

Reflective Paper, School of the Spirit, November 2008

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Statement of Faith

I came to the School of the Spirit program primarily thinking of myself as a Buddhist-Quaker. I felt that compassion for all beings in the Universe went right along side of the testimonies of peace, integrity, simplicity, community and equality that I endeavor to follow as a Quaker. The meditation I have followed for many years is a guided meditation in a Tibetan manner. When I applied to the School of the Spirit, I wanted to learn more about Christ and the Bible, to which I had been exposed as a Presbyterian growing up, but never really incorporated into my adult life. However, a number of years ago, around the time I took a FGC Gathering workshop on Edgar Cayce, I began internally praying the Twenty-Third Psalm as part of all of my meditations.

Throughout the "On Being a Spiritual Nurturer" program, I have learned to love to read the Bible, especially the Gospels, but also Revelation and the writings of Paul and the Gospel of John. These stories are alive for me! Sometimes Jesus or another apostle speaks directly to me. This is in the best tradition of *Lectio Divina*, which I learned about in the residency: reading passages prayerfully and slowly for meaning. The Psalms continue to give me peace and I have even read the story of Job in the Old Testament.

However, an insight came to me as I was preparing for my second year Research paper. I had wonderful sources, but one book by Thich Naht Hahn, Anger: Wisdom for Cooling the Flames deeply spoke to me about the non-duality of experiencing conflict and forgiveness. It is clear to me that the hurt that engenders the need for forgiveness is on both sides of the equation. Mindfully approaching forgiveness and even reconciliation as oneness is an aspiration for me, with God's help.

Throughout the two years of the program, I have felt that my very core has been broken open. The pains and hurts of childhood have been washed clean, the insecurities and low self-esteem have been shown as the distractions they are. I have been able to laugh at myself and others in a loving way. And I have learned to listen to the lives of others in a loving way, and have felt the favor lovingly returned.

At this point in my life, I have recently gotten a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer. From the first, I felt very free. I knew that God was with me and in every cell in my body, that there were no good cells or bad cells. God is in the entire universe, in the winds, snows, smiles of children, sorrows and pain, animals and the creepy crawly things of the earth. God has just given this to me as another challenge, never leaving me alone one moment. I see no duality between death and life, enabling me to potentially live each day afresh. I say potentially because distractions,

responsibilities, and worries do rob me of the freshness of a day, at times. So I see that I have rather come full circle. I am still a Buddhist-Quaker with a Gospel understanding of Christ's teaching and example for our lives.

Discernment of My Gifts

I have come to realize that I have a unique attitude to my diagnosis of cancer. I am joyful, and I want to spread joy to others wherever I go. I see many worried and sad people in the Cancer Center where I have been receiving treatment, and I try to smile and speak to everyone. Not everyone is ready for such joy. I have longer conversations with the women in the waiting room for radiation therapy so I have listened to their stories, sympathized with their troubles, encouraged them as best as I can. In the same way, I have visited with friends and also tried to listen and spread light and joy to them as well.

After having practiced law for 18 years, I know how distressed people can get over their own problems. I am only dealing with clients over the telephone for the time being, but I often see the self-centered folks getting more upset about their particular issues, whereas the good-hearted folks just call to wish me well or to pass on information. It has always been a challenge to spread joy to legal clients who have so many problems. Deep down I know that no matter how bad their problem seems to them, I can listen with God's help to assist them in fashion a solution.

Another gift that I have discerned is in the forgiveness area. In studying and incorporating so much of the process of forgiveness for my Research Paper, I realize that I have a real life present-day issue in my family that has been unfolding. My father's brother, my uncle was married to a woman who had epilepsy. She lost several children before she finally had one daughter who is 11 years younger than me. Because my aunt had difficulties and could not drive, my cousin was brought up by her father and my grandparents. This aunt died 2 years ago and my uncle, in his late 70's started dating women. My cousin went absolutely ballistic. I talked with her around that time and she was upset that her father got a cell phone and a sports car. She actually scared off one woman who she would not allow in the hospital when my uncle was in for a medical procedure. Then later, my uncle met a nice woman and married her, and the fireworks got a lot worse. My cousin has never let the wife into her house in Atlanta to meet her husband or children. She insults the wife to my uncle's face. He is a very sweet, mild mannered man and is very hurt by all of this. Now she has gotten one of the children to write an ugly letter to the wife, which hurt my uncle terribly.

My husband and I used to visit this cousin in Atlanta on our way down to see my family in Mobile. Lately I have avoided visiting her. Now I wonder if I can be any kind of conduit between these people whom I both love. I would like to listen to the cousin and hear what is truly bothering her, without being judgmental. (Can I do that?) It is clear that she is hurting and is only hurting herself and her family by acting this way. I have already done some listening to

my uncle and his wife. What can I teach them about forgiveness that I have learned? Living by example is difficult when it is with people you have known all your life, and with whom you have been playing certain roles.

In my law practice, I have already tried to incorporate forgiveness. I handle divorces and separating couples, and I try to suggest marriage counseling if it seems appropriate. When a person feels victimized by someone or some company, I try to listen to their feelings, even if the only relief I may be able to get for them is monetary. In my Research Paper, one of the authors made it clear that forgiveness does not flow from corporations.

Reflection on 2007-2008

As our residencies come to a close, I can only say that I am a changed person. Up until the time that the medical profession has been calling the shots in my day-to-day life, I was enjoying daily meditation, journaling, and primarily spiritual reading. That was a large change from the fiction reading that I loved previously, and the many community and Quaker activities I was involved in. This has truly been a sabbatical, but I have not taken it alone. My dear companions in my K-group, including my Core Teacher and others in the program have walked with me, cried with me, healed me, prodded me, and generally helped me shape into the new person I now am.

Now that I am going through oncology and radiation treatments, they involve a lot of waiting time, so I have been reading some fictions books. I still journal a good bit, including dream journals, with the use of a small journal that one School of the Spirit gave me as a gift last residency. I am sleeping much better, so I can meditate more clearly now.

I have seen something happen in my Worship Group that I hoped for but never expected. The group is now getting organized and exploring whether to become a preparatory meeting, or a meeting on our own. We have discerned some decisions, but some of our attenders do not know unprogrammed Quaker process, having come from programmed meetings. I am holding the Worship Group in the light so that we will proceed according to God's will.

The love and care and good wishes that I get from everyone in the program touch me to my very core. The tangible beautiful gifts that people made me bring their presence to mind every time I see them. The cards and emails are wonderful, as are the telephone calls from K-group members telling me of their lives and asking about mine. I feel very blessed.