Companions Along the Way

Spiritual Formation
Within the Quaker Tradition

A Resource for Adult Religious Education

Introductory Materials

Edited by Florence Ruth Kline with Marty Grundy

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
Companions Along the Way
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As Friends our way is to companion one another humbly, joyfully, and gratefully. We lived fully into this at the Companions Along the Way conference; seasoned Friends felt privileged to be given the opportunity to pass on what they knew and those who received their teachings did so in the same spirit. There was the sense that we are making our spiritual journeys together and that ultimately we will all arrive at the same place. This kind of companioning happens when we, in turn, are companioned by God. The more that we are present to this Divine Companion, the more we are present to one another. It is in this spirit that this book is dedicated.

Dedicated to those Friends who teach Quakerism by the conduct of their lives
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Throughout the editing of this book, we experienced a deep sense of gratitude for being given the opportunity to work with the plenary presenters and workshop leaders from the Companions conference, Friends who are deeply committed to the adult religious education of Friends. We want to thank them for giving so graciously of their time and energy in adapting their conference presentations to the printed page. We also want to thank and mention by name the other contributors; without their input this book would not have come to fruition.

This publication would not have been possible without the Companions conference. Shirley Dodson, who was the staff person for Philadelphia Yearly Meeting’s Adult Religious Education Program, discerned the need for the conference and then remained faithful to her leading by organizing it. Her organizing efforts were shared and supported by the Planning Committee; the Adult Religious Education Concerns Group of PYM; and the four sponsoring organizations: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Friends General Conference, Pendle Hill, and School of the Spirit. Grants were received from the D’Olier Foundation, Kirk Plumsock Trust, and the Sara Bowers Fund.

Alison Anderson, a member of the PYM Adult Religious Education Concerns Group, was the copy editor. She functioned as a liaison between the editors and the layout artist, and also assembled the Combined Bibliography. She did an incredible amount of work, always in the spirit of generosity, even during those times when this editing became, in effect, a second job for her. The professional quality of this publication is due in large part to Alison.

Sara Palmer, a member of Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, brought a much-needed clarity to the organization of the workshops in the table of contents; her editorial suggestions for the individual pieces themselves were also incorporated. Sara has a true gift for editing. Steve Gulick, interim staff for PYM’s Adult Religious Education Program, met with unceasing enthusiasm the various challenges that were sent his way, challenges such as organizing an up-to-date list of Quaker publishers and periodicals (see Resource section).

The PYM Publications Services Group and its clerk, Odie LeFever, took this publication under their wing. They emphasized quality over an earlier publishing date, directed us to apply to the PYM Publications Granting Group, and gave permission to reprint the first eleven pages of The Journal of George Fox.

Marilyn Trueblood, PYM comptroller, supported our intention to keep the selling price low, the motive being wide distribution; she also suggested that we lower the price further – which we did. We applied for grants on this basis, and were helped in this process by Carol Walz, PYM staff for grant requests. We received grants from the PYM Publications Granting Group, the Shoemaker Fund, and Friends General Conference. These grants, plus the resolve of the Worship and Care Standing Committee to help underwrite the publishing costs, made it possible to keep the selling price low.
Bruce McNeel, the layout artist, had an especially challenging job, because the diverse materials in this publication required designing a wide range of formats. Bruce met this challenge with much creativity. The layout not only supports the integrity of the authors, but it is visually appealing as well.

Lorna Kent, a member of Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, brought her background as Friend and artist to the cover illustration. It lovingly expresses the spirit and intention of this book.

Our work was made much easier knowing that at any time we could simply contact librarians Rita Varley, PYM Library, and Mary Ellen Chijioke, Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College, for needed information for the Resource section. They actually enjoyed responding to our calls for information.

Alyse Reid Smith, a member of the Worship and Care Standing Committee; Kingdon Swayne, a member of Newtown Monthly Meeting; and Alison Anderson, the copy editor, did the final proofreading. Proofreading is a job that requires keeping in mind a thousand and one things at the same time and only those who have attempted proofreading could begin to understand the courage it takes to volunteer for this task!

Again, our deep appreciation and thanks. It has been a joy and blessing to work with all of you.

Florence Ruth Kline, clerk
PYM Adult Religious Education Concerns Group

and

Marty Grundy

Sixth Month, 2000
There is more to Quakerism than the absence of outward rituals, creeds, and priests. It is a whole way of life predicated on listening to Divine Guidance on how to live so that we become ambassadors, as it were, for God’s way of Love. In former days, when most Friends grew up in tight-knit Quaker families and communities, Friends ways were “caught” rather than taught. But even then, it was discovered that if conscious efforts were not made to teach the foundations of our faith in the Bible and our tradition, Friends tended not to know why Friends practices developed as they did, or how our faith informs our actions.

Because we have insisted on no creed or ritual to define us, and no priest to depend upon to teach us, we are each responsible for learning and teaching Quaker faith and practice. We have not abolished the priesthood, but the laity. Friends glory in the possibility of direct communion with the Divine without human intermediary, and we are all invited to develop our own relationship with God. “There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition,” is the legacy left to us by George Fox and the early Friends. Each of us is responsible for practicing the disciplines of study, reading, meditation, and prayer that develop our capacity to listen more intentionally to the Holy Spirit. We are each responsible for our own “inner work” – allowing the Light to show us those parts of ourselves that are not in conformity with its Pure Love. Each of us, ultimately, must give up our self-will to follow God’s will.

But if each of us only practiced our own spiritual disciplines in solitude, we would not be Friends. Friends are called to be part of a faith community that listens, worships, and learns together. Our meetings are groups in which each member is responsible for ministering to the others. The direct relationship with the Divine is wonderful. But it happens through grace, and is not under our control. Ministry is that human activity which makes more real the presence of God for another. Ministry is Divine Love mediated through words or actions. It is through learning how to live with and love each other – how to listen to the Inward Teacher instructing us in the art of Love – that we mature spiritually. Our relationship to one another is our ministry. “. . . we do not do ministry. We are ministers.” As Friends, we intend to live in such a way that our lives speak. Ministry, then, is “not primarily a task; it is a way of being in the world. It is living in relationship with God and being a witness to God. Ministry is being able to listen to the Word of God and thereby having a word of life to share with others.” (Sandra Cronk, PYM Faith and Practice, 1997, p. 106).

Quaker religious education is a subtle thing. The real teacher is the Inward Christ, the Spirit, God. But we humans can help one another through study and reflection. It is very helpful not only to be familiar with the Bible, but to understand Friends’ original approach to Bible study. It is helpful to be familiar with the Christian classics, and to be able to pick up Quakerly threads running through them. It is very helpful to be familiar with Quaker writers, especially journals and accounts of personal experience with God and the Society of Friends. It is helpful, then, once we thoroughly know our own, to become acquainted with other religious traditions.
A study of Quakerism provides a framework for organizing and understanding our own experience of the Divine. When we engage in this study together, we develop a common language and understanding so that we are able to communicate more fully with each other. Group study provides both content and hands-on experience of sharing things we feel deeply about, and listening to one another with loving hearts.

Ideally, there is no sense of hierarchy in this faith community, although we are drawn to those who have perhaps responded more fully to God's open invitation. Our relationship to one another is that of companions, rather than priest to parishioner. We are companions to one another as we help each other grow into a deepening understanding of the faith of Friends, and an increasing faithfulness to the practice to which God calls us. As London Yearly Meeting stated in 1986, "The purpose of all our ministry is to lead us and other people into closer communion with God and to enable us to carry out those tasks which the Spirit lays upon us."

Although many paths may lead to God, and many, many faith traditions have value, not all of them are Quaker. By joining the Religious Society of Friends we have agreed that the Quaker path is the one we choose to follow. Adult religious education helps us to understand that Quakerism is not a series of doctrinal statements to be memorized, nor rituals in which to participate, but rather it is a specific orientation, a lifestyle based on inward listening to God as part of a group of Friends who are similarly engaged — a listening that is done individually and corporately. Quakerism is rooted in the biblical and Christian tradition as experienced immediately and inwardly. Friends who have gone before us have left guideposts through their words and actions. We need to know their stories, how they listened to God, when they were faithful and when they slipped, how God helped them get back on the path. If we consciously think of the whole fabric making up our Religious Society, we are less likely to assimilate habits of behavior and thought that are alien to our tradition.

Today, when the majority of Friends are convinced, we participate in a community of companions who learn from one another just like Friends have always done. But are we learning Quakerism these days? In our desire to be tolerant we have become hesitant to "impose" our tradition and beliefs on new Friends. Consequently they assume that their perceptions of the Society of Friends, which often include a gentle anarchism and a stubborn individualism, are correct. They become, in turn, models for newer Friends, and Friends faith and practice become further diluted or distorted. Perhaps now is the time to ask ourselves if Quakerism is worth perpetuating. If the answer is "yes," then we need consciously and purposefully to develop adult religious education programs that focus on transmitting our Quakerism — without apology. As religious educators our work is to provide opportunities for this education to happen in ways that engage the heart, mind, and soul of "teacher" and "student," walking together as companions on the spiritual way.

Marty Grundy
During the initial stages of planning for the Companions Along the Way conference, it became clear that the conference was not meant to be an end in itself, but one of many steps in undergirding the Society of Friends through a strong adult religious education program. We were soon led to know a second step: a publication of the presentations from Companions. While this book takes a different form than the conference, its purpose is the same—to support Friends involved in adult religious education by:

- providing practical workshops
- acquainting them with Friends who are especially knowledgeable about Quaker spirituality
- raising questions
- providing a sense of community and ongoing network
- inspiring and encouraging
- providing an experience which exemplifies Friends spirituality

Therefore, our hope is that this book will serve as both a record of the spirit of the conference and an ongoing resource.

Most of the editorial decisions were based on the assumption that many of the users of this publication will be new to Quakerism and/or teaching and organizing adult religious education. Therefore, a special effort was made to ensure that the workshops are clearly organized, that there is a good resource section, and that the plenary and workshop presenters are available for questions via the contact information included in their biographies. At the same time, the experienced and seasoned Friend/teacher will find much enrichment. The authors bring new insights and spiritual and intellectual depth and do not hesitate to take Friends to those places where difficult and growth-provoking questions are asked.

In addition to supporting Friends who identify themselves as adult religious educators, this publication could also be very useful in educating Friends for committee work, especially those committees which provide pastoral and spiritual care—such as Ministry and Counsel, Overseers, and Worship and Ministry.

Organization

There are three sections: the Plenaries, the Workshops, and the Resources.

Plenaries

At the Companions conference the plenary speakers invited us in. They set the tone. They inspired and gathered us as they responded to queries such as, “Why is adult religious education especially important for Friends?” “Is it important that there be a Quaker spirituality?” “How can adult religious education and spiritual formation be rooted in Quaker spirituality and tradition, while drawing on resources from other traditions?”

The plenaries set the tone in this publication as well, and our suggestion is that they be considered before moving on to the workshops. An adult religious education committee might want to use the plenary presentations and queries as a basis for a retreat to plan or evaluate their meeting’s program. The plenaries could also be considered by the entire meeting.

Workshops

While all of the workshops support spiritual formation, they do so from different perspectives. In this book they are divided into five sections: Teaching and Organizing Adult Religious Education Programs in the Monthly Meeting; Spiritual Formation; Quaker History, Faith and Practice; Bible; and A Final
Piece for Reflection. As you will discover, even these divisions are not “neat,” because more than one workshop fits under several headings.

I. Teaching and Organizing Adult Religious Education Programs in the Monthly Meeting

These workshops have been placed first because they are basic. They are extremely supportive; with much sensitivity they demystify the components of teaching and organizing adult religious education. *The Yin and Yang of Teaching Adult Religious Education* by Walter Hjelt Sullivan focuses on teaching while *Organizing an Adult Religious Education Program in Your Meeting* by Shirley Dodson focuses on the organization. *Adult Religious Education in the Small Meeting* by Allen Oliver and *Teaching Quakerism* by Paul Anderson address both teaching and organization.

II. Spiritual Formation

These workshops address the nurturing of our spirituality in a wide variety of solitary and corporate settings. Individual spiritual practices are addressed through *Centering Prayer* by Chris Ravndal and *What is Spiritual Direction? Can Friends Benefit from It?* by Renee Crauder. Spiritual formation within the monthly meeting is addressed through an ongoing support group, *The Spiritual Companions Group* by Nancy Bieber, and two workshops, *What Do I Bring to the Religious Society of Friends?* by Deborah Saunders and *Creativity and Spirit* by Sally Palmer. Spiritual formation on a yearly meeting level is addressed through *The North Carolina Quaker Renewal Program* by Max L. Carter.

Two of the workshops offer multiple settings. *The Inner Teacher* by Marcelle Martin and Jorge Araúz is a weekend retreat which can be used by a monthly meeting or yearly meeting. *Encouraging Spiritual Growth, Gifts, and Ministries in Baltimore Yearly Meeting’s Spiritual Formation Program* by Virginia Schurman and Thomas Jeavons provides opportunities for spiritual work on the individual, monthly meeting, and yearly meeting levels.

III. Quaker History, Faith and Practice

In the process of studying Quaker history, our Quaker ancestors can become our spiritual companions; we learn about their humanity while they inspire and challenge us. Two innovative approaches to studying Quaker history are included: *Using Quaker History to Deepen Quaker Spiritual Life* (with sample lessons on George Fox and James Nayler) by Marty Grundy and *Using Quaker Stories in an Intergenerational Quaker History Study* by Cathy Gaskill.

Our Quaker practices have sprung from our faith. “To seek to know one another in that which is eternal,” is explored in Patricia Loring’s *Worship Sharing*. The expectation that we will be divinely led if we are open has resulted in specific Quaker practices of discernment. *Seeking Clarity Both Personally and Corporately* by Jan Hoffman addresses a variety of contexts while *Spirit-Led Decision Making* by Margaret Benefiel focuses on the meeting for business.

IV. Bible

These workshops are presented by Friends who love the Bible and offer creative and tender ways to approach it. Paul Anderson’s *Using the Bible for Spiritual Formation* approaches Bible study by reminding us that: “The same spirit who inspired the writings of the Bible also speaks to us as we read them.” Joanne and Larry Spears’ *Friendly Bible Study* uses a method similar to worship sharing; in this context, a primary focus is using our personal experiences to bring meaning to Biblical passages. *Telling Bible Stories* by Renée-Noelle Felice is a playful approach that makes full use of the imagination.
V. A Final Piece for Reflection

The plenaries and Kathryn Damiano's piece, *Learning as a Way of Being*, are very similar in intention. They affirm the unique place of Quaker spirituality and encourage us to immerse ourselves in our past as preparation for understanding how God is calling us now. A basic difference, however, is that Damiano's workshop is very intensive and directed more toward the experienced and seasoned teacher/Friend. This is not an easy workshop; it is intellectually and spiritually challenging.

Resources

*Sponsors of the Companions Conference* includes a description of the work of each organization as well as contact information.

The *Combined Bibliography* includes all the references mentioned in the plenaries and workshops.

The *Quaker Publishers and Periodicals* lists are up-to-date.

No printed material serves its purpose if it remains on the shelf. We invite you to invite others in your Meeting to join with you and embark on the great adventure of learning and living ever more deeply into the Quaker Experience of a life centered on God.

Florence Ruth Kline

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note: for updates on the contact information in the biographies please call PYM Adult Religious Education staff at 215-241-7182