

# **Anatomy and Physiology of Spirit**

**Janice Domanik**

**The 2009 Jonathan Plummer Lecture**

**Presented at Illinois Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends**

**McNabb, Illinois**

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## **Introduction of Janice Domanik, by Monica Tetzlaff and Brad Laird**

Monica:

Many Friends in this Meeting House today have been touched directly by Janice Domanik's love. All of us have been nurtured indirectly by Janice's service to Friends through Friends General Conference and Illinois Yearly Meeting. This introduction was written by Brad and me with help from Bridget and Chip Rorem, so we will speak of some of the ways Janice has touched us. Our stories give one small indication of Janice's faithful service to Friends.

Janice grew up as a Quaker and she can tell funny stories about this experience and her early love of biology, chasing butterflies and observing spider webs. Janice has not lost her sense of humor or her delight in the sacred in humans and nature. She became a biology professor and taught Anatomy and Physiology for 37 years, and it is partly from this experience that she draws the title of her Plummer Lecture.

I first met Janice when she was washing dishes at Women's Weekend in the basement of this Meeting House. Another Friend had told me that Janice was Clerk of Friends General Conference Central Committee, and I was amazed that she was gracefully and happily washing dishes all weekend. I now know that this is the way of Friends at Illinois Yearly Meeting, and I learned this way of living out the testimonies of equality, simplicity, and community from Janice.

I next learned how to be a clerk. Janice wasn't my only example, but I learned so much just watching her clerk Lake Forest Meeting for Business and hearing her ask for a minute of thanks after each committee clerk's report. This spring I benefited from Janice's leadership and service on the FGC Committee for Ministry on Racism when Tab, Genevieve, and I attended the Weaving Sacred Wholeness Retreat on Diversity among Friends at Penn Center on St. Helena Island.

Brad:

Janice has served on many Illinois Yearly Meeting Committees over the years. Her way of moving from intuitive and prayerful consideration of a matter, to a plan, assignments and deadlines, to how to understandably present information, and back to prayerfulness has been a significant part of the context in which I have learned to be a Quaker.

Janice often gets a gleam in her eyes. Sometimes it is unclear to this observer why. She might or might not explain. But when talking about a grandchild, it is nearly always there.

We ask you now to center down and prepare to attend to this year's Plummer Lecture, to listen to that of God in Janice. She will speak out of the silence, and, after her talk, we will directly transition to worship. Those who need a break or need to be excused may slip out quietly.

The title of her lecture is: The Anatomy and Physiology of Spirit.

### **The Anatomy and Physiology of Spirit**

As I begin I should share I have always known that I was loved by family, my friends, my meeting and I experienced Divine love even when I was mischievous.

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In First Corinthians Paul preaches about speaking in tongues. I have the experience of being in a meeting for worship when an individual rose and spoke in a foreign language and the power of the message was felt even though the words had no meaning for me. This morning I will use my words to share with you about my spiritual journey. For some the words I use will not be the ones that they would use. For others it will be obvious that while we use the same words, my meaning is different. As I share with you I ask you to listen beyond the words to where the

meaning has been in my life. It is there that we can share humbly of our common experience of the Divine.

I will be sharing with you a kaleidoscope of stories about my spiritual journey. I will give you a glimpse of the movement of the Divine through my life and my experience of transformation.

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My journey began in an old meetinghouse heated by fireplaces, one on either side of the meeting room. Entering, I smelled the years of smoke that penetrated the walls and benches and the odors of old wood that has experienced years of changing temperatures and moisture. The wood benches had hard cushions when I was young. There were two levels of facing benches: low ones used weekly and elevated ones used during weddings or large gatherings. The lights gave off a yellow hue adding to the solemnity of the space. The door latch was an old lever and made a loud clanking noise when opened, so William Borton sat on the backbench and quietly opened the door for each new arrival.

Another memorable aspect was the windows whose glass panes were old enough to have bubbles, lines and waves caused by varying thickness and inconsistent pouring and cooling. Early on these windows attracted my attention revealing different appearances of leaves and branches depending on which part of the window I gazed through.

Those windows became a lesson that has served me well. How often have I been exposed to life experiences where I needed to see not just through my own eyes but I needed to be open to how others see? We do this during our business process and this is one of the strengths. We listen with open hearts to how others "see" and hear God calling us to move forward. From the shared ministry of the body, the sense of the meeting becomes clear and can be minuted.

This meeting was filled with seasoned members who shared their time with me in First Day School and after meeting for worship. These adults and the classmates became my first companions on my journey. While my teachers read Bible stories, my small hands created biblical figures. Later I made drawings with my child's view of the Bible story that was presented or my teacher recorded the discussion my classmates and I had about a Bible story. The pictures and typed-up discussions were kept and at a later time the pages were bound together and presented to me. These bound volumes are treasures that have moved many times with me. The carefully assembled record of my participation in First Day School, the Bible I was given by the meeting and the attention I received allowed me to know I was a valued member of the community in spite of my young age.

Participation in the weekly meeting for worship was expected and it is hard to say when I first became aware of the Presence in the midst of the meeting for worship. Certainly, there was the time of learning to sit quietly followed by learning to quiet the activity of my mind. It was not a straight-line improvement but an up and down of wiggles of the body or mind at some times and the experience of the Presence or the gathered meeting at others. There was vocal ministry and sometimes this was merely a distraction and at others times it grabbed me and drew me deeper. At a young age I began to sit with William Borton on the backbench. He helped me by secretly

passing me crystal mint Life Savers when I got wiggly and it was under his tutelage that I realized not every message was for me.

Rachel Thom, an elder in the meeting, spoke of releasing the busyness of the week past as an important part of settling into worship and all these years later her message comes back to me when I am centering into worship after a crowded week. A classmate ministered to the meeting one week on the unwillingness of members to pray out loud. This young man's message gathered the meeting during that week's worship but it also changed the meeting. Friends were moved to pray aloud after hearing this message. It may even have been the stimulus that led to my lifelong curiosity about prayer and the diverse ways that people pray.

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After our First Day School classes ended each week we gathered together in an assembly. As the assembly was drawing towards a close we sang together this one line song as a way of entering into a period of silent worship.

**5 Lord, Who Lovest Little Children**  
*CHILDREN'S PRAYER*  
MIRA ROWLAND Adapted from NOVELLO

The musical score is written for a single melodic line on a treble clef staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The melody consists of a series of chords and single notes, with a final cadence. The lyrics are: "Lord, who lov- est lit - tle chil- dren, We lift our hearts in prayer to thee." The score is numbered "1" at the end.

Lord, who lov- est lit - tle chil- dren, We lift our hearts in prayer to thee.

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Our bodies settled into worship as if on cue. Young children joining the group quickly learned this song was a signal that we were going to be quiet together. My memory of those times is of some days when I was anxious for the quiet to end and others when it felt welcoming and comfortable. The worship closed with us singing another song that reminded us to carry the lessons we learned with us and that God would be with us until we returned.<sup>2</sup>

Our singing after our First Day School classes was an introduction to praying and praising God through music. In high school I was part of the combined choirs that sang Handel's *Hallelujah Chorus* in the chapel at Princeton University. As we sang, I had the experience of a prayer of praise. My memory is of the chapel coming alive with the praise for God from the many voices that were joined together in song. I also played the clarinet in the band and there were times when the band performed a piece, such as *Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring*, when we would be connecting with the audience at a level beyond the academic performance of the music. We would be playing from the heart, and the energy that came back to us as we played was of the audience hearing and responding from the heart. These musical experiences were for me an example of prayer praising God.

In our home there were several framed cross-stitched patterns that Mother made. One that hung in the boys' bedroom was the prayer:

Now I lay me down to sleep,  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.  
If I should die before I wake,  
I pray the Lord my soul to take.  
If I should live for other days,  
I pray the Lord to guide my ways.

There are many variations of this prayer. Some feel it is too depressing for children but the last two lines are the ones that stayed with me and they are hopeful. When I read it, at some level I knew that God was guiding me. That certainly did not mean I was always doing what God would have me do. Throughout my life I have carried on conversations with God that are a form of prayer. These conversations are at times quite one-sided. I have shared where I am, my concerns and my seeking of the way forward. The clues about what I was to do were not always what I wanted and I admit to arguing with God. My arguments are sometimes similar to Bill Cosby's imitation of Noah being asked to build an ark. At other times I have sort of agreed to how God would have me move forward only if something I have conceived allows my compliance. This is setting up a roadblock. If any of you think that you can win by doing this, forget it. My experience is God will get around any roadblock I create.

Prayer is a part of my seeking. Asking God what it is that I am supposed to do in a particular situation. So one form of prayer that I have engaged in frequently is a prayer requesting guidance. I do not always get an answer to my request. As a result of praying my heart is opened. It is this opening of the heart that is important because the answer to the prayer may actually be already around me but I was not open enough to recognize it.

Another type of prayer that I have practiced is a prayer of thanksgiving or thankfulness. I learned this form of prayer by listening to my Grandmother Hood pray before meals when we visited. She always thanked God for the safety in our travel to her home as well as thanking God for the food we would eat. She added a line about our lives being in the service of God. Today during a walk in a field or prairie I am thankful for the wonders of the world around me. Sitting on a jetty on the Atlantic Ocean I am moved by the bounty of the oceans and estuaries and can be drawn into a spontaneous prayer of thankfulness. The natural world provides places where the surroundings can move me instantly into a centered place that opens me to the movement of the Spirit.

I have participated in workshops and retreats on prayer as part of my effort to explore the many ways that people pray. I practice praying without ceasing as a result of one workshop. This is prayer where I carry the individual or the concern in my heart at all times. The person that I am carrying may not know or I may have told them I will be praying for them. Let me share a time when I did this. Our daughter Christine was expecting a baby and I called both her home and cell phones and got no answer. I left a message for her to call me. She had stopped working and it made no sense that she would not answer either phone. Something in this was out of order and so I began to pray without ceasing for her. I did not hear from her or her husband that evening or

the next morning and continued to pray without ceasing for her. There was something that kept me from calling her again. After dinner the next day the phone rang and a very emotional Christine was on the phone. My immediate concern was that she had lost the baby but a careful listening to her revealed we had a new grandson. Christine had been through thirty and a half hours of labor and during that time I had been praying without ceasing for her. While I was delighted I had a new grandson, my continuing concern was for Christine because of how she sounded. The next morning I drove to Wisconsin, the last 60 miles through a blizzard, and when I arrived at the hospital, I think she was surprised I had to hug and hold her before holding my grandson. Once I was convinced she was OK, I could joyfully hold Braden. As I held him I felt my heart open with joy and I said a prayer of thanks to God for caring for Christine and Braden during the long labor and delivery.

Smells and sounds will move me to pray. Entering meeting for worship in an old meetinghouse where there are similar odors to those of the meeting of my youth can move me to pray. It is as if I am pulled into a vortex that rapidly carries me to a centered place. These are moments when all the pressures of my busy life drop away and I am opened to how the Spirit moves not only through me but, in addition, through the gathered community of worshipers. During these times I feel connected to the others in the worshipping body in that which is eternal. There are not words that I can use to express the comfort that comes from meetings for worship like this. Some refer to them as gathered or covered meetings; for me it is more than that. It is a coming together in a way that we cannot come together as mortals. It is coming together where we have let go of our idiosyncrasies. It is a time when again I am moved to a prayer of thanksgiving that God is present with us, holding us, guiding us and moving us to new spiritual realms.

So far I have shared the easier parts of prayer for me. What about the stumbling blocks? The problem for me is intercessory prayer. I have from my youth had a problem asking God for something specific. I can pray for guidance because then I am not asking for a specific outcome. Asking for a specific outcome is a problem. I believe if I ask for a particular outcome I am telling God what to do. My struggle is I do not feel that I know everything. My solution to a great need for an individual has been to pray to God that "Thy will be done." I am going to share a story about a time when I prayed "Thy will be done" that was especially hard for me. When our son, Stephen, was six weeks old he became sick. His sister had been exposed to scarlet fever when he was a few days old and I had faithfully washed my hands every time I picked him up. I was nursing him and he nursed every two hours day and night. One day I noticed he was sleeping longer between feedings and during the night he did not wake to nurse. I woke him over and over trying to get him to nurse. Finally, I tried to get him to take water from a bottle. He would not take the water. At this point I became fearful and realized that I could not keep this child alive by my will alone. I also realized that he was on loan to his father and me. Through tears I prayed to God and said we loved this child very much and would take good care of him, but if it was God's will I would release him back to God. I prayed "Thy will be done." After this prayer, I woke Dick and we took him to the hospital. The diagnosis was pneumonia and we were allowed to take him home after he was injected with the first of several doses of antibiotic. Several hours after the injection, he had enough energy to nurse again. As he nursed, I said a prayer of thanks. I was hopeful that he would recover fully. This story may help you understand how profound my concern about intercessory prayer has been.

I have recently come to realize that I was defining intercessory prayer as asking for a specific outcome and perhaps my definition was too rigid. I can see it does not have to be a request like a child demanding exactly what she/he wants. I see that it can be a request for comfort or care that does not definitely prescribe the outcome. I also see that when we hold another in the Light we are doing a form of intercessory prayer. For years I have been comfortable with holding people in the Light and not thought of it as intercessory prayer. It was holding the individual up to God's loving embrace and care.

There is one last aspect of prayer that I would like to address. I remember being part of a gathering of Friends from my meeting that was discussing prayer. Each of us was asked to share when and where we prayed. I was afraid everyone would laugh at me when I shared and I waited until almost the last. I told them I prayed in the car and waited for them to laugh, but no one did. At that time I had a forty-five to sixty minute commute by car to and from work. The commute was a time of centering and prayer and I would arrive at work or home in a better place for having spent the time that way. Over the years members who had heard me say this would occasionally ask how full my car was. It was sometimes full with all the people I was praying for and with the concerns I was bringing forth. Through it all there was the presence of God guiding my way.

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Regular attendance at meeting for worship leads to an understanding of the unspoken conventions among Friends. No one speaks during the first part of the meeting for worship. Individuals do not speak twice, there is space between messages and messages are not long. These are known conventions and would be observed by children attending meeting for worship regularly today. Another convention was the manner of dress. Everyone was dressed in grays, browns, dark blues and blacks. This was the simplicity of dress in the early 1950's.

During junior high school when it was time to get a new winter coat, the years of observing meeting members' attire had a role in the discussion around what coat I should get. These were the days of long tan coats and since I had reached my full adult stature, I hoped finally to be able to get one. There was a burning desire to look like those in school who were popular while not being so "wild" as to be outside of the accepted convention of the meeting. In addition, there was the knowledge a tan coat would be a little "brighter" than most at meeting but not too risqué. Alas, the coat made me look pale and sickly. The sales clerk and my mother suggested I try on a red coat in a similar style. I protested that I could never wear it to meeting for worship because it would be risqué. After many protests, I tried on the red coat and had to agree I looked much better in it. More discussion and we got the red coat I would wear regularly to meeting for worship over the next few years.

My prayer was that no one would notice the coat since I was sitting in the back of the meeting room with William Borton. Several months after I began to wear the red coat, the clerk, Mary Borton, approached me and asked me to join her on the facing bench during worship. Skirts and long coats came below the knee in those days and girls wore knee socks. It still felt cold in the meetinghouse unless one's legs were wrapped in a blanket, one was near a fireplace or sitting in front of a small electric heater provided for the clerk. During meeting for worship that morning

the electric heater stopped working and Mary Borton did not have a large enough blanket to share with me. As meeting progressed I got colder and colder and began to shake. I was afraid to seek a solution to my increasing discomfort because in my mind if I moved it would be perceived as not using the worship time appropriately. I am convinced meeting ended early that morning as Mary Borton became concerned about the quaking youth beside her. Two "elderly" women across from us immediately asked me to sit between them and they warmed me by sharing their body heat and their blanket. They had been trying to signal me to move over during worship as soon as they were aware the heater had failed. Their first concern was that I be warm. In truth, I learned being warm is essential to being open to experiencing the communal meeting for worship. In addition, I learned my perceived beliefs about how the body would judge my behavior during worship were my own self-judgment. Others were focused on their own experience of the Divine. Finally, it was another affirmation of the value this meeting placed on young members and their full participation in all aspects of the meeting community.

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While First Days were spent going to First Day School and Meeting for Worship, school days began with the reading of a passage from the Old Testament of the Bible, the reciting of the Lord's Prayer and the pledge of allegiance to the flag. Family meals were preceded by silent worship and there was an expectation each would pray before going to sleep at night. My life was sprinkled with the presence of God.

Within this context I was growing up as the only girl with three brothers. I was determined that I would be able to do anything the boys could do. This drive to be like them can best be demonstrated by the day I disappeared along with my brother's 2-wheel bicycle. I was gone for the better part of the day. I arrived home late for dinner scratched and dirty and announced, with a broad smile, I could ride a 2-wheel bicycle.

I was going to be in charge of my life and when there was something to be mastered, I would do it — even if it took many trials and lots of time to master the new thing.

In addition to this desire to control my life, I had a deeply felt understanding of the importance of integrity. As a child I saw this as right and wrong. It was really simple for me. Something was right or it was wrong; there was no room for discussion. One evening while mother was picking up my father at the train station the two younger boys were having a disagreement. There was chasing and as a result one of the boys hit a window, breaking it. Fortunately he was not cut but there was a broken window and each of the boys wanted to be first to tell our parents about what had happened so that the other would take the blame. This was not unusual because whenever there was a problem during our parents' absence there was the race to the top of the back stairs to tell one's own version of the events. The older boy succeeded in getting there first and blamed the entire thing on our younger brother. Dad was so concerned by what could have happened that he did not listen to anyone else before punishing the younger brother. I had watched the entire sequence of events and knew my father was wrong and of course proceeded to tell him so in my holier than thou childish way. My father grounded me until I apologized but my stubborn holding to what I saw as the truth meant I did not care about being grounded. A special event I was to participate in came and went and there was no sign that I would back down. My mother



found living in the house with a husband and daughter who would not speak to each other was unacceptable. She and I had many long talks and I believe she came to understand there was some truth in my being upset with my father. I indicated he really needed to find out all the information before deciding what happened even if the event was one where someone could have been seriously injured. Mother was able to help me see the manner in which I had approached my father was one that did not show respect and I needed to apologize to him for being disrespectful. There was no mention of my telling him incorrect information or that I was wrong in telling him what I had seen. My mother was showing me that in any disagreement between individuals each one has a part of the responsibility for the miscommunication. The message of this lesson was one I would have to experience over and over. She was showing me the importance of Jesus' message in Matthew 18 where he told his followers how to handle a disagreement with another. Now I know there is the need for my own internal spiritual work before approaching one with whom I have a disagreement. When I approach them humbly and accept responsibility for my part in the miscommunication, there is space for resolution. Failure to do this leaves me feeling separated from God.

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During elementary school I met a girl who went to the Catholic school across the street from the public school I attended. We were each interested in hearing about the other's religious experiences. Our long slow walks together were my first experience of sharing my spiritual journey with another. In spite of the differences in our religious training we were each seeking another with whom we could share our journeys. We had a hunger that was not being met.

In high school I was fortunate to have a good friend who was interested in sharing about her spiritual journey. She convinced me to join her in attending a couple of retreats. Most of the participants were Episcopalians and their experience of communion was different from mine. I had some trouble explaining to them the direct experience of communion with God that did not include something physical. One of the Episcopal priests involved in leading the retreats had the experience of direct communion with God and was familiar with Quakerism so he supported my description of my experience. These retreats were held at Westtown School and as I shared I felt the support of years of Quaker worship on the campus.

In college I had a friend with whom I could share the stirrings of my spiritual journey. We have maintained our friendship through the years, sharing religious experiences and on occasion recommending a book that was helpful or moving to the other.

Always I was seeking out individuals with whom I could share my spiritual stirrings. While at Lake Forest Friends Meeting, I have participated in many different groups that have gathered to share with each other. Some lasted only a short time as we struggled to find the approach that met everyone's needs. Others like the Shalem group lasted for many years and helped each of the participants move along on her journey.

At the same time I participated in this search within my own meeting, I was doing volunteer work with Friends General Conference. As I traveled around for Friends General Conference, I became aware of the hunger for sharing our spiritual journeys that exists among Friends. This

desire to share spiritual experiences is one of the ways we help each other. It is true we can read diaries and biographies but to be able to talk about an experience with another and have them assist in the discernment of what is important takes me to a deeper level. To have the other person or persons ask queries about the experience helps to focus my journey. The act of gathering and worshipping together at times outside of the regular meeting for worship allows us to know the others in that which is eternal. This forms a bond that cannot be broken by our human failings. The connection can be strained by our human condition but the knowing of each other in that which is eternal maintains the binding of our hearts.

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My parents moved to Clarendon Hills, Illinois, right after I graduated from high school. I began attending Downers Grove Meeting with them. My attendance was limited to school vacations until I entered graduate school at Northwestern University. I was warmly welcomed into the community at Downers Grove and after my first year in college was invited to take care of the preschoolers at Illinois Yearly Meeting. I was a part of the community even though I was away for much of the year. The welcoming and encouraging of participation in the diverse activities of a meeting of all ages of individuals makes a vital community.

Young adults live a nomadic lifestyle and one anchor in that time is maintaining one's membership in a meeting where one feels connected. After completing graduate school, I moved to the Finger Lakes region of New York to begin my first teaching job. I began worshipping with Rochester Friends Meeting but felt a strong spiritual tie to Downers Grove Meeting. Even after a couple of years in New York, I still felt my spiritual home was with Downers Grove Friends.

When Dick and I decided to get married, we went to Downers Grove seeking clearness to be married jointly under the care of Downers Grove and Rochester Meetings. I joined Dick in Chicago; we went to worship at Downers Grove Meeting and presented our letter requesting clearness for marriage to the clerk. The week we arrived was the week of Downers Grove's celebration of 40 years as a meeting. It was wonderful to be able to celebrate with them and have our letter warmly received.

Christine and Ed Bruder and Mary Ruth and Louis Jones were our clearness committee. Again I flew to Illinois and Dick and I drove to Christine and Ed's home to go with them to the Jones'. When we arrived, Ed met us at the door. It was one of the hottest, muggiest July evenings I have ever experienced. Dick and I were totally soaked with sweat from the drive to the Bruder's home and because we were anxious about the clearness committee process. Ed suggested that we might each want to take a shower, which made us laugh and relax. Once at the Jones', we shared an enjoyable meal together and then began the discernment around our request to be married under the care of the meeting. The care with which it was approached speaks to the responsibility a meeting undertakes with a marriage and to the understanding that there are important items to be discussed by a couple before entering into marriage. We were asked if we had discussed how we would handle finances. We had not talked about finances, but almost in unison each said that the other needed to be kept out of bookstores — a statement we would each make even today about the other. There were other questions asked about things that needed to be addressed before marriage. Some we learned during the clearness process that we needed to discuss more fully.

Others were not as important to us as they were to the members of our clearness committee. The approach the clearness committee took with us demonstrated a commitment to marriages held under the care of the meeting that is mirrored in the marriage section of our *Faith and Practice* approved at the 2007 sessions of Illinois Yearly Meeting. I know the faith of the marriage clearness committee members influenced my contributions to the process of preparing the marriage section for presentation to the yearly meeting.

We were older than recent individuals requesting marriage under the care of Downers Grove Meeting and at one point a committee member asked how we would approach solving a problem Friends were confronting. Even as we were together discerning what was rightly ordered in terms of our request to be married, we were being treated as individuals who were a vital and respected part of the community. We did not have to achieve a certain age or status; we were already a valued part of the community and as such should be asked for input.

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At a Lake Forest Friends Meeting Religious Education Committee meeting I learned about a retreat titled, "Confronting the Ocean of Darkness with the Ocean of Light." This was essentially what I was doing with my First Day School class, so I asked for the information and said I would like to go. I was given the information and made the first of several calls to the Friends General Conference office in order to be able to participate. Each time I called it was fine to attend but something was not done. It required that I persist in my quest. At the time I would not have said what I was doing was "Spirit-led"; I know better now. There was something about the title and description that was drawing me to persist in seeking to participate. It was a life-changing event. I learned there were others that were seeking as I was. I was able to share the stirrings I was feeling and not be scared of the response. At the end of the weekend I was asked to join the Friends General Conference Religious Education Committee. Illinois Yearly meeting had the need for another representative to Friends General Conference and was pleased to have me agree to be a yearly meeting representative.

The leader of the retreat was Caroline Pineo who was the co-director of Camp Onas when I was a camper. One of the participants had been a counselor and had taught me canoeing. The weekend demonstrated the smallness of the Quaker world — something I have experienced over and over during my work with Friends General Conference.

Becoming involved with the Friends General Conference Religious Education Committee gave me lots of things to do with the young members at Lake Forest Friends Meeting. I was exposed to religious education materials used by other yearly meetings and curricula being developed by committee members. During committee meetings we would do activities that could be done with young people and learn the problems one might encounter. Adults, after all, make the same mistakes when given instructions that children do. The children in Lake Forest Friends Meeting got to test things we wanted to use in curricula. They got to listen to stories and comment on them as the committee decided what to include in a new edition of *Lighting Candles in the Dark*. The children learned we listened to their advice and took seriously our continued requests.

I assumed my service would just be in the area of religious education but as time went by I was

asked to take on other service for Friends General Conference. Each new call to service brought with it new learning opportunities and interaction with a broader and broader group of Friends. I treasure the time spent worshipping with these Friends. They were times when centering seemed to come easier. I was able to have frank talks with those I was meeting, about matters with which I struggled. I was gathering around me Friends who were with me even when we were miles apart. At one time I had a spiritual friend with whom I worshiped every morning and we were almost a thousand miles apart and in different time zones. Those times of joint worship helped me prepare for my busy days of teaching. I moved through my schedule with a sense of grounding that came from our shared worship time.

What about all the committee meetings I was attending? What I have learned from years of service is the time of worshipping together lifts my spirits. The shared meals and conversations around them have helped me to know committee members and to value their experiences. The flights or drives to meetings are also times when we can minister to each other. The distance becomes short when shared with another. Then there are those precious moments during a committee meeting when a member speaks quietly but with the authority of the Divine and the pieces come together. For me those are times of grace for the gathered group and I leave the meeting knowing that the time was well spent.

Another thing that happens when we serve together on committees is that we become friends with each other. At times I will think of another I know from committee work and hold them spontaneously in God's loving embrace. When this occurs, I don't know why it is happening and later I may hear it was an especially hard time for the individual. This is for me another confirmation of our being connected in that which is eternal.

Travel to meetings all over the country and Canada has introduced me to many Friends. There is time to hear their stories over shared meals, during rides to and from airports and meetinghouses and of an evening before retiring for the night. I want to share about two specific experiences during my travels. One is about an extended stay among Friends in a distant meeting. During my time with these Friends, I joined a celebration of someone's birthday at a potluck brunch just a few hours after my early morning arrival. I knew only a couple of people in the assembled group, yet I had the feeling of having joined individuals I had known for years. During my time with these Friends, I went bird watching, hiked, picnicked, picked berries, joined with spiritual formation groups, as well as meeting with individuals and assisting with a difficult discernment process. Imagine my surprise during one shared evening when I learned one woman had grown up as part of Peoria-Galesburg, now Spoon River Meeting, and knew my oldest brother's family. It was as if I had been welcomed back into a family I had been away from for a long time. I experienced a hunger amongst these Friends to share their stories and to hear others' stories. As a result of this visit, I encouraged some Friends to begin a phone spiritual formation group that continues to this day. I believe I have received more than I have given as a result of facilitating this gathering of Friends.

The other experience was similar to this one. I was able to worship midweek with a small group that worshipped together each week. It was like being at Lake Forest's midweek meeting for worship. Another morning I was able to join the women's retreat of the meeting. As a result of my sharing around the query, several women sought me out and we shared freely about our

spiritual awakenings. Again I had the feeling I had known these women for a long time. These times of sharing have had an impact on my own spiritual journey. Friends have asked me questions that have been just the query I needed to consider. My experience of traveling among Friends is I receive as much or more than I feel I am able to give.

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"The Lord is my Shepherd." This is the opening line to the 23rd Psalm. As a child I was asked to memorize it. So all these years later I can recite the 23rd Psalm but it has changed in its meaning over the years. When I memorized it, I was dutifully following instructions and it did not have immediate significance to me. When my father's Aunt Agnes died, I was the one child taken to the funeral. At the visitation the night before the funeral, I picked up a small card with Aunt Agnes's picture and there was the 23rd Psalm. In an instant the Psalm took on meaning for me. One might think that was the last time I gained an insight from the Psalm. I find the reading and rereading of passages in the Bible at different times in my life brings new meaning to me. Recently as I settled into meeting for worship the opening line of the 23rd Psalm came to me. The Lord is my Shepherd. What is the manner of interaction of the Shepherd and his flock? He is not pushing them hither and yon. Rather he is guiding them. If the Lord is my Shepherd then the Lord is guiding me, as one would guide a small child by placing a guiding hand on his/her shoulder when walking in a crowd. The slight pressure of one part of the hand can indicate a change in direction. No words have to pass between parent and child and there is a smooth movement of the two almost as one. How does God guide us? I have the experience of being urged to call someone on the phone. I have no idea why but I have learned to follow up on these urges. Sometimes the person is sick, other times they are lonely or need to have someone listen to them. On occasion I have been looking for a book with information I seek and I see a book on my shelf I know needs to be passed on to someone else. To me these are God moments when the pressure of the hand has been such that I act without even knowing why I am to act.

I believe we also have the responsibility to interact with each other in ways that are like a shepherd and his flock. The traditional role of the elder in Friends meetings was like a shepherd or mentor. These individuals were to guide those who were moving into a ministry for the body. This ministry can take many forms and the guidance needed can also take many forms. On my own spiritual journey the adults who really listened to me as a child, the fellow travelers who shared their struggles and listened to mine have been essential. We want to be as shepherds guiding each other, and this means a light touch.

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George Fox reminded us to "Walk cheerfully over the earth answering that of God in everyone." What does this ask of us? To walk cheerfully over the earth means we are to be cheerful in our greeting of those we meet. This means treating all as a beloved child of God. Does this change how we will interact with each other? Yes, it means taking the time to smile at people as we are walking down the street, riding on the bus or train, or waiting together for an airplane flight. Even going so far as to say hello, good morning, good afternoon or have a good day. It has an interesting effect on me as well as on the person I greet.

Do I always do this? Of course not. And one day not so very long ago, I was in a hurry trying to find where to go in an unknown train station. I spotted a woman sitting in a booth labeled "Passenger Assistance." I walked up to her and asked where I was to go to catch a particular train. She looked at me and said, "Let's begin with 'Good afternoon,'" and then told me where I needed to go. She was reminding me to slow down and to walk cheerfully. I needed to release my urgency. I thanked her for her assistance adding that I hoped she would have a good afternoon.

Walking cheerfully today in our hurried, time-urgent and cluttered lives means slowing down and really seeing the other individuals we encounter. It means taking the time to see what is around us and smell the natural odors and hear the symphony of the natural world.

What about answering that of God in everyone? When I was teaching, I encountered students like one Parker Palmer describes in *The Courage to Teach* as the student from hell. These are the students who appear not to be responding to what is occurring in the classroom. The temptation as an instructor is to modify what one is doing in an attempt to engage this student in the class. The student Parker Palmer described ended up being his driver to the airport after a day's work at a college. He was crestfallen when he saw that this was the individual to be driving him to the airport. During the drive he learned this student, who appeared to be bored, had been listening and they had a dynamic discussion throughout their drive.

In my case I think of a young woman who constantly made loud and rude comments during class. I tried to redirect her but never seemed to succeed. In addition, she made a practice of leaving the laboratory early, before the work for the day was completed. I had reached the point of believing the only solution was for me to tough it out until the semester ended. One day she asked if she could come to my office. I said, "Of course," but internally I dreaded her visit. Fortunately, I had the time to center before she came. I knew I had to really listen to her and be open to how God moved through her. My experience of her was totally different from in class. I learned she had an illness that required her to have frequent medical appointments. I learned of her frustrations with her family members over her need to remove certain allergens from their home. I learned about her desire to become a nurse so she could really listen to patients, something she had not experienced as a patient. I experienced her as a beloved child of God. My inclination is to say she was different from that day on. It is true she did not make inappropriate comments. She did become my advocate to her classmates when I pushed them to work harder. She still, on occasion, left lab early but she would tell me the reason for her early departure. More important is the fact I was changed. I knew her at a deeper level. I had seen that of the Divine as it shone through her.

Opportunities like this have occurred over and over in my life as a reminder that we are called to answer that of God in each individual we meet. In my work with colleagues it meant I was willing to be open to faculty who were often ignored. I found giving this listening attention meant experiencing individuals' gifts I would not have known existed.

There are times in our lives when we plan for life-changing events: when individuals plan to commit to a life-long relationship, when they anticipate the birth of a child, when a move from one location to another occurs because of a job or the decision to purchase a home or to move to a new rental property. These are all changes that are planned and we prepare ourselves for the change(s) that will result. Of course we can never fully anticipate the impact of the changes. One hears new parents say they cannot remember what their lives were like before the birth of the child; partners talk of the unexpected impact of a new job, moving to a new community or new home.

What about changes that are not planned and anticipated but occur and change life in an instant? It was just a typical morning shower while staying with a friend in Philadelphia. A simple turn to get the soap off my back and I lost traction and was flying through the air. I landed against a radiator with my full body weight on my left arm. In an instant I had broken my arm and had no control over the forearm. Somehow I was able to get up and call for help. I knew the arm was broken and there were lots of things I could not do. Later I would realize there were things I would have to practice over and over to retrain the muscles.

During the hours in the emergency room and the various diagnostic tests, I had the mistaken idea the bone only required setting and a cast and I would be on my way. Then came the news it was a bad break and would require surgery and the need to wait a few days for the swelling to reduce before doing surgery. That night as I "slept" on the couch, the enormity of what had happened overwhelmed me. I could not get the arm comfortable nor relax the shoulder muscles enough to sleep, and I was profoundly scared and alone. I needed relief from the discomfort and I needed to turn my fear over to God so I could rest. I found myself praying to God to support my arm and take away my fears. I had the sensation of being supported gently with foam under my arm and my body being held and protected, and sleep came in short bursts.

As the days progressed the Quaker community sought out a highly qualified arm surgeon to do the surgery. They transported me to preoperative appointments; found a place for me to stay that had a chair lift and special access bathtub. They picked up Dick at the airport, accompanied him during the surgery and supported him while I was in the hospital. One Friend was there with us after the surgery when the pain medication was not working and thought to have me listen to music on her iPod. Once I had the music to listen to, I was able to get the pain medication closer to what I needed. The next morning a nurse (and Quaker) who worked helping people handle pain showed up in my room having been called to assist. Undergirding all of this visible care was the prayer. I was supposed to participate in Friends General Conference's Executive Committee meeting the weekend of the accident. On Friday evening as they gathered, the body prayed for my recovery. Members continued to hold me in prayer over the days and weeks that followed. How can one express the power of these prayers? There are not words I can find, but I was washed over with a feeling of being part of a gathered meeting when Executive Committee members prayed for me.

The surgery is really just the beginning of the healing process and there were other surprises to come. Once physical therapy began there was the need to warm the muscles before exercising them. A friend suggested putting rice in a sock and heating it in the microwave. I remembered getting a portion of the old dorm curtains sewn into rice-filled segments at yearly meeting

sessions a few years ago and went in search of it. Five times each day as I warmed my arm muscles in the rice-filled dorm curtain, I felt held by my yearly meeting — both those with us now and those who are no longer with us. I was grateful for the inspiration of Clear Creek Meeting members to make something from material that might have been discarded. On days when it was hard to do the exercises, I was not alone. Again there are not words to express the depth of spiritual support this provided.

Doing exercises five times a day requires discipline and whether one follows through with the exercises influences how much return one gets. Scheduling my day so I could exercise five times took effort, especially once I was able to drive. It gave me an appreciation for what it is like to pray toward Mecca five times a day. What an incredible spiritual discipline that is. My opportunity to do the rehabilitation after this surgery has given me a deep respect for the Muslims who are following the discipline of praying five times a day toward Mecca.

What about when something happens in an instant that changes one's spiritual life? It was 5:30 in the morning and I was sitting in the admitting room for surgical patients waiting to be admitted. A young boy was brought in, still in his pajamas and a woman entered with a turban on her head to hide the fact that she was bald. I looked around more carefully and was overwhelmed by the number of people waiting to have surgery and the concerned looks on their faces. Spontaneously, I began to pray that God would be with each person as he or she went through his or her scheduled surgery. That is a prayer that has continued to be with me. Since my surgery, when I wake in the night I pray for those who will have surgery that day and ask God to be with them.

Driving home from work after my late-night class one snowy day, my car began to hydroplane and I became tense about the drive. It did not take long for me to realize that driving with all the tension was not going to make the drive any better. I prayed and told God I could not make this drive alone. I began to feel the tension leave my body and I became aware of the presence of someone else in the car. This is one of the times I have been aware of the presence of the living Christ in my life. It did not take away the responsibility for being careful but it relieved the tension and allowed me to focus on what was critical each moment.

On Christine's sixteenth birthday we were driving to Indiana for our niece's wedding. The drive was eventful. There were thunderstorms and tornado watches in the Chicago area. We arrived in Terre Haute to dry and warm conditions. I was driving behind a pickup truck with young people sitting on the sides of the back. I stayed well back out of concern for the safety of the young people riding without being seat belted. The traffic was heavy and I was stopped waiting for it to move forward when two cars in succession, that had not noticed traffic was stopped, hit us from behind. It became apparent Christine needed to be taken to the hospital to be checked out. She had experienced whiplash and while she had gotten out of the car, I was concerned that her head not move in case there was damage to the cervical vertebrae. This is another time when I experienced the presence of the living Christ. A man appeared out of nowhere, told Christine the ambulance was just on the other side of the train crossing the road. She was panicky and he took hold of her head and neck holding them immobile and calming her until the rescue squad arrived. As they were loading her onto a stretcher, I turned to thank the man and he was nowhere to be seen.



These are examples of times when my spiritual life changed in an instant. Rufus Jones in *The Double Search* writes about God seeking us as we seek God. For me those times when I am pulled spontaneously into prayer or to request help from God are times when the double search comes together in synchronicity.

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What about those times when I find myself in the desert spiritually? These are times of feeling separated from God. I have tried to determine what causes these times of feeling separated. I have the experience of a fallow period coming after a time of intense spiritual experience. When this happens, I believe the dry time is a time when my recent experience is working within me even though I feel separated. Another cause for feeling a separation is when I have experienced a loss or am grieving. These two triggers I can identify but there are other times when I have felt in the desert spiritually and I do not know the cause.

Whatever causes a dry spell, I know it is not a time to stop going to meeting for worship. I must confess it was more habit than a realization I should be going to meeting that has kept me present during times of separation. These are times when I believe I am a drain on the worshipping body. I believe the meeting community is providing me support. The members of the community are drawing me into the worship. I will use a Biblical reference to help you grasp my meaning. In Mark, chapter 2, he speaks of Jesus entering Capernaum and many coming forward to be near him. Four friends of a man who could not walk carried him on a stretcher but could not get close to Jesus. They climbed to the roof of the house where Jesus was, cut a hole in it and lowered their friend on the stretcher to Jesus. When Jesus saw the faith of the man's friends, Jesus indicated the man's sins were forgiven and he could rise and leave. I believe the community of my meeting acts as this man's friends. They continue to worship and pray and some may even know that I am in special need of prayers. As I continue to be present at meeting for worship, participating in committee meetings and even seeing other members outside of meeting, I am remaining open because I have the faith that the dry spell will end. I am then reconnected to God.

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We are called to action and this action takes many forms. As a teenager I participated in work-camps that changed my understanding of how society functions. Before the work-camp experiences I was not aware of the many ways that our society isolates individuals or groups. Working side-by-side with children of migrant laborers, whose parents chose to stay in the north to protect their families, opened my eyes to the real tragedies that continue even today. The seeds of my work on diversity were planted. Individuals have told me that a person of color would not be comfortable in a Quaker meeting. This statement left me speechless. I was raised as a Quaker and on First Day morning during a work-camp I attended an African-American church where I heard James Farmer (a minister who was active in the civil rights movement) preach. The only European-Americans in the church were the Quaker youth and leaders who participated in the work-camp. As James Farmer preached, members of the congregation were moved and spoke aloud of their agreement with what he was saying. There, in the midst of this African-American church, I experienced a gathered meeting. I previously had fleeting experiences with church

services where there was a preacher, mostly when we attended church with my Grandmother Hood. The African-American church service was an entirely different experience for me and I felt the presence of God. I believe that we can all, regardless of religious background, experience the Divine with others, whether it is in a Quaker meeting, a Catholic mass, a Baptist church. Some of us, regardless of our upbringing, will seek a new place to worship and we should be welcomed because we may be just the new person needed by the community. The color of our skin, our ethnic background, our educational background, our employment, age, sexual orientation are not important but our seeking of a relationship with God is.

There are other issues besides diversity that have called me to act on my spiritual beliefs. I have participated in a variety of actions to let others know of my concerns. The most important action is trying to live my faith. This means living the testimonies of simplicity, peace, integrity, community and equality. It does not mean I always succeed, but it is my intention to live with them as a guide and my participation in my monthly meeting helps me be faithful to this intention.

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Over the years I have used a variety of spiritual practices. I have prayed, read, done walking meditation, and tried to journal. My life is littered with journals I kept for a short time and then stopped keeping. I thought once I retired I would be able to write with more regularity but the time consumed by my volunteer activities quickly displaced my resolve. I am a journaling failure. I wondered often what the impact would be of writing about my spiritual experiences but knew I was not disciplined enough to accomplish this task. I knew attempting it would be another opportunity to find ways to avoid following through. As I continued to chide myself about my failures in this area, I received a request to give the Plummer Lecture at Illinois Yearly Meeting. If I had answered the request when the call came, I would have said no. I was asked to discern whether I was called to do this. I met with Friends to discern how I should respond. It became clear that I was to do it. I should thank the committee for asking me to do this. I found that as I lived with the various parts of this talk, I learned more and more about my own journey. I learned I could sit down and write but it would not be a daily practice. The things I was to write would come to me and I had to live with them for days or weeks before the words came together to be written on the page. My experiences are no more special than anyone else's. I know from my travel that through the sharing of our stories we help each other along on our journeys. Many of you have done that for me. I hope that in some small way my experiences help some of you. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to look back and share with you my unfinished journey.

#### Endnotes

1. *A Hymnal for Friends*. 1955. Friends General Conference. Philadelphia, PA. Hymn #5. Used by permission.

2. *Worship in Song: A Friends Hymnal*. 1996. Friends General Conference. Philadelphia, PA.  
Hymn #330 "As We Leave This Friendly Place."