
THE CONSERVATIVE FRIEND

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What Is Worship?

What is worship? Is it true that “everything is worship,” as is sometimes asserted among unprogrammed Friends? One-word definitions of “worship” include “love,” “esteem,” “adoration,” and similar words. However, Friends’ activity in meeting for worship is both more focused and more active than those single words suggest. One could consider monotheistic religious worship the state of heightened reverent awareness of and responsiveness to God. Furthermore, we who practice Christian unprogrammed Friends’ worship understand that we enter into worship without plans concerning what course the worship will or should take, and that we expect to be drawn into worship through the work of Jesus Christ within us.

Worship is a very basic human activity, stretching across history and cultures. People have found many ways to heighten their awareness of God. Some natives of the American Southwest have used peyote. Many people (e.g., Roman Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Hindus) use incense. Catholics also use repetition of liturgy, organ music, and choirs. Protestants use intellectual or emotional preaching and hymn singing. Many modern Evangelicals use praise bands. Sufi Muslims use whirling dances, as did the Shakers. Various groups use sunrise services or other experiences of nature. Representatives of any of those groups are likely to say that their practices bring them into closer awareness of God.

George Fox, deeply disappointed by the practices of the Church of 17th C England, urged people to heed Jesus’ words: “...the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth....God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.” (John 4: 23-24) Thus Conservative Friends eschew most outward practices, seeking to provide an environment that allows us to enter directly into the spiritual. Our claim is not that singing or a sunrise can never lead us into worship – into heightened awareness of and responsiveness to God – but rather that sitting quietly with one another in focused corporate expectation of Christ’s presence in our midst

is a more reliable and direct way to that awareness. It is, of course, possible to sit alone in expectation of Christ’s presence, but most Friends find that, in the long run, they have more powerful experiences of worship when they gather with others. Thus, a “gathered” meeting is one in which the worshippers find their heightened awareness of God’s presence bringing them into deep unity. As we come into that unity in Christ, our individualism is dulled; while we do not lose our differences, they become much less important. We each feel a sense of Truth that is both intensely personally relevant and at the same time over all of us. As Fox wrote in his 43rd Epistle, “All meet together everywhere, and in your meetings wait upon the Lord. And take heed of forming words, but mind the Power, and know that which is Eternal, which will keep you all in unity, walking in the Spirit, and will let you see the Lord near you and among you.”

We can “mind the Power” and “be still in that which is pure” (another Foxian phrase), but as human beings we can do no more than prepare the way. We cannot bring ourselves fully into worship by our own efforts, for, as Jesus said, “No man cometh unto the Father but by me.” (John 14:6) We trust Jesus to guide our worship, individually and corporately, minute by minute. As we grow in that trust, we become sensitized to Christ’s direct spiritual work within and among us.

When, through the work of Christ within us, we come into the glory and power of God’s presence, we then find ourselves called, even propelled, into response. There are many ways of responding: prayer, praise, song, insight, a feeling of brokenness, confession, repentance, commitment, and more. Some may occur together, such as a song of praise. Most of those responses may be either felt privately or given aloud to, or on behalf of, everyone gathered.

We use the term “ministry” to refer to that public, vocal responding to God’s presence and direction

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Scheduled Meetings for Worship

(For worship at OYM monthly meetings see www.ohioyearlymeeting.org)

Meeting	Location	Contact Person	Contact Information	Meeting Schedule
Athens Christian Friends	Athens, Greece	Themistoklis Papaioannou	papathem@gmail.com; P.O. Box 21121, Athens 11410, Greece	Weekly / First Days, 5 PM
Chatahoochee Friends Worship Group	Atlanta, Georgia	Scott King	770-315-9478; a_lang@bellsouth.net	Call or email for info
Crossroads	Michigan: Flint, White Lake, Lansing	Phil Helms	248-360-2074; admin@ michiganquakers.org	Weekly / First Days
Friends Gathering in Jesus Christ	Evanston, IL (near Chicago)	Robert Hopper	847-733-7226 ; friendrobert61@sbcglobal.net	Twice a month / 2nd and 4th Seventh Days
Goshen	Scone, Scotland	Paul Thompson	UK # 01738 620688; Book- seeker@blueyonder.co.uk	Twice a month / 1st & 3rd First Days
Greenwich	London, England	Simon Watson	simonw@quaker.org.uk	Weekly / First Days
Richland/Ashland Friends	Loudonville, Ohio	Scott Savage	419-368-9419 (leave message)	Monthly / 2nd First Day
Ripley Christian Quakers	Ripley, Derbyshire,UK	Mike Wake- field	UK # 01773-541424 Rcquakers@lomaxes.me.uk	Weekly First Days, 10:30 AM
Salisbury	Salisbury, Maryland	Kye Parsons	410-749-8221 kyeparsons@hotmail.com	Weekly First Days, 1:30 PM
	Little Falls, New York	Geoff Gilmore	315-823-0616 geoff@gsgilmore.com	Monthly / 3rd Fifth Day

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during worship. Rightly led ministry serves to heighten other the other worshippers' awareness of God – of God's active presence, of God's work as recorded in Scripture, and/or of what we Friends believe about God. Ministry that is not in response to God's immediate leading is likely to heighten listeners' awareness not of God but of the human speaker or of some controversial topic, and it is likely not to be very spiritually helpful.

Any form or particular session of worship can be spiritually empty, failing to heighten our awareness of God. Sometimes errant ministry blocks our focus on God. Often we are distracted by details of our ongoing lives. If we are not in a state of heightened awareness of God, we are not worshipping God, no matter how socially, intellectually, or even doctrinally worthy our actual thoughts are.

Worship in the Name of Jesus

At Mount Kerazim, Jesus set up a new worship, a worship which was to be in spirit and truth. *A time is coming and has now come when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers that the Father seeks. God is Spirit, and his worshippers must worship him in spirit and truth.* (John 4:23,24) God's true worship is in the spirit, so we first wait to be given God's spirit.

It begins with an expectant waiting upon the Lord, for Him to reveal Himself in our hearts. As we gather together, we wait to feel the presence of God's only Son, Jesus Christ, among us, so that we may be led, taught, and guided by him, both as individual people and also as a group. We base this on Jesus' promise that *where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them..* (Matthew 18:20)

The central message of the New Testament is that Jesus Christ has come; and God has sent Him to be an everlasting prophet to us, and we are to hear Him in all things. God said: *This is my beloved Sonlisten to him.* (Matthew 17:5) This worship is not something optional for Christians, nor should it be limited to any denomination. If we are to obey

When, in contrast, we experience a "favored" or "useful" time of worship, we easily recognize its difference from the dull, the empty, or the mundane. Sometimes one Friend is sensitized to another worshipper's heightened awareness of God. Often, in comparing experiences after meeting, many of the people present will agree in their assessment of the spiritual depth or vitality of the worship.

Simply sitting in quiet thought together for an hour is not worship, nor, of itself, is any other daily or special activity. To be in worship we must be drawn into awareness of and responsiveness to the presence of God.

Susan Smith

Susan lives with her husband Jack near Harrisonburg, Virginia. They are members of Rockingham MM (Ohio YM).

God's command to hear His Son in all things, then we must gather together and wait to receive Jesus in our midst as a living prophet and teacher. Here is no magic formula; true worship is a gift from God, bestowed on those who humble themselves, and wait patiently for His Son.

We know that Jesus is among us by the work He does within our individual hearts - and among us as His people. Jesus may move some of us to preach, sing, or pray aloud. Or it could be that we will be asked to do something like heal or comfort each other.

Whatever we are asked to do, we should respond to Christ's prompting in our hearts. This is the beginning of all true ministry and the way Christ bestows His spiritual gifts among His people, His Church. If anyone is not sure if they are being led by Christ to do something, then they must wait; the leading, if true, will become stronger. It is as we present our bodies, minds, and spirits as a living sacrifice to God's service, that our worship becomes real.

Allistair Lomax

Allistair lives with his wife Gillian and their four children in Fritchley, England. He is an affiliate member of Rockingham MM (Ohio YM) and worships with Ripley Christian Quakers.

Called Together in Worship

Christ calls us together to worship God in Spirit and in Truth. It is a testimony to His authority that we gather, more than any decision of ours to be in a certain place at a certain time.

Christ promises to be with us when we meet in His name and tells us to ask God for what we need, in His name. It is important that we know what "in His name" means. It is not that we simply call ourselves His people, get together, and voice requests. In Jewish culture, within which Jesus taught during His mortal ministry, to invoke a name is to invoke the power behind that name. Therefore, when we meet to worship, we surrender our own will and purpose to that of our Shepherd, Christ.

Our Shepherd calls each of us by name and draws us into the fold. In that safety we wait in silence. It is not a vacant, listless silence, if we let go of our concerns and busy thoughts, even thoughts about things which we have convinced ourselves need praying about! The physical silence becomes, under that steadying, divine hand, a deep, worshipful stillness.

In that stillness we are prepared to feel God's Holy Spirit at work amongst us. It is this Spirit which gathers us together, and which takes over the ordering of the worship.

Someone may be moved to speak or preach, which

is an uplifting experience, both for speaker and listener; far more so than any prepared sermon, how ever instructive. Someone may be moved to pray out loud, praying in the grip of the Holy Spirit. This is true prayer, far more so than following a pattern of words or the direction of a human authority would be. The Spirit may bring someone to his or her feet to praise or sing. That person will have said to God, "Open Thou my lips," as did the psalmist, which is far more praise than following a hymn number on a board.

This meeting together for worship, our first testimony to Christ's leadership of our lives, leads to all our other testimonies by which we bear witness to His authority.

As we have been gathered, so we are eventually allowed to go. The worship ends and we return to other things. What we take with us from our meeting is the knowledge that Christ is our constant guide, the Light that shines upon all who enter the world. Worship continues throughout our daily lives, maybe at a different level, making us His disciples, His friends, the living stones of His church.

Paul Thompson

Paul, his wife Stephanie, and their daughter Ruth live in Perth, Scotland. Paul is an affiliate member of Rockingham MM (Ohio YM) and worships at Goshen Meeting.

Advice

In your meetings for worship, be earnestly concerned to enter reverently into communion with God. Come with minds and hearts prepared. Yield yourselves up to the influence of the Divine Presence so that you may find the evil in you weakening and the good raised up. God calls each one to the service of the meeting. Be obedient and faithful, whether by word or silent prayerful waiting; and be ready to receive the message of others in a tender spirit.

4th Advice, Ohio Yearly Meeting *Book of Discipline*

In the Stillness I Find You

In the stillness I find you.
 No words needed, the calm envelopes me
 As I settle down into the living, breathing silence.
 Breath in, breath out, let go, let God...
 For the countless time this day,
 this week, this year,
 This lifetime.
 Body and spirit at odds,
 Conflicting jobs asked of the mind.
 As common interlace it interprets, directs, protects,
 I'm caught in the fray of clashing commands
 Regarding survival. First breath and last,
 The bookends of
 Our lives,
 The dash between the dates
 On birth to death records, Mere hiccups,
 Blimps on the screen, And yet your love presses on,
 Cranks out copious life.
 Your essence
 Permeates
 All.
 No boundaries of skin,
 No without and within. All of one fabric.
 Just variant qualities, properties, Every detail so present,
 Doing its thing, Flowing through time.
 And change is the constant.
 Conscious and thrilled
 And terrified and
 Numbed.
 And if I didn't have
 You in which to anchor my being
 I can't imagine how terrifying the drift would be.
 Untethered, eternal... aloneness... and wondering...
 Wash me in the sea of your selfless love,
 Bathe me in the beauty of your light.
 Gather me up in your tender mercy
 And take to your heart of hearts,
 My song of love and adoration,
 My absolute eternal trust in your plan for me.
 Respite
 From the seductive.
 Compelling drama of everyday
 Life. Ever-vigilant, mind never at rest, taking a
 Break from the unconscious tyranny of
 Wanting to always figure it out, of
 Thinking I am in control.
 Reality check available
 at any moment.
 "Re-member,"
 you whisper.
 Eyes wide open,
 Heart ready to receive,
 I come to you, again and again.
 To remember How much my greatest truth is to trust
 In you for all my needs To be met, for all my path to be lit.
 My deepest joy That I can come to you any time...
 Any time... any time...
 And you will meet
 me where
 I am.
 I cannot fathom
 The depths of that kind of love,
 And so the mystery holds me ever in its sway.

Susan Stark

Susan is a member of Clear Creek MM (Ohio Valley YM). She recently moved with her husband to Tennessee to care for her aging parents. Susan lived and worked with OYM Friends as a young adult.

This poem, © Susan Stark Music, expresses a number of the elements of worship outlined in prose articles in this issue.(ed.)

Invitation to Worship

Advice to All Who Wait upon Our Lord

We gather to wait upon our Lord in silence. We wait for His power and life to fill us. We wait until the Lord's spirit moves us and gives us the words to speak. We do not speak, sing, or pray in our own will and words, our own earthly wisdom, or at the time we have picked. We speak as God opens within our hearts what He would have us speak to His assembled people. If any of us, man or woman, speaks it is as a vessel through which God speaks.

Our worship is worship in which our Lord is an active participant, choosing who will minister, choosing what will be sung and what will be prayed. Our worship is for the edification of God's church, which is a gathering of His people in His spirit.

God's true church is that body of which Christ is the head, directing it as its priest, king, prophet, shepherd, bishop, governor, and orderer. We know He calls His sheep by name and gathers them in love and that He has other sheep, besides ourselves, that

He is gathering beyond our knowledge. Our worship recognizes Christ Jesus as our present and life-long teacher, who instructs us how to live in His world and gives us the power to forsake sin and live in perfect obedience to His will.

We invite you to wait upon the Lord with us and know His gospel, the good news of God's power to teach and lead us in all things. Seek to be still and quiet, letting go your own thoughts and desires, your wandering imagination and the murmurings of your own will, the counsel and notions of your own heart. This may not be easy at first. As you strive to banish them they may assert themselves all the harder. Therefore, simply ask our Lord to lift them from you in His time. Then, waiting upon the Lord, you will know the presence of your Shepherd and you shall not want.

An anonymous contemporary Friend, from OYM

On Recognizing God's Care

On the second weekend of May 2008, the gathering of Christian Quaker renewal fellowship meeting was held at Woodbrooke College, Birmingham. I had attended these groups before and found them very human and with interesting insights. I booked my place for the day, knowing it was free, but I was obliged to travel by certain trains to make sure of an "allowed" ticket.

As time drew near, I felt it was going to be very tiring to get there and back in a day. I wondered whether to withdraw because of the uncertainty of catching those trains and how full and uncomfortable they had been last November. It would have been easy to allow myself the ease of pottering about at home and tidying some areas, and telling myself it was not my fault that I was prevented.

Nevertheless, that morning found me catching the earliest train to be in Cardiff central station by the stated time on the ticket and admiring the early morning mists and nature at her best. I got to the

right platform where, to my surprise, I found an old neighbor from a previous address making the same journey as I was. In this was an opportunity for a wonderful meeting.

Arriving at Woodbrooke College, I joined a session talking about fear and its accompaniments, where I was more than a little excited to hear of others' experiences and general suspicions that are all too often fanned by our newspapers and broadcasting media. One man had been involved in a terrible road accident where his car spun out of control, being shunted from behind. At that crucial time he recalled saying, "O God please help me." He was not badly harmed and was grateful for that call to our Lord.

Saying "goodbye" is the least easy of all, but reflection on something lovely is always a pleasure. In the busy city traffic, I wondered if I was going to make my particular train, but I did. Thoughts of water to quench my thirst were uppermost in my mind as I

anticipated the hot and solitary journey back home. Then, to my surprise, there was the neighbor I had traveled up with, so I found company for my return time and enjoyed another unexpected encounter.

Friends have always believed in the power of God in individuals. Having fallen badly last year and passed out for some while, I can testify to the great kindness of all who came by, like the parable of the good Samaritan in Jesus' time. Young and old persons attended to the whole situation of my helplessness

by the roadside, with a blanket and other offers of help.

Jesus' care and concern are available to us always, as is the immediacy of his Presence, for He told us; "Lo I am with you always, even until the end of time."

Christine McCarthy

Christine lives in Pontypridd, Wales, and is an affiliate member of Rockingham MM (Ohio YM).

Another Reflection on Recognizing God's Care

It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.

Psalm 118: 8

I do like the expression "safe and sound". Who does not want to be safe and sound? But what can we do when we find ourselves insecure and under threat? Who has never felt frightened or lonely?

Are we bored or frustrated? Sullen and resentful? Fearful or misunderstood? Arrogant or overbearing perhaps? Do we feel impatient or critical? Or do we simply find it difficult to see another's point of view? Do we lack trust in Him and each other? Are we bewildered by a turn of events?

Whatever the problem, whatever the circumstances, we surely know that bringing the Light of Christ to bear, is to open the floodgates to His love. It could also be that we think ourselves victim to any of the above things and more besides. But once we focus on Jesus and allow Him full control of our thought and feelings in complete surrender to His love, then

we begin to change and so does everything else.

For me, the true meaning of the expression "safe and sound", and the only place of complete assurance, is in the arms of Jesus. I believe that when we rest there, quietly and unselfconsciously, we find ourselves in a perfect position to hear His voice. It is on His knee that that we are taught how to love and be loved. As we learn of His ways, we are taught how to work together at His bidding.

I may be wrong, but I believe our yielding to Christ, our willingness to be humble before Him and each other, acknowledging whatever mistakes we think we may have made in the safety and security of His shared and forgiving love makes us "safe and sound". I don't just hope so, I know so. Friends, I can think of no other safer place to be!

Hazel Ramsay

Hazel and her husband Andrew live in Aberdeenshire, Scotland. She is an affiliate member of Rockingham MM (OYM).

Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.

Psalm 29: 2

Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

Matthew 4:10

The Conservative Friend #33
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Give over unto thine own willing,
Give over thine own running,
Give over thine own desiring
To know or be anything.
And sink down to the seed
Which God sows in thine heart,
And let that be in thee
And grow in thee
And breathe in thee
And act in thee,
And thou shalt find by sweet experience
That the Lord knows that
And loves and owns that,
And will lead it to the inheritance of life,
Which is God's portion.

Isaac Pennington, 1681

Arrangement 2007 by Paulette Meier, of Community Friends Mtg (Wilmington & Ohio Valley YM's)