

Hamilton Quaker Newsletter

April 2026



Rejoice in the presence of children and young people in your meeting and recognize the gifts they bring. Remember that the meeting as a whole shares a responsibility for every child in its care. Seek for them as for yourself a full development of God's gifts and the abundant life Jesus tells us can be ours. How do you share your deepest beliefs with them, while leaving them free to develop as the spirit of God may lead them? Do you invite them to share their insights with you? Are you ready both to learn from them and to accept your responsibilities towards them?

Advices and Queries #19

Upcoming Events and Announcements

PSAC will meet on Monday, April 20 at 7:45 in our Zoom space. All are welcome to join!

The next meeting of the Reading Group will be on Sunday, April 26 at 7:30 p.m. in our Zoom space. Please contact Shirla (shirla766@gmail.com) to be added to the participant list.

Save the Date! Hamilton Monthly Meeting Retreat, May 29-31 at Camp NeeKauNis.

The next Meeting for Worship for Business will be held in person at the Meeting House on Sunday, May 3 at 12:30 p.m. You can also join us online on our regular Meeting Zoom link.



Vocal Ministry

by Beverly Shepard

Our meeting is greatly blessed by new attenders over the last few years, and especially recently: people who found our meeting and found that the Quaker way suits them. But unlike a typical Protestant church service, what constitutes Quaker worship and ministry is not immediately obvious. I have been asked by at least one newcomer how someone knows when to speak out of the silence, and what the purpose of speaking is. Having attended Hamilton Meeting for almost 50 years, I think I have a fairly clear idea of the when and what and how of vocal ministry. Nonetheless, I did a little poking around online. Here is advice on how to discern if you should speak, based on Quaker traditions and testimonies, and compiled (I think) by Friends General Conference:

In Quaker (Friends) worship, particularly in unprogrammed meetings (such as Hamilton MM) speaking is considered a "vocal ministry" that arises from a deep sense of spiritual prompting (or "leading") rather than from planned thought or debate. Determining when to speak involves inner reflection, testing, and sometimes overcoming fear to share a message intended for the whole community.

1. Test the Message (Discernment)

Before speaking, it is important to test if the urge arises from the Spirit or from your own ego or nervous energy.

Is it for me or for the meeting? Ask yourself if the message is a personal reflection or something meant to be shared for the benefit of the gathered group.

Is it necessary? A common Quaker phrase is to test if the message needs to be shared immediately, or if it can be held in silence. Some Friends follow a rule of thumb to only speak if they cannot hold the words in.

Does it fit the silence? The best ministry often arises from and returns to the silence, adding to the collective experience rather than breaking the atmosphere.

Is it timely? Avoid speaking in the first or last 10 minutes of a one-hour meeting to allow the meeting to settle and close properly.

2. Physical and Spiritual Sensations

For many, a true leading to speak is accompanied by physical sensations, as the ministry is "received" rather than invented.

A "Quaking" Experience: The name "Quaker" derives from the trembling or shaking that can accompany a strong, spirit-led message.

Physical Urgency: A persistent, (quickened) heartbeat, a buzz in the stomach, or a feeling that you must stand, even if you are terrified, can indicate a message meant to be delivered.

Mental Persistence: The same thought or phrase may return to your mind repeatedly, refusing to go away despite your attempts to let it pass.

3. Guidelines for Sharing

If you feel moved to speak, these guidelines help ensure the ministry is well-received:

Be brief and simple: The most effective ministry is often concise.

Do not debate: Ministry should not be a response to a previous speaker or a debate on a topic.

Stand if you can: Standing helps your voice reach everyone and signals that it is a formal piece of ministry. Speak clearly and loudly enough that everyone in the room will hear you.

Speak once: Generally, it is advised to only speak once per meeting.

Trust the process: If you are new or nervous, trust that a message truly meant for the meeting will be heard with love.

4. What if I Don't Speak?

Silence is worship: A completely silent meeting is not a failure; it is often considered deep, meaningful, and restful.

Holding is okay: If you are unsure, it is often better to hold the message in your heart. If it is truly from the Spirit, it may return at a later time or, if it was intended for someone else, that Friend may be prompted to say it instead.

"After-thought" meetings: Many Quaker meetings have a time for sharing after the formal, silent meeting has ended, which is a good place to share reflections that were not clearly a "leading" during the silence.

Ultimately, if you feel a strong, persistent nudge that you must speak, you are encouraged to do so.



The North Star Network

by Siân Bowen-Cole

I caught the social justice bug from my family at a young age. My grandfather organized miners in South Wales during the 1926 General Strike in Britain. My dad wrote countless letters to politicians, newspapers and organizations as a member of Amnesty International and as a person of deep faith who cared about humanity. I was probably about ten when my mother ripped up and shoved a flyer back into the hands of a member of the fascist National Front when we were shopping in town, telling him it was “rubbish.” I was both proud and terrified. He was too stunned to react. In my younger years I stood up for the underdog, spoke out in class and collected signatures for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

I have felt powerless watching the news as the world seems to be turning upside down and cruelty and suffering have become acceptable punishment for some. Pete Cross connected me with The North Star Network because I volunteer with Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC). The North Star Network is a Quaker organization which has revived the concept of the Underground Railroad to help people who need to leave the United States, because their constantly changing laws would result in them becoming illegal and vulnerable to arrest and deportation.

“Standing by people fleeing oppression has been part of the Quaker DNA for centuries. Friends have a tradition of aiding refugees and victims of persecution including enslaved people who came north on the underground railroad; members of the Jewish community, opponents of Hitler and displaced people during the Holocaust, as well as refugees and was victims in other countries across the globe.” - *The North Star Network* website

Initially, I was asked by T from the Network if we knew of anyone who could collect a family up from the Peace Bridge, at Fort Erie, and drive them to Toronto. Rather than find someone else, the obvious answer was that I could do this.

I was surprised by the strong and overwhelming emotions I felt, including a deep sense that I was doing the right thing. I wondered about Miep Gies who helped the Frank family, and about thousands more whose names are lost, who have selflessly assisted others out of the belief and compulsion that they had to do what was right. I had nothing to fear, but they did. I imagined that the Quakers who acted as conductors and guides, or hosts at way stations on the underground railroad were also consumed by a feeling that this was absolutely the right thing to do. I felt that compulsion too. As a Quaker I feel called to sit in silent worship, discern and also to act.

T provided me with all the information I would need, and one afternoon in November 2025, with my meeting holding me in the Light, I set out to pick up a family of four from the Newcomer Centre at Fort Erie.

I found my way to the newcomer building, parked and was welcomed in by R, who works there. Apparently it is not usual to allow people collecting newcomers to come in, but as this had all been arranged, and as I was not family, Canadian Border Services had given permission for me to wait inside.

The building is unique because there is a narrow entrance hall from the front door which leads to 2 doors opposite each other. One way for border security, the other for the newcomer centre. This is the only entry point in Canada that has both services in the same building. I was probably there about twenty minutes before the family came back from their interviews with Border Security. They were tired, relieved and happy. Their son was clutching his Woody from *Toy Story* who had been photographed along with the family, and Woody's picture had also been stamped, meaning he was official in Canada too. Woody soon had a new friend, Teddy, a gift from me.



The car was soon weighed down with the belongings the family had chosen from all of their possessions to begin their new life. We chatted on the journey and the son began to fully understand that Canada was his new home and they wouldn't be going back to the United States.

His family had discovered about a month earlier, when the US Administration had ended the Temporary Protected Status for Venezuelans, that their papers would not be renewed and they would become illegal in the country where their son had been born and where they worked. Their biggest fear was that, in their case, they had no option to go anywhere other than Venezuela (since their passports had expired because there is no Venezuelan embassy available). At the same time, their son, as a US citizen, cannot enter Venezuela without a visa, and there is no way to apply for one due to the lack of an embassy. So essentially, it would have meant an inevitable family separation. The adults in the family would be illegal in the USA from the night after we met at the Peace Bridge. They would be in danger in Venezuela if they returned. The child's response to what was happening was disbelief that leaders could not see that people are just people and to treat everyone with respect.

I know people are not statistics; thousands of people have been affected by the current US Administration, detained, deported or disappeared, and killed by ICE. When I think of this small family of loving, gentle, kind people with their bright, happy son, it puts faces to the atrocities being committed against people who are simply trying to make a living, raise their children and contribute to society. We are all geographical accidents of our birthplace. Some of us are privileged, others are not.

Not long after I returned from this journey someone asked me if I would do it again. My response -- in a heart beat! For more information, or if you would like to help, please check out <https://www.thenorthstarnetwork.com> .

Struggle to Find the Words

Hesychia

by Sheldon H. Clark

Don't worry. The struggle in a Friends' Meeting for Worship to find words to express one's deep inner encounter with the Divine is an ancient one. Greek philosophers identified the condition: "Essentially, *hesychia* is the 'work done within' to reach a state of deep rest, allowing for constant remembrance of God."¹ Quakers unwittingly applied the concept, not only to themselves, but also to the Meeting for Worship as a whole.

George Fox was not a scholar and would not have known the Greek term when he famously had a revelation that transformed his life. Throughout his life, Fox was a model for contemplative worship and preaching. It appeared he was never at a loss for words and highly respectful of quietude.

George Fox was fortunate in enjoying the benefit of the classically trained Robert Barclay (1648-1690), who was able to "interpret" the Quaker experience of "*hesychia*," as "the Seed," the "Inner Light," the "Christ Within," to their more academically trained contemporaries. Barclay wrote: "For, when I came into the silent assemblies of God's people, I felt a secret power among them, which touched my heart; and as I gave way unto it, I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up."² Barclay captures the essence of "*hesychia*." He experienced the spirit of what Friends refer to as "a gathered" or "covered" Meeting for Worship in which the attitude of those gathered creates a sensation of holiness. Individuals in gathered worship generate a collective wholeness of "deep rest, allowing for constant remembrance of God."

Friends General Conference (FGC) offered the following advice about speaking in an unprogrammed Meeting for Worship.

1 https://www.google/search?=hesychia+meaning&rlz=1C1GCEA_enCA915CA915&oq=%

2 <https://silentassemblies.wordpress.com/2015/09/05/quaker-and-hesychast-slight-return/>

“Many who are new to Quakerism wonder if they should speak in meeting for worship. Experienced Friends have found that some messages coming to them during meeting are for sharing immediately while others are for personal reflection or for sharing on another occasion. Ideally, spoken messages in meeting for worship come from one’s experience and are prompted by the Spirit. Often, those led to speak in meeting for worship find themselves powerfully moved. The name “Quaker” became attached to early Friends when George Fox told a judge that he should tremble at the word of the Lord. The name stuck because it accurately described the Quaker experience of ministry, in which speaking from a deep sense of leading can leave one trembling or shaken, overcome with a feeling of awe.

Today members of the Religious Society of Friends refer to themselves interchangeably as “Friends” or “Quakers.” So that they can reflect upon each spoken message, Friends try to allow a time of silence after each message. Sometimes a later message builds on an earlier one, but messages are not challenged, discussed, or debated in subsequent vocal ministry, as this would interrupt expectant waiting. Sometimes a Friend will describe a message from a meeting for worship as one which “spoke to my condition,” meaning that the message addressed his or her needs.

As valuable as the vocal ministry is, Friends also value the silence of expectant waiting because it allows them to listen for God’s leadings in their lives. As breaking the silence to give a message in meeting is a weighty matter, Friends who are moved to speak tend to do so with humility, with a scarcity of words, and are enjoined from speaking more than once in the same meeting for worship. Corporate worship is so important to Friends that even children and babies attend part or all of meeting for worship.”³

3 *Exploring Quakerism: A Study Guide, Participant's Edition* by Marsha D. Holliday, 2006, Quaker Press of FGC, p.8. used by permission.
<https://www.fgcquaker.org/exercises/how-do-quakers-know-when-to-speak-during-worship/>

Stephen Cary (1915-2002) was an integral part of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) between 1946 and 1969. He led the orientation for forty Conscientious Objectors going to diverse countries at Pendle Hill in the summer of 1964. I was there preparing to go to India. He asked us to remember that each of us was going to find ourselves stereotyped as westerners. The truth of this statement came home to me, when I was living in a small village in South India. Villagers wondered why I was there? My work was as a rural development worker and English teacher. "Did I know JFK?" "Sorry, no, not personally." Clearly, I was not a Sannyasi wearing saffron robes and not a miracle worker. In fact, I was quite human. I self-identified as a Gandhian. Most people understood.

Failure is not final. It is better to try and be found wanting, than not to try at all. Vulnerability is not weakness. Openness to suggestion is important. Friendliness includes forgiveness. Quakers are seekers of Truth wanting to experience the rest, the love, and peace of acceptance. Worshipful silence is restorative. Friends attend Meeting for Worship to enter into the great mystery of the unknown and be amazingly surprised.

"We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time."⁴
"Essentially, *hesychia* is the 'work done within' to reach a state of deep rest, allowing for constant remembrance of God." Occasionally, we are inspired to share our experience of an encounter with the Divine.

The inner struggle to speak or not to speak never ends.



4 Eliot, Thomas Stearns. "Little Gidding" in *The Four Quarters*, 1909, London: Faber, p. 59, lines 239-242.

A Reflection

by Beverly Shepard

As I sat in meeting for worship one recent First Day I was looking at the small plant that sat in a pot on the little table in front of me. I thought about that little plant. It wasn't making a great deal of difference to the world by itself, but plants as a group – and they are a huge one – are not just important but essential to the functioning of our world as a place where many kinds of living things co-exist.

While I regarded the little plant, my thought drifted around the idea of our relationship with plants, and I found myself thinking of the Pando Clone. I learned of this remarkable being some years ago and was amazed and humbled. Aspen trees, as you may know, reproduce not only by the traditional method of making seeds which can grow into new plants, but also by spreading root underground, giving rise to new trees, which become full-sized, complete, but connected to and genetically identical to the parent tree. An entire forest can be such a creature, known as a clone. The Pando aspen clone in Utah is considered the world's largest living organism. It occupies 106 acres with some 47,000 stems (individual tree trunks) and weighs about 13 million pounds. It is over 16,000 years old, perhaps as old as 80,000 years. This astounds and delights me.

And it is dying. Why? How can this be? How can a living being that large, that old, constantly growing, be dying? It is due to a combination of factors, for all of which human beings are at least partly responsible. The Pando Clone is, on balance, not regenerating itself. The older trees are dying off faster than new ones can grow. This decline is primarily driven by overgrazing by deer and cattle, who eat the young, tender trees preferentially. Cattle, of course, are put into the picture by people. It used to be legal, if regulated, to graze cattle in the Pando Clone but it was made illegal in 2024. Deer have been there always, but their grazing is now much more widespread and intense because people have been killing off their natural predators, cougars, wolves, and black bears, for

generations. These damages are compounded by climate change, in particular drought, which we all know is driven by human development.

We need to change. As a society, or rather as a huge range of societies all over the world, we have to do better. If someone thinks our species is not endangering our planet, introduce them to the Pando Clone. Quick, while it still exists.



About this Newsletter / Submission Guidelines

This Newsletter is a monthly publication of news and announcements relevant to Hamilton Quakers.

It is also a venue for members and attenders to share creative works or articles they have written on subjects that may be of interest to our Quaker community. As a general guideline we are looking for submissions that are inspirational and related to Quaker concerns, as well as announcements and news. Members and Attenders are encouraged to submit works for the newsletter.

Requests for newsletter items are announced after Meeting for Worship and/or via email during the week before Meeting for Worship for Business. They are due by the Friday before Business Meeting. Submission of materials implies permission to publish. Copyright for original material resides with the author.

If the person submitting the article is unknown to the editor or if there are questions as to whether the article will be appropriate for the Quaker newsletter, the editor will consult with the clerk(s) who will together discern what will be included. Written permission to publish must be obtained from the copyright holder if a submission is not the original work of the submitter, unless the works are in the public domain, or are covered under the creative commons license.

Hamilton Meeting reserves the right to edit submissions for length or content in consultation with the authors. Please limit submissions to a maximum of 750 words. When opinion pieces are included a line will be added indicating "Submissions reflect the opinions of their authors, and not necessarily of Hamilton Monthly Meeting".

Submissions should be directed to the current editor, Siân Reid, daywitch@gmail.com.

We acknowledge the land upon which Hamilton Friends Meeting House is located as the shared traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg, protected by the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt covenant. This historic peace agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy, the Ojibwe, and allied nations represents a commitment to share and protect the land, water, plants, and animals, with respect. It is the privilege of Hamilton Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) to share in the tradition of stewardship of this land, which has been the environment of human beings in this territory for thousands of years. We honour the original Peoples of this land and express a commitment to and gratitude for the opportunity to work together toward restorative justice and reconciliation.