, her rule book. She is imbued with a knowledge of

scripture, and when she is confronted with doubts and fears about her call, it is scripture that helps her recognize the nature of the conflict and to resolve it. The obscure story of the milk cows leaving behind their calves to return the Ark of the Covenant to the Children of Israel (referred to and commented on by the visiting minister) is to her a confirmation of her call and her sacrifice. Her dream of the story of the sacrifices of Elijah and of the Prophets of Baal encourages her that her own sacrifice will be, like Elijah's, acceptable to God. She bears out the Quaker understanding of the place of scripture that sees it as essential to our formation in faith, but secondary in authority.

Anna Edgerton's assessment of the dramatic change that she and her family made was that "It was a move by faith alone, not without some misgivings as to the outcome, but comforted by the almost continual reminder, 'They that trust in the Lord shall not be confounded.'" [Ps22:5] A year after the move, the baby died of diphtheria. There were many other hardships, along with some successes. Did Horace and Anna continue to feel that they had been "rightly led?" An answer is suggested in a letter that Anna wrote to "members of the Copeland Household" in Woodland on Fifth Month [May] 24, 1924. I dreamed last night that we were going back to Ohio & to buy our old farm back again, but in the morning thinking of it, it was my feeling-- 'whatever thou wilt, but it is not my choice,' with the feeling that whatever the future might bring of hardships and trials I would rather choose to cast my lot with those we have learned to love in N.C. Sometimes in considering the separations between our loved ones & us, I am [reminded] of the many favored seasons we have enjoyed with those we have learned to love here with the language 'who are my mother and my Brethren?' not that I would cheapen our ties to our own at all, but that heavenly Father has in this way made hard things easy and supplied all that was necessary for us even in this way.

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“Trust in the Slow Work of God”

by Janis Ansell

These words of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin recently came to me as an apt description of the long, slow process of discernment that led us to our present life. For my husband Charlie, who received the vision more years ago than he can recall, the trusting and patience were lived silently until the moment when God opened my ears to hear and join him in the joy of knowing to what we had been called.

When Truth burst forth within me during worship in Eighth Month, 2008, I was slow to receive it. I sat with the sensation that I could only name as freedom and questioned God as to its meaning. I wrestled with the messages telling me what I had to release in order to claim this freedom. Being already in a condition of surrender to walking a path of Light, I knew from what I heard inwardly that to continue on this path with God, I had to let go of “home” as I knew it. So began a journey away from the meeting in which my membership was recorded and away from the house that we had built and in which we raised our children.

One might think that coming to that clarity and willingness to release my attachment to those two important objects in my life would have made the search for where to be simple. It was not. For the next year, Charlie and I looked for land in the North Carolina county to which we thought we were to move and where we would live into the Call to “feed my sheep” that Charlie had heard some years earlier and faithfully carried in his heart as we were being prepared to do so.

Many possibilities came our way during those months. Moments of hope and expectation never developed into a promised land that we could either purchase or lease. We struggled and doubted. We met regularly with F/friends in prayer for discernment. We listened, individually and collectively, to hear if the Call was still alive. We, and others praying with us,

were clear the vision still had Life. We could feel it awaiting birthing but could not find where to be to allow it to manifest. Slowly, we came to accept that we needed to look elsewhere for the place we were to be and so we opened ourselves to being led by the spirit to another part of the state, or even another state.

Again we were asked to surrender our plans, release our expectations, let go of our desires, our new monthly meeting, our friends. Doing so led us to the next opening. We attended Representative Body in Fourth Month, 2010 at Snow Camp. Coincidentally, the same weekend the Piedmont Farm Tour was being held in the area and F/friends gave us an admission button. After worship on First Day, we toured three farms as we made our way east, driving toward home. Finally, we knew we were experiencing the place to which we were being led. We could feel how right this part of the state would be for us and we began actively searching for land in the area.

In Seventh Month, 2010, as we traveled to annual sessions of North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) at Guilford College, we left the interstate to drive around the Snow Camp area to look for land. One road we tried had a detour, requiring us to use roads that were new to us. So it was that we came to complete our drive to Greensboro, not on the interstate, but on the rural Greensboro-Chapel Hill Road. We set off, trusting that if we headed west and heeded the signs, we would reach Greensboro. It was on this road that we spotted “For Sale” signs and found our new home.

Now that you have read a brief summary of the story of how we came to be here, let me return to discernment, the theme of this issue, and offer some Truths that help me with clear discernment by removing distractions so I can focus on the Light guiding me.

I believe that God is and that God loves me and wants for me more love and happiness than I even know how to desire. I credit the experience of my participation in the School of the Spirit’s program “On Being a Spiritual Nurturer” with opening within me a willingness to accept this radical love, freely and

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unconditionally offered, and now freely accepted without angst and feelings of unworthiness. Surrendering to this Love is a necessary step in discernment for me.

I trust God. Learning to accept everything that comes to me as a gift from God has been a great help to discerning the directional signposts along the Way. When our first nine attempts to locate and purchase land failed, the gift rising from the experience was that God was finally getting our attention and using those experiences to point us in another direction, to show us that another place had been prepared for us. We needed simply to turn our eyes to the Light and to be open to settling where we were led. Once we both reached the inner knowing of this Truth, we were very gently and unexpectedly shown the land on which we now live, Wings of Dawn Farm.

By listening with our hearts, breathing Spirit's love, following our Guide one step at a time, we live fully an ordinary life each day, of farming, following, and feeding on many levels. We sense we stand now at both the end and at the beginning of a journey. The mystery of what this ministry is to be unfolds as it will, like the petals of a flower.

The time and the direction are gifts. Our part is simply to live faithfully and obediently into all that is asked of us by the One who loves us.

In all things, God's Grace is sufficient.

Janis and Charlie Ansell are members of West Grove Monthly Meeting, Alamance County, North Carolina.

Taking off My Tie: The Adventures in Fashion of a Quaker/Lawyer

By Scott Holmes

The day after I returned home from the 312th annual meeting of the North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends (Conservative), it was time to dress for work. I am an attorney, and so I reached for my tie. As I reached for it, I felt a pang in the pit of my stomach. I was uneasy putting on my tie. And this spiritual unease made me feel sort of nauseous. Years of being a Quaker, learning our historic testimonies on simplicity and equality, studying our tradition of plain speech and plain dress, experimenting with various forms of plain dress, and recently discussing plain dress with more seasoned Quaker friends at the yearly meeting ... were causing a sort of spiritual allergic reaction to wearing my tie to Court.

This feeling was inarticulable. I could not describe the feeling, or give a good explanation for it. I had no "belief" based on logic or understanding. I had not arrived at a strongly held conviction after long consideration. It was an inner movement of the Spirit, making me feel like I was going to get into trouble if I put on the tie. It was a sense of dread associated with doing something wrong. It had something to do with "simplicity" and "equality," and "privilege."

So... I put on the tie anyway. And went to work.

The next morning, the feeling got stronger. And then the next day, even stronger. And, I knew I was going to have to consider taking off the tie. I planned to request a "clearness committee" from my own monthly meeting (my Quaker religious community). A clearness committee is a group of Friends who convene to listen deeply and spiritually to someone who is trying to discern his or her path. These Friends do not offer advice or guidance, they just ask questions from a Spiritual place that help the person find his or her own truth. These committees also serve to test leadings of the Spirit to make sure they are authentic.

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They could make sure I am not acting from some "bone-headed" idea arising from my own stubborn and egotistical musings. I made a mental note to myself: "Email Joe Graedon, our clerk of meeting, and request a clearness committee to help me figure out what is going on."

After a few more days of dressing for work, the feeling was unbearable. I remembered an old Quaker anecdote about the famous founder of Pennsylvania, William Penn. He was of noble blood, and came to Quakerism as a young adult, which caused quite a stir among his family and the elite. He wore a sword as a part of the style of the day, expected of a young man of his position and rank. He came to his Quaker Friend and mentor, George Fox, and asked him if he should stop wearing the sword. Fox reportedly remarked, "Wear it as long as thou art able." Had I worn a tie, as long as I was able?"

So I took off the tie, and went to Court. I was a little nervous, but no one seemed to notice. And, the judge did not seem to care. She had known me for years. She knew that I care deeply about my clients, that I work hard, and that I am a conscientious person. She didn't bat an eye. I was relieved. Maybe this business of taking off the tie would go unnoticed. I became hopeful that I could get rid of my spiritual nausea without causing a stir. But I was wrong.

The very next day I appeared, without a tie, in Federal Court. I had not appeared before this judge very often, and he did not know me at all. It went something like this:

The Judge said, "Have you been in Federal Court before?"

"Yes," I responded.

"What is the rule of practice for dress in Federal Courts?" he asked.

"The men wear ties"

"Never, in my thirty-six years in Court, have I seen an attorney appear in Court without a tie. Have you appeared in Superior [State] Court without a tie?" he asked showing his increasing frustration.

"No."

"So you have less respect for Federal Court than you do State Court?"

"No, that's not it," I said, struggling for the opportunity to explain the recent change in my dress.

"Are you aware of the rule of Court for dress in Federal Courts?"

"Actually, I couldn't find a rule of Court for dress in Federal Court... Is there a rule?" I replied respectfully.

"I don't know," the judge said, a little less angrily.

"I am actually a Quaker under concern for simplicity and equality, trying to wear plain dress."

"Are you trying to say there is a religious, free exercise...? I mean if you were Jewish I would not make you take off the yarmulke..." he asked in a very skeptical tone.

"Yes, it is like that." I said, relieved that I was going to get an opportunity to explain that I meant no disrespect. "I have been a Quaker for a long time, and I recently attended the 312th annual yearly meeting of Quakers and came under a concern for simplicity and equality in my dress, or 'plain dress.'"

He didn't seem to know what to do with me at that point. He seemed very frustrated, offended, and very skeptical of my claim that the refusal to wear a tie was a religious leading.

So he said, "We will take our lunch recess, and you can decide what you want to wear. And if you want to make some kind of religious explanation, you can do it at that time."

So Court recessed, and I tried to figure out what to do.

The attorneys and United States Marshals in Court looked at me like I was crazy, like I had just jumped off a cliff for no good reason. My client looked at me in disbelief, afraid that my fashion statement was going to hurt his case before the judge. I had a tie in the car, and had to decide whether to put it on. I went back to my car, prayed for clearness, and was not clear to put on the tie.

When I returned after lunch, without a tie, the judge simply said, "You may appear as you are." And we went about

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the hearing as if nothing had happened. I took a deep breath of relief. During the whole encounter, I had felt very clear that I was faithfully following a Spiritual leading and nothing bad could happen.

This began a spiritual adventure that continues to this day. I have been challenged, enriched, ridiculed, demeaned, supported, and blessed by this Spiritual leading. This little work is an account of some of the adventures and lessons that I have learned along the way.

I appeared without incident for many months in State and Federal Courts. I tried cases before juries without a tie, including a highly publicized murder trial. I received a lot of thoughtful comment, criticism, and support from various friends, colleagues, co-workers, and clients. In general, I found that other attorneys were more intrigued or concerned about my lack of a tie than judges. There were times when I appeared for the first time in other counties, and sat "past the bar," and local attorneys would direct me to the public seating -- thinking I was not an attorney. Judges would call me to the bench and ask politely about my dress, and when I told them it was religious expression, they would smile and we would continue court with no problem. I found that by sending a letter or an email to the judge before I appeared was a helpful way to avoid surprise and awkwardness in Court. After several months, I lost track of which judges I had appeared before and which ones I had not. It was all going so well.

Then I appeared before a federal judge who had a real problem with my attire. I had appeared before him before, and thought I had appeared without a tie without an incident. I also greatly respected his fairness, his dedication to following the law, and his own personal story, which involved overcoming discrimination and other obstacles. I was not prepared for what happened, but I felt guided by the Spirit.

After calling my case, he called me to the bench. He told me he was offended by my attire. I tried to explain that I was a Quaker under concern for simplicity and equality. He wasn't

convinced and asked why I would wear an earring as an adornment and not a tie. I started to explain how the earring marked my solidarity with folks of different gender identifications...but it was too much. He said that if I were retained (privately hired), then I could dress however I wanted. But, since I was appointed by the Court, I should dress appropriately. I asked whether there was a dress code that I was not aware of ... specifically for male court-appointed lawyers.

He said he was going to have me removed from the Criminal Justice Act (CJA) panel, so that I could not receive Court appointed cases. This struck quite a blow to me because representing poor folks charged with serious crimes is a central part of my spiritual path. I looked at him in disbelief, and said, "just because of a piece of cloth around my neck?" He said he knew I was a good lawyer, that I was well prepared and cared about my clients, but that I had dressed in a way that offended the Court. He said that if a transgendered male lawyer came in wearing a dress, he would not be allowed to appear. I asked why not. He said, "because those people are not protected." He meant that there have been no Supreme Court cases recognizing gay and transgendered people as a historically persecuted class deserving of extra protections under the Constitution. Unlike race, gender, religion, and national origin, sexual orientation does not receive equal protection.

I asked, "Since when did you have to have Constitutional protection to appear as a lawyer? Once I have fulfilled all of the requirements to appear as an attorney, why should it matter what kind of Constitutional protections exist for me to be who I am?"

He was not persuaded. We finished my hearing, and I felt proud of the calm and spiritually centered way I had reacted. But I was suddenly very very sad to have offended someone I admire. I called a Quaker friend who listened to my story, and listened to me cry. And I felt a little better.

The very next day a very similar thing happened before another Federal Judge I admire. He expressed that he was

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offended. He was not persuaded by my religious explanation. And he said we would take it up later, out of Court. I was scheduled to appear before him a week later, and so I sent him an email detailing my religious conviction and asking for the opportunity to take it up before I appeared before him again. I did not want my own spiritual preference to interfere with the representation of my clients. I did not hear from him. I assumed that everything would be fine, and that he would have given me the opportunity to discuss it with him if there was a problem. I prepared witnesses, and people traveled to be available for the hearing. When I appeared he opened court and said that he was going to continue the case, indefinitely, until I could dress appropriately in Court. He said I could discuss it with him in chambers at the end of the session that day. I was devastated. My client looked at me crestfallen, my witnesses were dismayed. In the hall, I had to explain that I had wasted all of their time because the judge would not let me appear before him without a tie. This was the first time that my spiritual fashion statement had cost my client, and it was awful.

I walked into chambers of the judge at the end of the session. He was very amiable, thoughtful, and respectful. He said he had done some research and felt comfortable requiring a tie, even if I claimed religious beliefs supported my decision not to wear a tie. He talked about a Supreme Court case involving some employees who were fired for testing positive for marijuana and claimed marijuana use was a part of their religious practice. The Constitutional rule for the free exercise of religion is that religious exceptions are not required for "rules of general applicability." This means a rule that applies to everyone – like don't do drugs – does not have to make accommodations for the free exercise of religion.

I paused when it was my turn to respond. I had some silence, and waited for the Spirit to guide me. First, I said, let me say it gives me great pain to have offended you. I have admired you as a judge for as long as I can remember, and it gives me great pain to have caused you offense, personally. Second, I

would have never expected that you would have delayed my client's case because of some choice I made. I asked to address this issue before Court to avoid any negative consequence to my client, and now the witnesses who came out of town for this hearing have no idea when we might hear this matter. My client remains in custody because of my dress, and that pains me tremendously. Finally, with respect to my legal right to dress without a tie: This rule about ties is not a rule of general applicability. It only applies to men. And because gender is a protected class, you have to have substantial reason to discriminate against me on the basis of my gender. Your rule does not require women to wear ties, and there is no substantial reason to discriminate against me on that basis. I also have the right to follow deeply held religious convictions if they do not otherwise impair my ability to do my job. If I were Jewish and wearing a yarmulke, you would not have forced me to remove it. I have a First Amendment right to remove my tie for religious reasons. Finally, the tie obviously has meaning, symbolism. It means something different to you than it means to me, but it means something. Therefore, by forcing me to put one on, you are compelling "speech" and violating my First Amendment right to free speech. For all these reasons, this marijuana/employment case does not apply, and you have no authority to disqualify me from the practice of law because I will not wear a tie. But, let me say this, my duty to my client far outweighs my own personal religious expression. I respectfully ask you to re-schedule this hearing as soon as possible, and I will dress like a clown if that is what it takes to have my client's case heard.

The judge looked at his computer and picked a date in less than a week. I clarified with him that he was directly ordering me to wear a tie when I appeared in his Court, and he agreed that I could wear a tie "under protest." And we parted ways amiably. He suggested that I take the matter up with the Chief Judge in our district. If ordered by the Chief Judge, this judge would allow me to appear without a tie in his Court. This

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opened the possibility that I could use the legal system to enable my leading.

I took a tie with me to Court when the hearing day arrived. I was dreading putting it on, and felt that heavy weight again in my stomach. But, when I arrived, there was another attorney there who had been hired by the family. I was fired. I was overjoyed that I did not have to put on the tie, even as I was disappointed that I was fired because of the whole situation. The combination of joy and pain made me feel I was probably on the right spiritual track.

I began the process of "clearness" through my Quaker meeting and met with a group of friends who questioned my leading and found that it was authentic, sincere, and rooted in our traditions as Quakers. They were going to recommend to our monthly meeting to write a minute of support, bringing my actions under the care of my Quaker meeting. This was a tender, beautiful and thoughtful process of deep listening and testing.

Weeks went by, and I appeared regularly in State Court without a tie, with no incident. I was scheduled to appear before the Chief Judge in the district in four different cases. So, I wrote to him explaining my religious leading and requested that he allow me to appear without a tie.

He wrote back as follows (and sent copies to all the Judges in our district):

Mr. Holmes,

I have received your note and your letter with reference to your intent to appear in my Court on April 8, 2010, without wearing a tie for the reasons you have stated. Your proposed appearance in my Court without a tie will not meet the Court's expectation of professional attire. Please judge yourself accordingly. As far as policy for the Court is concerned, I will be more than happy to take this matter up at our next Bench Conference. If the Court deems it appropriate to invite you to express your views, then you will be notified in advance of the meeting.

And so I would have to choose what to do. I consulted the State Bar, which advised there is no ethical requirement that attorneys wear a tie. They also said that if my religious beliefs conflicted with my ability to effectively represent my clients, I should withdraw as counsel. I consulted with friends and family. My eight year old son, and soccer player, said that if you want to play the game, then you must wear the uniform. If the ref says tuck in your shirt, you tuck in your shirt. Wise words from my little guy. People on my legal team were supportive of whatever decision I chose, but mostly encouraged me to put on a tie. My father berated me for being silly and recklessly putting myself before my family and my client – jeopardizing my livelihood over something stupid. I consulted with Quaker friends who were supportive; however, the report of my clearness committee would not go to the full meeting for several weeks. So technically, my leading was not under the care of my meeting. I could not say I had the full support of my religious community.

As the hearing date approached, I had several options. I could ask the court to allow me to withdraw from the four cases. This would also require me to withdraw from all my cases in that District – and if they persisted in requiring a tie, I could never practice in that District again. I could go to court without a tie and risk being held in contempt of court. This could result in a fine, incarceration, and ethical sanctions – including disbarment. I could appeal to the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals and assert my Constitutional legal claims to require the Court to allow me to appear without a tie. Or, I could suck it up and put on a tie.

I struggled mightily with this choice and prayed for guidance. For practical reasons, appealing to the Fourth Circuit made no sense. But, I also learned, that I could not in good conscience force the judges to change their policy by appealing to the court system. The message of equality implicit in the removal of my tie did not allow me to appeal to the hierarchy of the law for relief; the ends would not justify the means. So I had to decide between quitting, contempt, or putting on a tie.

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A week away from the hearing date, I had to decide what to do. If I was going to withdraw as counsel, I needed to file a motion in a reasonable time to allow the Court to consider it and make arrangements for new counsel and a new hearing date. If I was going to risk contempt, I needed to make some serious plans for my family.

In the early hours of the morning, I learned some things about who I am. I am a Quaker, in a long line and tradition of Quakers who resisted inequality with simplicity. They went to jail for their refusal to take oaths, to remove their hats to nobility, to pay tithes to the established church, and to pray the way they were supposed to pray. From the 1600s, these Quakers fought for women's rights to preach, organize and own property. They fought against slavery and the injustice towards Native Americans. "Speak truth to power," as Quakers often say. I was well within my spiritual tradition to feel led to remove my tie in Court.

I am also a trial lawyer, with a particular calling to represent poor folks. I love to fight for outcasts, for people in big trouble. I love the research, investigation, strategy, performance, drama, tragedy, and the opportunity to be a guide and advocate for people in dire straits. I love to argue, to creatively engage in conflict. To win, to lose, to find ways both outside and inside of the system to improve it.

My Quaker identity and my trial lawyer identity constantly collide. Quakers believe in simplifying life, in removing all things that distract from a life in the Spirit. Habits, entertainment, materialism, greed, all distract us from service in the Spirit. "Live simply, that others may simply live." But there is little if nothing simple about being a trial lawyer; in fact, complication and confusion are a time honored strategy. Quakers believe in nonviolence, both physical and mental. "There is no way to peace, peace is the way." Quakers seek truth in a way that is peaceful, centered, collaborative. The manner of Friends seeking truth is founded in Unity, there is no truth or action unless we all agree. The legal system seeks truth in an

adversarial, competitive manner. As a trial lawyer, I participate in a system supported by institutional violence. And, I am called upon to engage in the psychological violence of cross-examination: to coerce people to admit things against their will in a way that can be demeaning to their Spirit. Quakers believe in integrity: in telling the truth, and making sure one's life is lived in accordance with one's values. "Let your life speak." As a criminal defense attorney, I am often called to try to suppress the truth in order to serve some higher Constitutional value, such as the right to privacy or right to be free from coercive interrogation.

Quakers also have a historic testimony on behalf of equality, for women, minorities, Native Americans, and others who are oppressed. Because there is the light of God in everyone, we are all deserving of equal love and respect – regardless of wealth, station, or birth. There is no one above, no one below: for Quakers, the world is flat. Although the Justice System prides itself on the idea that Lady Justice, with eyes covered, is blind to differences among people, the system is hierarchical and justice is not blind. Justice is often for sale, and those who can afford a lawyer and litigation can seek justice. The rest of us cannot. There is also a hierarchy within the court structure itself: judge, prosecutor, defense attorney, probation officer, bailiff, clerk, plaintiff, defendant, victim, witness, the public -- all have their place, power, and acceptable voice. To participate in court is to participate in a hierarchy where the judge is at the top. In fact, the person of the judge is often called "The Court" itself, interchangeably.

To be a Quaker-lawyer is to feel the continual pull of these tensions. For the most part, this has been a creative tension. Being a lawyer continually keeps my spiritual beliefs fresh and tests my Quaker commitments. Being a Quaker helps me be a different kind of lawyer, listening with compassion and thinking "outside of the box" in ways that are refreshing and humanizing. This is a powerful synergy, until these two parts of myself collide diametrically. I did not know, but I probably should have

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guessed that removing my tie would force me to choose somehow between the two identities.

As I approached the Hearing date, one case weighed heavily upon my mind. One of my clients was facing a high sentencing enhancement for allegedly pointing a gun at a police officer. My client was an illiterate, Mexican, with limited mental abilities. He was shot multiple times when police busted in a trailer to execute a search warrant. They said he raised the gun at them to shoot, while he said he was throwing the gun down. I had my client's testimony and some medical evidence, and I was going up against multiple officers. This is the kind of case God put me on earth to fight, and I was having a hard time considering abandoning my client. After a lot of prayer, and discernment, it became clear to me that my duty was to my client. I was not called to abandon my identity as a trial lawyer; on the contrary, I was called to serve my client. Also, contemplation of the possibility of leaving federal practice or losing my ability to practice altogether made me appreciate how much it means to me to have the privilege to be an attorney. Being a lawyer is a core part of my identity, something I felt was meant to be, and the prospect of giving it up made me realize how much I love serving as an attorney. Once this became clear, it was easy to put my tie on. I sent an email to the chief judges (and copied all the judges) in the District saying the following:

The Honorable Judge.

I appreciate your consideration of my note and letter regarding my wish to appear without a tie. I will respectfully and humbly appear in a tie in your Court, and in all the Courts of the Middle District, with the hope that this Court can eventually accommodate this small measure and call to my conscience. I would greatly appreciate it if you considered my request at your next Bench conference, and will follow the guidelines the Court sets. It is an honor and a privilege to represent indigent persons

accused of crimes in the Middle District, and I look forward to continuing this work in the Courts.

I apologize if the manner of my dress or my handling of this matter has caused offense or disruption to the administration of the Courts. I have meant no disrespect, and have been trying to follow a spiritual leading

I wore a black suit and tie, joyfully. And I won my Hearing. Later in the same day, I appeared before a well-respected judge who is retiring, and he made a special point to thank me for my service in the District. It felt like confirmation that I discerned the right course, and kept within my measure of the Spirit.

Shortly afterwards, my Quaker meeting considered whether to support my leading and bring it within the care of the meeting. I shared my leading with meeting for worship with attention to business in the Fourth Month, Eleventh day of 2010. After messages of concern, questions, and messages of support, the meeting crafted and adopted the following Minute of Support:

Our member and Friend, Curtis Scott Holmes, has been led by religious conviction to remove and stop wearing a tie as an attorney in court. We have tested this leading in the manner of Friends, and support Scott as he continues to discern the development of this sincere leading as consistent with Friends testimonies.

Now, I could describe my leading as a "strong religious preference." Because of this preference, I usually do not wear a tie in Court. However, I wear a tie in Courts which specifically require it, even as I continue to try to gently persuade these Courts to accommodate my religious preference.

Through these experiences, I learned some important lessons about power, privilege and oppression. Our world is profoundly unequal and unfair for many people. Groups with

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privilege enjoy all kinds of economic, social, and cultural benefits at the expense of people who are oppressed and exploited. There are many kinds of privilege and oppression. A person may enjoy privilege in one area, and experience oppression in another area. For example, I am privileged as a result of my race, gender, sexual orientation, economic class, and national citizenship: white, male, heterosexual, middle class, American. I am privileged along every axis of privilege there is. My wife shares most of these privileges, but as a woman she has suffered oppression and inequality as a result of her sex. This journey of removing my tie has given me a personal lesson in privilege and oppression. It has given me a small taste of what it feels like to be unfairly judged based on some silly external appearance. It has given me greater empathy for my brothers and sisters who have suffered a lifetime of being unfairly treated and judged because they are different.

The more I become aware of the operation of privilege and oppression, the more I am burdened and uneasy with my privilege. Privilege forms a seemingly inseparable barrier between me and my less fortunate brothers and sisters. Worse than that, they suffer at my expense. My comfort, freedom, and opportunity are built squarely on the backs of people locked in the cage of poverty and injustice. Furthermore, my economic privilege is driven by the engine of an economy that is poisoning our earth and racing us to the edge of self-destruction. Privilege has a self-centered way of becoming anxious over its own self-protection. I worry more over my 401(k) than the addict who can't get into the homeless shelter for the night. Even as I acquire, accumulate, and protect my privilege, I am traveling farther and farther away from the Spirit, from Jesus who leads us to the poor, the persecuted, and the outcast. God is with those who are connected with our poor and persecuted neighbors, even our enemies. This is why the Gospel repeatedly warns against wealth as the root of evil, because wealth distracts us from our God given purpose: to love and give and share with each other.

This act of removing my tie is an act to show my solidarity with the poor and oppressed. It is an act renouncing a certain amount of my privilege, in the context of a hierarchy supported by privilege and founded on oppression. Perhaps my indigent client is dressed in orange, or cannot afford a tie. Why should I own one? If the women attorneys of the bar struggle to find a "neutral" way to dress in court, why should I not share in their struggle? If transgendered or gay attorneys are forbidden to "appear as they are," why shouldn't I share in their struggle? I have learned that gender and class difference is a performance, and my unwillingness to play my part has caused great discomfort among some in authority.

The judges and attorneys who had the most difficulty with the removal of my tie all shared a military background. A close friend and member of my legal team also served in our military. He helped me understand why my refusal to wear a tie was so offensive. In the military, the chain of command is a matter of life and death. Obedience to orders is paramount. It is therefore important to be able to identify your place in the hierarchy immediately. You can tell by someone's uniform whether you must obey his or her command or give a command. The uniform is a symbol of belonging, and a marker of your role in the unit. And so, appearing out of uniform is dangerous and offensive. I love my brothers and sisters in the military. However, my Quaker Christian faith makes it impossible for me to participate in such a hierarchy for killing. When Jesus disarmed Peter, he disarmed us all. I live in that life and Spirit that has taken away all occasion for violence. We are all children of God, even my enemies. And so, I am devoted to an egalitarian world view that is contrary to the hierarchy of the military. My refusal to wear a tie is a symbol of my vision of equality, and my reluctance to participate in the hierarchy of Court.

It pains me that the judges I admire interpret this act as an offensive act of disobedience, when in fact it is an act demonstrating my aspiration for universal love, for judge, clerk, bailiff, opposing counsel, and my indigent client. During the

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course of my adventures, people outside the Court criticized the judges who were offended as "unreasonable" or "power tripping." But I am the first to come to their defense. These judges have devoted themselves to our legal system, as servants. They have a world view that interprets my leading to wear a tie as offensive, and they see it as their duty to preserve respect for the courts. They do not see that the courts could have greater respect if they could accommodate a Quaker without a tie. They are trying to do their duty as best they can. I love the ideas and aspirations of our legal system, as imperfect and unfair as it often is, and these folks are well meaning, intelligent servants of justice.

I wonder whether there is any power, privilege, or possession that I possess that is not at the expense of another—that is not gained as a result of exploiting another. Isn't all power and privilege built on the backs of the oppressed? Aren't my cheap T-shirts made by the small hands of exploited children? And so, what is the ethical response to being privileged? Is it renunciation of power or the careful use of power in service of the oppressed? Perhaps the answer is somewhere in between. There are some kinds of power and privilege which are so evil, so destructive, such a barrier to human connection, that they must be renounced. Slavery, war, domestic violence, and killing come to mind. And there are other kinds of privilege which must be carefully managed and used in service of the oppressed and in an effort to alter the unjust system of privilege.

But how do I tell the difference? There are some attributes of privilege I cannot change. I am a white, male, heterosexual. I have greatly benefitted from these privileges: they have protected me from poor education, poor health care, prejudiced violence, poor housing, and other terrible consequences of being an ethnic minority, a female, or being gay. In considering the issues raised by taking off my tie, I have learned there are ways I can use my privilege that create a safer space for the oppressed, that alter the system of oppression, and signal my commitment to be an ally/insider. I can participate in

my privilege in a way that alters the system that confers and perpetuates privilege. I have other privileges that are more like talents, gifts, abilities that have been given to me to be used in service of others. There are other privileges that I could renounce, manage or alter. These privileges arise from my class, wealth, my profession as an attorney, my American citizenship. These are privileges that are deeply mired in the exploitation and violence toward others, but they also convey power to help change.

So what do I renounce? What do I manage or balance? How do I avoid deluding myself that I am supposed to have a privilege, when the truth is I am just enjoying the benefits of privilege and am rationalizing my continued participation?

I also learned something of the cultural struggle within Court among competing visions of "respect." The Court represents a hierarchical, privileged, mainstream vision of respect for authority, for our system of justice. Respect is earned in this view of the world by working hard, pulling yourself up, taking care of your family, and succeeding in accumulating wealth and power. There are also folks who are drawn into the criminal justice system who show up in Court with the shirts out, pants down, and dressed in a "disrespectful" way. For these people, who are usually caught up in the culture of the street, "respect" means the ability to inspire fear in others. In a place of poverty, where there is little opportunity to advance – a place of drugs, violence, depression, and not a lot of hope – negative practices arise. To be "disrespected" in the street means that you did not show someone you feared them; and, it usually results in an act of violence. There is a whole economy of "respect" and "disrespect" happening in street culture that has given up on the Court's idea of respect because it does not look like a real possibility. If we can't have it, we don't want it. So my clients literally dress to show their butt in court. When I show up without a tie, I am participating in this cultural struggle for respect, and trying to communicate that I do not belong to either world view. I am trying to say to the judge, we are all equal, we

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are all children of God, and deserve love. I am trying to say to my client, I am not a willing participant in the system that has caused a lot of your suffering. I represent a different kind of respect that is critical of both the hierarchical institutionalized violence of the Court, and the anarchical violence of the Street.

In addition to some lessons about power and privilege, this business with my dress has taught me something about spiritual leading or calling. When I felt that discomfort with the tie, I had no idea I would be called to discuss simplicity and equality in the chambers of a federal judge, or in open Court, or in an email to men in Arizona or Pennsylvania who are struggling with similar issues of identity. I had not worked out my reasons, or thought it through. I heard the call, and I tried to obey as best as I could. A spiritual leading is an irresistible call to obedience that deepens our faith. For me, I did not work out my belief in advance, I just obeyed. It reminds me of Jesus's call to the disciples to drop their nets and follow him. They didn't have a long discussion. They did not seek a clearness committee. They just obeyed. They had no idea what they were getting into, what they would encounter... The path of the Spirit is rich, joyful, deep, unpredictable, tragic, sad, and misunderstood. It looks silly to some and profound to others. It tests the core of who we are, and brings us into communion with a long line of others who have been similarly tested. It is a wonderful gift that I would not ask of anyone. If "fear of the Lord" is the beginning of wisdom, then I've got a good start, because I fear the call. It shakes up what is comfortable and easy. It seems to disrupt security. But the truth for me is that I have found more security in trying to live faithful to this call and become more fully alive in the Spirit. The only true security is in our path to becoming who we are meant to be, and that is inextricably tied to the path of the Spirit.

Journal of North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative)

I have written this account as a part of this continued leading. This leading is from the Spirit, from my Quaker community, and so I am accountable to both. I write this to share with the 313th annual meeting of Conservative Friends in North Carolina, and for my Durham Friends Meeting. They can see my faithful attempt to follow the leadings of the Spirit, and help test, guide, and teach me as I continue my path. I am not an individual. I am a part of a faith community that has set me on this path, and I am obligated to them, as they are obligated to me, to articulate the path, challenge it, nurture it, and share the path together.

Scott Holmes is a member of Durham Friends Meeting, Durham, North Carolina.

A Conversation on Discernment

by Evelyn Jadin and Deborah Shaw

Evelyn Jadin and Deborah Shaw began a spiritual friendship when Evelyn was a student at Guilford College, a friendship that continues to this day. Evelyn is completing her studies at the Earlham School of Religion and is currently serving as an intern with First Friends Meeting in Greensboro. She attended Friendship and West Grove Meetings while she was a student at Guilford. Deborah Shaw is a recorded minister in Friendship Meeting and is Assistant Director of Friends Center at Guilford.

D. Describe your process of discernment

E. In thinking about this the past couple of days, it's not like I have a process where I'll spend five days praying, I'll spend three days talking with people about it; it's not like I have a set checklist. I think that in different situations I go through a different process, but there seem to be similar themes and practices. I think the main one for me is prayer, and listening, and holding whatever it is that I'm discerning about in my heart. Sometimes, there's different instances where discernment is needed -- for example, discerning to speak at North Carolina Yearly Meeting Conservative -- and then after I decided to speak, I was discerning what to speak about. Then there are times in a meeting where a quick decision is expected and then it feels like there are different levels. But with the bigger decisions, it feels like that is easier to focus on, because it feels like the steps, the process is more drawn out.

I spend a lot of time listening. In listening, it is listening to my body's response -- if I'm feeling tense anywhere, holding this question, if I'm feeling excited, if I'm feeling loose and light -- those are definite indicators. I listen to dreams and other

people, for discernment that comes through other people. Things like discerning what to speak about for a sermon, I find that if you're listening, the message tends to come to you, if you're open to it.

Like this past week discerning the sermon that I was going to preach on – I read this one passage three weeks ago, and in the continuing three weeks that exact same passage and that image just kept coming up, over and over and over again, by people that didn't even know that I was sitting with this question. So I take cues from that as well. Particularly paying attention to what hearing that does to my heart and body, if there's a resonance.

And I find, for me, that if I'm supposed to do something, like I sat in prayer for a long time about speaking at North Carolina Yearly Meeting Conservative, and I found that, after sitting for awhile with it, a question kept coming up, an idea kept coming up – so I find that if I'm supposed to do something there is a thought that arises that is specific for that particular context. So I definitely think that prayer, listening – in all different forms – and I try in bigger decisions to be involved with my faith community and with trusted elders and friends, be in communication with them.

As we were coming up with these questions, I had mentioned the role that doubt plays, and that is definitely a feeling that comes up for me in discernment as I consider “Am I making the right decision?” “Is this what God is calling me to do?” And then the doubt about my own gifts, “Am I the best person for this?” And in the midst of that, it feels like there are layers in side. I'm trying to think if there is an image-- the Melanie Weidner image of the mother holding the child – inside there is the answer, but outside there are these other layers, baggage almost, that you have to get through to really hear that answer. And that's why I think clearness committees are helpful because after clearness committees or after talking with a trusted friend or elder, it's like the answer has become so obvious, and part of that is getting past the layers and the answer that God.

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Working with clearness committees or trusted elders helps dispel the doubts and fears.

D. What are the blocks to discernment?

E. For me there are definitely several – doubt is one, particularly doubt in my own ability. Another way to talk about that would be insecurity, insecurity about my own gifts. Fear of outrunning the guide: the questions of “Am I really called to do this – or is it just me?” I’m very able to get sucked into that cycle. Sometimes it is good to reflect on that, to check in with how well I’m listening. But if I’m not in a centered or grounded place, it’s easy to get into a cycle that isn’t helpful. A big block to discernment is if I’m not grounded. If I haven’t been praying regularly, keeping up with my intentional spiritual practices, if I haven’t gotten enough sleep, if I’ve been really stressed and haven’t taken enough time to simply breathe and say a prayer to God, all those small things cumulatively have a big effect on my groundedness. If I’m not grounded, I’m not going to make the best decision or be open to listening, open to hearing. And when I’m not grounded it allows space for the insecurity and fears and doubts to have stronger voices. Another block that I notice, particularly when I engage with smaller decisions, is feeling rushed, like there isn’t enough time – which is never true. Fears and insecurities are small words that encapsulate a big realm.

D. You’ve mentioned the role of the faith community, trusted elders and friends, clearness committees as helps to discernment. Is there anything else you would like to add about the role of the faith community in your discernment?

E. I think (and I’m going to sound like Britain Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice) that is also important to be a part of corporate worship. I can’t just have a relationship between me and God and that be enough. I don’t know exactly how to articulate how

that affects discernment, maybe it's in the grounding, maybe it's in the being able to listen, but...

D. ...but you just know it does!

E. Right! And I think clearness committees are wonderful. They are extremely helpful tools. And it is always a blessing to be the focus person but also to be someone on the committee. They are awesome tools and should be used more. I think that one reason why they might not be used as often as they could be is that people may not value the discernment process or they may not feel that what they are discerning is actually important enough need a clearness committee, or to ask people for that sort of help. I think that's a shift and I want to see it shifted back, because even if it is a small thing...

D. ...nothing's small...

E. Nothing's small – and you're learning to listen to God!

D. Learning to listen to God and to others, exterior and interior listening. I find that too when I'm talking with people about praying, and about the relationship with God in that regard, people say well I don't want to pray if it's not a big issue and I say that if you're not praying about the small issues you're not going to be able to go there on the big issues. It is very much like 12 step wisdom in advising that you call your sponsor every day. You say everything is fine today, everything is fine today, so that when it isn't fine, it isn't so hard to make the call.

E. Yes, I think part of that is surrender, too. And I think that surrender is part of the discernment process.

D. Say more about that.

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E. I think I'm just now connecting it. It's about saying I don't necessarily have control over this, I'm listening for what God wants. And that's hard, too, because who knows if God just wants one thing for you, I'm sure whatever decision you make God will work with it. It gets complicated – but I do think surrender is involved.

D. “Not my will, but thine.” As Thomas Kelly and others have said.

E. Yes. And that Isaac Penington quote...

D. “...give over thine own willing...” and “...sink down to the seed...”

E. Yes.

E. I've been doing this independent study on art and spirituality and it has been really interesting to listen to artists talk about the process of letting go and the image of how, in order to create, you're engaged with the creative God, you're letting go to let that creative energy go through you.

D. That also in the surrender, the submission.

E. It is important to have support (from the faith community) if you're making a big decision to have people that have been with you in the discernment process, with you when things are challenging and even if they're wonderful they are with you to celebrate.

D. You had also touched on prayer, noting it was the main thing in your process and I wondered if there was anything else you wanted to say about that, perhaps more descriptive, about your prayer?

E. I pray in different ways. The way that feels consistent is, like if I have a question, when I say “holding it in my heart,” that actually feels like I’m putting that question inside me in God’s light. And maybe that’s why, this is actually helpful, it feels like getting rid of the outer stuff, and that it’s in there already because I imagine myself placing it in that Light to begin with – that’s interesting! I also, on top of that, will imagine, or image, lifting it up to God. Then there’s times where I will verbally talk to God about whatever it is. I find lighting candles in prayer helps me. This is a distinction I feel needs to be made. When I’m holding it in my heart it feels like I’m carrying that with me all the time, so that’s like a consistent ongoing prayer traveling with me. These others that I’m describing happen more intentionally. I have a particular prayer time that I do every morning and so these are potentially some things that I might do during that period. Some of the imaginings I might do during the day, while walking somewhere or doing the dishes.

D. So when you say that these are more intentional – you mean that they are happening in an intentional time – not that you are “un-intentional” in your other prayers?

E. Right – intentional meaning “set apart” times. Particularly if I’m lighting a candle, really focusing all of my attention on that, instead of just one part of me. Sometimes I might do art, that helps me.

D. What kind of art?

E. I do painting. Often if it’s a question, I’ll write the question and just see what happens. And sometimes it’s nothing – sometimes it’s just a centering exercise that helps me sit with the question better. Sometimes I see something in art that helps me see that there is something that I need to pay attention to. On several occasions, just praying with others, like if I’ve brought up a concern with people, just having a short little prayer at the

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end of a meeting, asking folk to hold this question up to God. I'm thinking that saying this it sounds so great, but there's times when I don't do it.

D. But, I wonder, I don't know, sometimes I feel like, and I don't know whether it's just something I tell myself to make myself feel better, that sometimes I feel like that all the work that I've done carries that when I don't find myself able to be as intentional. That it's all building on everything that's happened before and I think that's why sometimes it works astoundingly well when maybe I feel like I haven't put that much effort into it. The ground has been prepared in such a way that even if we didn't get the hoe out this last time, that it's still crumbly enough.

You talked about a passage that you read and how that the rightness of the passage was underscored by random affirmations along the way. Does reading scripture or devotional readings play a part in your prayer?

E. It is part of my prayer and part of my discernment. But not in the manner of my setting out to pray about a particular question with a particular passage of scripture. It feels like – when I'm praying in my intentional prayer time – that I'll use scripture, I'll use devotional readings, that something will speak to whatever it is I'm sitting with. And then that might be a passage that I sit with along with the question. I don't know the Bible well enough to be able to have particular passages rise up for me.

D. Has there been a time when you missed it? That you really missed a discernment process that you could describe?

E. I'm sure there are tons of them! The ones that come first to mind are from issues around business meeting, where I was on a committee and was presenting matters to the whole business meeting and someone else on the committee had done the work and showed it to me, saying "Is this ok?" and me just looking

over the material in a cursory fashion and saying “Yes, it’s ok,” and it really wasn’t -- and that became apparent when it came to the larger body. And those were all times when I was really rushed, I hadn’t been that centered and grounded, and I was focused more on “OK, we need to get this done!” than the Spirit behind it. Does that make sense?

D. Yes it does!

E. And this is something that has happened to me several times – I don’t know if this is so much about missing it – or if it is part of the process – but, in committee meetings, I’ll get the sense that something isn’t quite right and I can’t quite put my finger on it and name it and so I don’t say anything. And then later things sort of blow up, and whatever I felt was off I am able to articulate later, and that was part of whatever happened.

D. Have you thought of a strategy about what to do when that happens? The times when you can’t yet name it but that some space might help the process?

E. Yes, I know in my head what to do – it’s actually doing it in the moment – being faithful to that and listening to that. It’s something that I definitely need to work on.

D. All of us do.

E. Because for me – I’m thinking back to specific experiences when I get that feeling -- oftentimes it’s in meetings where it’s rushing along and there isn’t enough time being taken and feeling that as a body we aren’t listening. In these situations I have my own insecurities and I don’t know how to say “I don’t know what’s wrong, but I feel like something is wrong,” and I can imagine myself in another role sitting there rolling my eyes and saying “Who cares? Let’s get this done! Your fluffy-duffy feelings!” I do know that it would be useful to sit and be still and

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even ask the meeting for that. And that has been a question I have had, too, about my process: how can I be faithful to saying what needs to be said, even if I'm not yet clear about what really should be being said? And I feel like my faithfulness in that has increased – even if what I'm saying is, “I don't know how to say this, but this seems really important.”

D. What you say has resonance for me. I remember one time being in a weekend conference and part of the condition was that there was too much scheduled for the amount of time, so what we were about could not be done in a worshipful manner. Something got said in the closing session that seemed to me to be not right at all and I started crying right away but I wasn't ready to speak to it in a way that would be heard – and maybe I should have spoken – but what I could have said at that time wouldn't have come from a place of love, it would have been a rant, and maybe – like you were saying -- I wasn't grounded enough, but I knew that I would get another opportunity, and I think it's about trying to learn about the long-term discernment and the short-term discernment, and that was a short-term discernment based on a lifetime of practice. I also feel a deep resonance with your faithfulness in saying something even if it isn't perfect and trusting that God will help, and if it's a message that someone needs to hear, they will hear what they're supposed to hear, regardless of what I've said. Trusting that that will happen.

E. One thing that I've found to be true, especially in this last year and a half, which really feels wonderful to me is even when you've done work that hasn't been perfectly discerned, that you can acknowledge that, apologize, and re-do the work. If we've failed or messed up, it's not the end of the world. Apologies, and being able to accept apologies when discernment isn't used, is a very wonderful thing that communities can offer each other. I'm going to give a specific example to make this point. We were having a meeting with the pastors and the clerks of the meeting

about this upcoming vote on gay marriage, and if the meeting is going to do anything or have an inequality committee, or if we want to do any education around the issues. Somehow, in the course of conversation, people just started putting responsibility on me to do this, and in the moment I felt sort of internal discomfort but I wasn't quite sure how to say speak to it, 'cause no one said "Evelyn do you feel ok to do this?" it was just assumed that I was going to do this, and I didn't know if there was subtle discrimination going on with assumptions that I would be the "right" one to take this on when really I was the last person that should. Immediately after the meeting, I was upset about it, feeling that I was stuck working on this task, and then I realized that no, I can just say that I never agreed to anything, I can go back to these people and we can talk about it, and we can figure out a different way. And that feeling, which seems really simple, that if discernment doesn't go well one time, that's ok, we can revisit it and make another attempt.

D. Because, we talk about continuing revelation and if we're putting ourselves in positions where the process is being forced, and maybe some results come out of that forced-ness, then upon further seasoning, reflection and prayer, we become clear that some of the outcomes weren't well-ordered and that we need to re-visit the concern.

E. Exactly!

D. Again – the body-knowing – but not being able to articulate it because of the pressure of the timing...

E. And the energy of the people around you exerting pressure...

D. We've both experienced that and it is very difficult. You wish that you could say "Everyone needs to stop until I can figure out what it is I need to say right now – I know that something needs to be said, but I don't know what it is."

Discernment

D. These next two are combined – What are indicators when a faithful discernment process is or has been followed? How do you feel if you’ve been faithful in your discernment?

E. Well, initially, in thinking about this question I thought of the obvious answer: the fruits of the Spirit, but that doesn’t always feel like the case. For example, I felt very clear to go to the Earlham School of Religion (ESR), but my first year there was very, very hard, and it was awful, and I hated it. It was challenging and I didn’t feel a lot of love. I didn’t feel a lot of patience... It would have been really hard to identify any of the fruits of the Spirit in that experience. But even though it was awful and challenging, it felt like deep down I knew that I was where I was supposed to be at the time. Even though on lesser levels I would have questioned the rightness of my being there at the time, I’m miserable, I hate these classes...but this deep sense of knowing in my heart that this is where I’m supposed to be was clear and that, even if I were to “humor” one of the less deep levels, I know that I would have felt even worse. This was a huge learning experience for me in that, even when you follow what you feel is faithful discernment and are where you think God wants you to be, it doesn’t always mean that it is going to feel wonderful and fluffy and happy and good.

D. That feels very helpful. What I heard you saying is that at the very deepest core there is, if not comfort, at least a sense of surety?

E. Yes. And reflecting on it, even while I’m still in it, and being in “real life” now, I can see how being in seminary is going to be extremely useful and that, in the long run, maybe I can’t see it right now, but there will be the fruits of the Spirit, from out of that hard and difficult experience. For me there’s that deep inner knowing, but that doesn’t mean there aren’t other levels of doubt. For example, after giving the message for the Quaker

Renewal Program in the deepest level, I felt like “Yes, that was what God called me to say.” But then, when I wasn’t grounded, these other levels of doubt came in. You saw that when I was questioning – and you just weren’t having any of it – you were reassuring me of my faithfulness when I was doubting! But when you aren’t grounded, it is easier to get caught up with the voices of doubt!

D. I’ve noticed that when one makes a great statement on behalf of the Kingdom and Christ’s glory that is the very time that we are assailed by doubts and the adversary.

E. Yes!

D. And just knowing that is part of equipping and taking on the whole armor of God.

E. Right, and that makes sense to me and I really believe that. When I first started preaching and even now, immediately after I give a sermon, I hear “Oh, my goodness, what did I just say?!?” “That was awful!” and all these other voices coming in. That still happens. On some level, while those doubts aren’t always useful, they can be instructive. I think it would be bad if I started preaching and never questioned what I was saying – because that wouldn’t be discernment, it would start to be about me. I don’t know how it all works! Thinking about how I know I have been faithful – right now – I feel the decision to come to First Friends was really challenging – I agonized over that and had several clearness committees – and now it feels so right and that is the best way that I can describe it – it is feeling it in my body. Right now the internship at First Friends is going really great, and that feels really good. I also think that – because I went through that discernment process that, if it weren’t going wonderfully, having gone through that work helps me be more present where I am. Even while it is going wonderfully, it helps me be more present, and to not spend time thinking of other paths I could have taken.

Discernment

The ability to be present where you are is a sign. Feeling it – and also being present.

D. Are there other thoughts that you would like to share?

E. One thing I didn't talk about in the process, and it's really important to me, is being able to talk it out with someone. Putting out all the options, getting all that out of me, because I can tend to hold things in, so being able to just talk it out with someone is very useful.

D. Throwing out all the possibilities and imaging where they would take you?

E. Right! I find that helpful for me.

D. Anything else?

E. I'm sure there is, but I can't think of anything else right now.

D. This is good.

Resources on Discernment

_____, *Consultation of Friends on Ministry: Discerning, Nurturing, Recording and Releasing*, Richmond, IN: Earlham School of Religion and Quaker Hill Conference Center, 1981.

Barbour, Hugh, *Five Tests for Discerning a True Leading*, Philadelphia: Tract Association of Friends, n.d.
Based on pages 119-123 of *The Quakers in Puritan England*, Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1964.

Grellet, Stephen, *Preaching to Nobody: A True Story From the Life of Stephen Grellet*, Philadelphia: Friends Book Committee, 1919.

Discerning an authentic leading does not require that one be able to see what the outcome might be.

Junker, Lee, *Friends' Practice of Group Spiritual Discernment*, School of the Spirit, 2005, available at http://www.quakerinfo.com/junker_discernment.pdf [Accessed 6/10/2012]

Based on readings and interviews with several members of Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting.

Lacey, Paul A., *Leading and Being Led*, Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Pamphlet #264, available at <http://www.quaker.org/pamphlets/pdf/php264.pdf> [Accessed 6/10/2012].

“The first obligation of a person who has had a leading to the truth is to test it; the second is to testify to it.”

Discernment

Penington, Isaac, “Of Certainty, and Rightly Grounded Assurance in Matters of Religion”, in *The Light Within and Selected Writings of Isaac Penington*, Philadelphia: Tract Association of Friends, n.d.

Recognizing and following God's leadings requires both humility and patience.

Punshon, John, “Listening to Ministry”, in *Encounter with Silence*, Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1987.

Hearing vocal ministry clearly requires spiritual discernment.

Wilson, Lloyd Lee, “On Leadings and Discernment”, in *Essays on the Quaker Vision of Gospel Order*, Philadelphia: Friends General Conference, 2007.

Realizing God's love for us and desire to help us are prerequisites to discerning when and how we are being led by God's Spirit.

Woolman, John, *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, ed. Phillips P. Moulton, Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1989.

Woolman included many examples of his discernment of leadings throughout his journal. The first pages of Chapter IV (1757) about his leading to visit the southern states are a good place to start.

Compiled by LLW, 6/10/2012

NOTES

