



a ministry of prayer and learning devoted to  
*the School of the Spirit*

*is dedicated to helping all who wish to be more faithful listeners  
and responders to the inward work of Christ.*

**Epistle**

From the Eighth Class of the *On Being a Spiritual Nurturer* Program  
May 22, 2011

To Friends Everywhere,

Two years ago, 23 women and men arrived at Avila Retreat Center in Durham NC to form the eighth Class of the School of the Spirit Ministry's *On Being a Spiritual Nurturer* program. We came from diverse backgrounds: most of us from unprogrammed liberal and conservative meetings and some from other branches of Quakerism or the Episcopal Church. All of us came with a deep commitment to strengthen our understanding of God, which we call by many names or no name. We also came with a diversity of belief and vocabulary, expecting to explore them together. We could not have anticipated that each of us would emerge from the program so transformed.

Extensive readings in Quaker literature, Bible passages, and writings from a variety of faith traditions provided the background knowledge for each residency. With the guidance of our core teachers and visiting teachers and ministers, we have explored how to translate unfamiliar or difficult language and concepts in the context of our individual beliefs and experiences. With our shared stories we have met and learned from each other. Like Jacob with the angel, we have wrestled with hard things and held each other in times of grief and loss. We have grappled with spiritual disciplines, Christian vocabulary and symbols, our Quaker past and present, and the wisdom of other faith traditions. We have been challenged and stretched.

This was both head and heart work. Worship permeated each residency: We began each day with an hour of worship and worship was woven into the fabric of our life together. Reflection papers and projects, periodic self and group exams, and times spent in our smaller Koinonia groups have helped us begin to heal all that has prevented our growing more fully into being the people God created us to be. Our care committees at home held us in prayer and bridged the space between residencies. We have laughed until our sides ached and wept in each other's arms. We have sung, danced, walked the labyrinth, and delighted in the beauty of nature. We have learned to trust each other in our vulnerability, to accompany one another on our journeys, and to name and celebrate the small victories. We have each been changed.

Two years later, we leave the program, but not the School of the Spirit. Together we have explored what ministry is, what gifts we each have to share, and what our faith communities might need from us. We have a deeper and holier appreciation of our diversity, as well as the common ground we can stand on. We bring you the joy we have found in the Blessed Community we have formed and the compassion we have experienced as we learned to listen beneath the words and to be companions for one another. The good news we bring is that we are all held and grounded in God's love. Out of that grows the fruit of the spirit as well as compassion, unity within diversity, and interconnectedness, even as we walk our own paths. We leave with our hearts tender and broken open: opened so that we can give and receive the Love we have felt and shared.

In that Spirit of Love,

*On Being a Spiritual Nurturer*  
Eighth Class

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