



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.*

REPORT
THE WAY OF MINISTRY, SECOND RESIDENCY
BY MICHAEL WAJDA, PERSON-OF-PRESENCE
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Dear Friends,

I just returned from the second residency of The Way of Ministry program. God was ever present. Faithfulness abounds.

The teachers, elders, and participants are all on a significant journey of nurturing ministry in the Religious Society of Friends, and beyond. I'd like to offer a few glimpses into the experience that I shared with them this past week, so that we as a board can continue to hold this important program in our prayers and support.

The themes of this residency were projections, consolation and desolation in ministry, resistance and yielding to God, the prophetic tradition, pitfalls in ministry, "the refiner's fire," and "Holiness: The Quaker understanding of Christian perfection." The participants are fully engaged through readings, reflection papers, evaluations, and self-examinations for each residency. Every participant is also part of a peer group of ministers that meets for two hours each day. There are five peer groups, with twenty-two participants. The peer groups take turns serving as "shepherds," one group for each residency.

The shepherds serve as a worship and ministry, care and counsel, and hospitality committee for the residency. This includes things such as snacks between sessions, opening and closing worship, when it is not with the full Pendle Hill community, noticing the flow of sessions and providing feedback to teachers, such as the need for a "light and lively." The teachers identify the schedule and types of epilogue in advance and invite specific pairs of participants to plan and lead the epilogues each evening. The epilogue is offered as a varying form of closing worship; during this residency they included scripture reading, song, dance, or individual sharing followed by silent worship. On one evening the shepherds offered an epilogue in lamentation. Friends entered fully into this experience, crying out loud to God to hasten unto us and not to forget the suffering and downtrodden. It was very powerful.

Since there are four residencies and five peer groups, one of the groups was asked to serve as "virtual shepherds" to help to keep the group connected between the residencies. These virtual shepherds have encouraged greater participation on the group's list serve, which is a place for worship-sharing contributions about what is happening to participants at home and in their ministries. Another list serve is being offered as a place to dialogue about the readings between residencies. Getting on this list serve is fully voluntary and will be maintained by one of the participants. Another virtual connector will be a Google calendar for prayer requests. When someone is traveling or preparing to serve in the ministry while in the program, they can post the dates and Friends will hold them in prayer.

Near the end of the residency, there was considerable discussion about each participant's care committee. Some are working well, some are struggling, and most care committees are being educated about the details and importance of supporting Friends called to ministry in this way. During the residency, the teachers distributed a list of "advices" to care committees that address:

- * Be willing to accompany Friends in places of desolation and fear.
- * Remember that God sends Friends to minister to the wounded and to places of brokenness.
- * Be open to supporting leadings that may take Friends into uncomfortable or risky territory.
- * Mirror to Friends the ways that you see God acting, speaking, shining, loving, and serving through them.

One participant spoke about her experiences with her care committees over many years and participants in the program then created additional advices that could be given to their care committees.

As the person of presence from the board, I sat in on all the teacher and elder team meetings. This gave me an up close and personal view of the labor these teachers and elders have been and are doing to birth this new program through The School of the Spirit for the Religious Society of Friends. The depth of prayer, intensity of labor, faithfulness, and absolute guidance by the Living Presence were palpable throughout the residency. Having been around when Sonnie Cronk and Kathryn Damiano were birthing the Spiritual Nurturers Program, I was reminded of the intensity of such an experience and given to feel immense gratitude and prayerfulness for the faithfulness and labors of these founding teachers. The service of the elders is extraordinary and so completely needed. I was deeply grateful to be present and to be carrying the prayers and caring of the board.

There were a couple of additional extraordinary moments that gathered the body into a place of absolute vulnerability, listening, and prayerfulness. Near the residency's midpoint, one of the teachers tearfully got down on her knees praying for God to "bring us home". The body was gathered in support and caring. In another session one of the teachers shared the story of her journey in ministry, which included negotiating with God, submission, and being invited by Jesus to join him on the cross. Her first response was "Yuk." Then, she relinquished and joined Christ. Instead of pain what she found was "sweetness" that consoled her. Jesus gathered up her current suffering and her past sufferings and she was changed. In this experience Christ joined her more than she joined him. You could hear a pin drop in the large room of Brinton House as she was sharing this story. I was taken to a place of deep gratitude and prayer.

When the vision for The Way of Ministry program was being developed, one of its primary objectives was seen to be the further maturation of those living into a call to ministry. What I witnessed and experienced at this second residency confirms that this vision and the labors of these teachers and elders, as well as the board of the School of the Spirit, is truly fulfilling this significant vision now. Praise be to God.

Respectfully submitted,
Michael Wajda