

Query 4: Harmony within the Meeting

Winter 2009 Response

Part 1 Deepening our relationships; gender differences

There are a number of doors and entrances into knowing one another more deeply. One doorway is having a shared commitment and understanding that we are seeking and following Divine guidance. As a worship group, we share that commitment. Having that shared focus can be a foundation of how we get to know each other, including our time together at Meetings for Worship for Business, serving on committees together, participating in retreats, and attending other informal interactions away from our worship.

Another doorway is to eat together. Eating is a form of communion, of coming to a table and breaking bread. These times of communion give adults the opportunity to interact with the children and allows the children to interact with adults other than their parents.

During our time together, our gender differences cannot be separated completely from other factors like culture and orientation as we relate to each other. Neither can the depth or shallowness of relating to each other be simplified to just being about gender. Gender socializations are laid aside as we come into worship and simply are with one another in the Presence of God, without expectations of how we might interact with each other or what our world view or place in the world is "supposed" to be.

How important it is to enter through the doorway and share in a safe space of silence, to wait on the Divine! How important it is to take the blessings we receive from the corporate worship and translate them into work and service that we are meant to bring to the wider world!

Part 2 Honesty and kindness; avoid topics for the sake of unity

The most emotionally sensitive topic we are facing as a worship group currently is about which yearly meeting to affiliate with. We've been very willing to talk with each other about affiliation but less willing to act quickly as a group. The advice said something about reconciling differences--"When differences arise, they should not be ignored for the sake of superficial unity. We believe disagreements which might divide or disrupt a meeting can be resolved through human effort and divine grace..." So when we affiliate, we must find the integrity within ourselves to keep to our spiritual path rather than turning towards one that might appear to be more comfortable.

But the things we avoid for the sake of unity aren't because of *differences* among us but because of our *homogeneity*--things that are outside the worship group in terms of class, race, etc. and we avoid engaging with *those* topics. Conflict is an opportunity for us to see flaws in our spirit. If we were working more as a worship group in the broader world, we'd

experience more conflict and therefore we'd have more opportunities for growth and for deepening our relationships among us.

Part 3 Forgiving spirit; look to that of God in ourselves and address that of God in those with whom we disagree

The query seems to ask the wrong question. The commandment is there, to forgive, but the deeper question is how to forgive when we truly disagree. It's a practice; we just work on it. That deeper relationship that we have with one another enables us to keep the relationship in tact while we struggle and while we also seek the shared common ground.

For some of us, when we were exposed to our first serious conflict among Quakers, we found ourselves drawn further in, because we could see the honesty on the part of everyone involved.

In Laughing Waters, we seem to have a fairly accommodating style--we don't "have it out." Part of that is rightly ordered--to set aside our own egos. Some of it is the culture of our group: we're afraid we'll offend each other and some of us *don't* say what God has given us. We don't draw each other out as much as we could, even if there may not be huge things to uncover. It's just that we don't always say what we really want to, what we've been given to say.

Like when coming to a new group of people, we each must consider how much of ourselves to share or not. The more we risk, the more we deepen the relationship, potentially. That might lead to more honesty--and subsequently to more conflict. It's also exciting to go deeply enough for that conflict to emerge.

Risk is involved when deepening relationships, when working through disagreements, when speaking honestly, and when seeking forgiveness. It seems easy to look for that of God in each other, and we wonder if we look deeply enough at that of God in ourselves.