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# THE CONSERVATIVE FRIEND

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## Conservative Friends' Witness for Today.

In an article published earlier (*TCF* #34, 11<sup>th</sup> Month, 2008) we considered a number of cultural tendencies and practices that have defined Conservative Friends in the past and continue to do so today [Christian, unprogrammed worship, balancing paradox, culture of listening, discernment, gender equality, recognition of spiritual gifts, importance of corporate (vs. individual) life, "teachability," gentleness, truthfulness in speech, and ultimate inadequacy of words. *Ed.*]. Beyond definition, however, is the matter of witness. What is Conservative Friends' witness for today?

Our witness is to **God's Reality**, so vast that we can never fully comprehend or describe it. Nevertheless, we know that we need to talk about it and its effect on us and on our behavior in the world. When we are totally ourselves, we are profoundly attentive to this reality, sometimes moment by moment, and obedient to what we are asked to do or not to do, to be or not to be. Our witness is that God's Reality, however vast and incomprehensible, is also very personal and loving as our teacher and guide. We, like early Friends, name this sustaining, energizing and teaching presence the Light of the Living Christ, the Guide, the Inward Monitor, and many other terms.

Our witness has been to **minimal speaking about faith**, a supra-verbal and non-verbal Christianity. In recognizing that our words are never fully adequate to explain our faith and God's reality, we have often let our lives speak without making any verbal explanation. These ways were usually learned by being near other Friends who were in touch with and responsive to God. Perhaps our inward listening builds up a capacity for non-verbal communication.

However, some Conservative Friends have become too non-verbal. We need to explain our beliefs and practices among ourselves and to inquirers, not only because those who come to our meetings may have had little experience learning by osmosis, but also because that learning takes more time than when

one is told directly. We need to speak about our faith experience even though our experience is not perfect.

Although we are becoming willing to speak about our precious inward and corporate experience, we continue to affirm that Christian faith and its expression in our lives cannot be fully explained or learned verbally. We need also to make opportunities for those who want to understand our witness to come among us. We need to encourage them to listen and watch as well as to discuss and ask questions.

Our witness is also to **waiting**, a word used many times by George Fox. To wait upon God – as in "waiting worship" – is to be profoundly attentive and available to God, always ready to respond to the Inward Motion, or simply to rest in the Divine Presence. Waiting is a matter of focused attention rather than length of time. Waiting can take a long time, as we allow Christ to transform us inwardly. Waiting can be instantaneous, when in an eye blink we go to that Inward Place in the midst of conversation or work, trouble or beauty. In a micro-second that waiting can give us clarity about what to say or do – or not to say or do.

We also have a witness to **Truth**, spelled with a capital *T*. The word "Truth" was much used by early Friends and by previous generations of Conservative Friends. Truth can mean God, or the will of God, or the whole meaning of the Gospel, or Christ the Light, the Life. Truth is something to be in, to be lived in. To be in the Truth is to be in touch with the Light and to live according to its guidance. To be in the Truth is to be in living communion not only with God but also with all those who are guided by Him. Friends knew one another as living in the Truth not so much by their words of doctrine as by the way they were willing to suffer – and by the way they stood, breathed, and interacted with each other. They could feel one another in the depths of the heart.

*(Continued on page 3)*

## Scheduled Meetings for Worship

(For worship at OYM monthly meetings see [www.ohioyearlymeeting.org](http://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, 5:00 PM
Caprock Friends Christian Fellowship	Lubbock, Texas	Michael Hatfield	michaelhatfield2004@gmail.com; <a href="http://www.texasfriends.org">www.texasfriends.org</a>	Weekly 7th Days, 6:00 PM
Chatahoochee Friends Worship Group	Norcross, Georgia (Atlanta suburb)	Scott King	770-315-9478; a_lang@bellsouth.net	Weekly First Days, 10:00 AM
Crossroads Friends Worship Group	Flint, Michigan; also Shelbyville, Michigan	Phil Helms	248-360-2074; admin@michiganquakers.org	Weekly / First Days
Friends Gathering in Jesus Christ	Evanston, Illinois (near Chicago)	Mike Conover	773-252-3773; MBConover@aol.com	2nd, 4th Seventh Days AM; 3rd Day evening
Friends in Christ	Harrisville, Michigan	Kimberly Anne Makela	plainquakers@gmail.com <a href="http://www.plainquakers.org">www.plainquakers.org</a>	Twice a month/1st & 3rd First Days, 10 AM
Goshen Meeting	Scone, Scotland	Paul Thompson	UK # 01738 620688; Book-seeker@blueyonder.co.uk	Twice a month / 1st & 3rd First Days
Greenwich Friends	London, England	Simon Watson	simonw@quaker.org.uk	Weekly / First Days
North Main Friends Worship Group	Greenville, South Carolina	Don Shabkie	dshabkie@bellsouth.net	Weekly First Days, 2:00 PM
Richland/Ashland Friends	Loudonville, Ohio	Scott Savage	419-368-9419 (leave message)	Monthly / 2nd First Day
Ripley Christian Quakers	Ripley, Derbyshire, UK	Mike Wakefield	UK # 01773-541424 Rcquakers@lomaxes.me.uk	Weekly First Days, 10:30 AM
Salisbury Friends Worship Group	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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(Continued from page 1)

And the last witness is to the **Stream**, the stream of living water of which Jesus spoke. Experiencing this Stream is as real as stepping into a stream of actual water, although it is very hard to describe. When we are in a listening, waiting state we are often brought into the Stream, a spiritual reality that has existed from the beginning of time. In that Stream time is in some sense irrelevant; in another sense time is important, expanded, eternal. All who have ever known this life are in some mysterious way in the

Stream even now, or so it feels to me. When we enter worship or a meeting for business and are in the right place inwardly, we step into the stream, a slightly different state of consciousness, and we know what we need to know. We experience an expanded and intensified connection with the people around us. Being in the Stream offers a moment of clarity through Christ.

Frances Taber

Fran is a member of Stillwater MM (Ohio YM), married now to Richard Simon. They live in Barnesville, Ohio.

## Western Region CFC Discusses “Faith and Culture...”

On 6 Twelfth Month, 2008, the Christian Friends Conference Western Region held a gathering at the Santa Cruz Friends Meetinghouse. There were 15 Friends in attendance from both the unprogrammed and pastoral traditions. Charles Martin began the day with introductions, reading of the CFC’s Statement of Purpose and giving a brief history of the CFC Western Region gatherings since 2001. The gathering then listened to the reading of Mediations and Experiences numbers IV, V, and VIII by William Shewen, a 17th Century Friend. (see below)

At 10:00 a.m. the participants assembled for Bible reading in the manner of Conservative Friends. Various Friends read passages from the scriptures that were considered in worshipful silence and led into an extended silent waiting worship blessed by rich vocal ministry. Waiting worship rose at 12:30 p.m. and we gathered for fellowship over lunch.

After lunch Charles Martin led a discussion focused

on subjects raised in an article by Frances Taber that had appeared in *The Conservative Friend* entitled “The Faith and Culture of Conservative Friends.” The article engendered much discussion about the themes of “paradox”, the “culture of listening”, “discernment”, “teachability”, “gender equality”, “recognition of spiritual gifts”, “focus on corporate being”, and “truthfulness in speech”. The participants told how their own meeting’s or church’s practice was similar to or differed from what was described in the article. There was some very deep personal reflection on how the individual’s meeting or church was meeting or failing to meet the expectations or needs of the participants. The general consensus was that spiritual fulfillment requires a vibrant faith community. The afternoon ended with silent waiting worship.

Charles Martin

Charles is a member of San Francisco MM (Pacific YM) and the former coordinator of the Christian Friends Conference, Western Region, which meets quarterly.

It is very precious, not only when we meet together, but at all times, to feel our minds exercised by, and meditating in, the law of the Lord, which is spiritual. Those that are exercised in this law of the Spirit of Life, and walk in obedience to it, no evil nor temptation shall prevail against; but they will witness salvation for walls and bulwarks. Some were witnesses of old, that the law of the Lord was pure and perfect. Many are witnesses of the same this day, and know it so by the operation of it; and know themselves subjects of that law, which is spiritual within them, which judges every vain

thought, and every idle word, and brings down every vain imagination. It is a blessed state, to be meditating in this law, day and night. For I testify, that this law of the Spirit of Life within, was man’s rule, whereby he walked innocently and uprightly, before transgression entered, and before outward alphabets were invented, or before any outward law was written, or engraved on tables of stone. To this Spirit of Life within again are many called, and many are coming, and come to; and forever blessed are those that walk therein, and are ruled thereby. William Shewen, *Meditations & Experiences*, 1683.

## Sustainability and a Right Relationship with God

The global economic turmoil of the past eighteen months reminds us of the difficulty that befalls those who place their hope and trust in the uncertain things of this world. We have seen the fruits of our culture's greed, lust and excess. We can reaffirm the validity of Ohio Yearly Meeting's long-held principle of moderation in outward affairs.

The *OYM Book of Discipline* states: "Even in times when life was less complex than it is today, Friends emphasized the importance of simplicity. The heart of Christian simplicity lies in the singleness of purpose which is required by the injunction to seek first the Kingdom of God. As men seek to express the spirit of God in their daily lives, they realize the necessity of putting first things first." (pg 48) Several OYM Advices (e.g., #'s 5,7, 10) point us toward the right use of resources. And Jesus teaches us, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matthew 6:19-21)

Outward treasures do influence our inward, spiritual life. If we wander off the sure foundation in our outward affairs, we lose our right relationship with God, to our spiritual harm. Further, these errors can move beyond our personal lives to impact other realms as well. John Woolman observed that in our possessions we find the seeds of war.

As Christians, we are accountable for the right use not only of our possessions but also of time and of natural resources, which are valuable gifts from God. Time is not something we need to "fill" or to idle away in hedonism; it is to be used for the glory of God. We should care for the natural world that God, when He had created it, pronounced good. We are not to destroy it, pollute it, or make it unfit for God's purposes. As Phillip Hartley Smith wrote in his excellent book *Quaker Business Ethics* (2001), "When we really face up to the fact that everything we have comes to us as a gift from God, we come to understand that we are all stewards ac-

countable for our use of time, people, money, and natural resources. In each situation a good steward seeks the right balance between prudence and adventure, conservatism and creation, leading and serving, stimulating and supporting."

In our relationships with other people, we are again called to sustainability, to reciprocal and cooperative behavior for the good of all. We are cautioned in Advice # 7 to avoid getting rich at the expense of others. Indeed, self-centered greed was a major impetus for the present economic debacle and remains a strong motivation in spite of its harmful effects.

If you have been hurt in the recent economic downturn, trust that God will correct wrongs in His perfect timing. If you have come through this downturn less affected outwardly, be thankful and humble, continuing on the foundation that has proven unshakeable. Let us hope and pray that out of the adjustments being made there will be correction of the things that were wrong and that we will come through collectively wiser and better stewards of God's gifts.

And what can each of us do to maintain a right balance in our affairs? Last fall a retreat "Answering God's Call for Simplicity", led by Jackie Speicher of Right Sharing of World Resources and held at OYM's Friends Center, considered that question. Among their specific suggestions were: grow your own foods and buy others locally as much as possible; minimize household energy consumption; share your time and wealth in ways that really benefit each recipient; accept help; make and use compost; do only uplifting things on First Day; take walks; read the Bible and have personal quiet with God daily. These and other activities can help us live in the balance and moderation that support both environmental and economic sustainability and our right relationship with God.

John C. Smith

Jack is a member of Rockingham MM (OhioYM) and a recorded minister. He and Susan live near Harrisonburg, Virginia, on a dairy farm.

## Why are the Ten Commandments are Unpopular?

This is the first of a series of articles on a subject to which I have found myself returning again and again since I was a child. It all began with Sarah Kennard, an old lady in my Philadelphia Friends Meeting. She had come from Conservative Friends in Ohio and in a quiet, gentle way was gifted with an evangelical outreach to children. I was in about third grade when Sarah Kennard gave me a card with the Ten Commandments on it. They were neatly numbered and slightly abbreviated, so that they were pretty easy to memorize. Little children do that easily, even if they do not understand all the words. They also think more than adults would guess - at least, they think if they are not constantly pumped full of TV and other entertainments. Silent meeting gave me time to think and listen carefully.

About the same time the United States entered the war against Japan and not long afterwards the war against Germany. My public school was full of war hype. There were war songs, war bond promotions, air raid drills, and there were slogans everywhere, such as "Kill the Japs!" It was easy for even a third grader to see that something was amiss. That was the beginning of my thinking, but I was brought back to the subject of the Commandments countless times through my life.

Why do people not want to talk about this rich subject? Some people do not like the negative phrasing of the commandments. They prefer to be positive and say things like "Be nice to Johnny!" rather than "You musn't kick Johnny!" "Be kind to people," sounds much more pleasant than "Don't, don't, don't." It is more comprehensive, too - and vaguer.

Some people argue that Christ's coming fulfilled the law and freed us from its restrictions, so that we no longer need to be concerned with petty details. If the heart is right, everything else will be right, too. This is nice, simple - and vague.

Of course, many people know that the Ten Commandments are in the Bible. They may even know that they are in there twice, Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, and that somehow this makes them significant. In the period when charm bracelets were

all the rage, I remember seeing Ten Commandment bracelets with a dangle for each one. Perhaps these did for children what Sarah Kennard's card had done for me, but I wonder.

If we read the Gospels, especially the first three, we realize that when Jesus taught, he had a good bit to say about the Law, about its ultimate meaning and about its misuse. Would you not expect that of a Jew! *[The blessed man's] delight is in the law of the Lord and on that law doth he meditate day and night.* (Psalm. 1:2) There is a blessing there!

What might that blessing be? Many Friends like to quote the verse from John that says *God is love*. Love is a pretty vague word. Charles Schultz devoted a long series of cartoons to the theme "Love Is...," and what parent has not heard "You don't love me [if you don't do, or give me, what I want]"! Similarly, parents, grandparents, and even spouses are sometimes tempted to try to convey their love by giving things - a quick conversion of emotion into the material. Let us not mock things, however. There is a lot in the Law that has to do with things; the Jews had a wonderful ability to deal with the material facts of life. And in the Books of the Law, God Himself offers a deal to the Israelites. Especially in Deuteronomy, the nature of God's deal is spelled out: *If the Israelites keep the Law, Jehovah will be their God and they will be His people, a city set on a hill that cannot be hid.*

Meditation on the Law of the Lord offers us more, though, than a promise of His love or an understanding of His covenant. In giving us a vision for a good society, it offers us insight into the nature of the Lord, a look at God's back, if not at His very face. The Law makes God real for us in a concrete way that also fills us with awe. And it shows us our own nature. This is no thrill. *"Woe is me!"* says Isaiah, when he recounts his misty vision of God in Chapter 6. To see God face to face is to die, and Isaiah is severely frightened. Maybe it is natural that the Commandments are not popular.

Ruth M. Pitman

Ruth grew up among Orthodox Friends in Philadelphia. She now lives in North Olmstead, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland.

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## One Friend's Experience and Understanding of Pastoral Care

As a volunteer with a local church-based program called Senior Connections, over the course of nearly two years of visits, beginning in 2006, I became friends with Shirley. Shirley was a widow, and was bed-bound due to a stroke and Parkinson's Disease. Prior to these developments in her health, she was a very active and outgoing woman. Her husband and mother-in-law also resided in the same nursing and rehabilitation facility in which I visited Shirley. They both passed away, within months of one another in 2007, during the time that I was visiting Shirley. Shirley passed away in First Month of 2008.

The purpose of Senior Connections is to foster relationships between volunteers and seniors in our community. It is not a social service agency or a charity; it is an effort to build the bonds of friendship and strengthen community ties within Evanston and the surrounding cities and villages. As a program it works well. As I stated earlier, it is not a social service program, although at times one may become an advocate and assistant for one's senior friend, depending on the person's family situation, and abilities and needs. The program coordinators provide ongoing support and assistance should a volunteer require it.

I had not thought of what I was doing as pastoral care, but in retrospect, following the passing of my friend, I realized that there were aspects of my relationship with Shirley that entailed pastoral care: I visited Shirley in her sickness and her widowhood; I read books and short stories to her, and I wrote letters and cards for her to her family and friends (her family lived out of state, and she had few if any visitors); I helped her sort through her mail, and I sought assistance for her as an advocate with the nursing staff and from the program coordinators. We shared milk shakes once, a favorite treat of Shirley's, but one which she found difficult to enjoy due to the effect of the Parkinson's on her ability to swallow. I also established connections with her family members, when they visited and through phone calls (I let Shirley use my cell phone, since I

had free minutes on the weekends, and Shirley could not afford long distance phone service). This connection to her family proved to be of significant value when she was dying, as I was able to involve them in this process and facilitate their presence with her even though they were separated by geography. Following her death, her family sent me thank you cards and even called to express their gratitude for all that they felt I had done for her and for them. The fact is, I received far more from Shirley, and from her family, and what they gave me I have been able to carry with me to this day.

There were times of great difficulty and depression during my visits. As a result of her health and bed-ridden state, her body was slowly deteriorating, and so there were times when the first 15-20 minutes of my visit was listening to Shirley's laments about her condition, the care she received, and other matters. When I was matched with Shirley I was told that she could be quite dour and negative at times, but that if we "clicked" the coordinators felt that I could be an encouraging person for Shirley, so it was not a shock, but it wasn't easy at times. In fact, there were times when I felt hesitant to visit because of the challenges I was facing in my own life. These times could be quite discouraging and disheartening, but I just listened, mostly, and when I sensed an opening I encouraged Shirley to look at things from different perspectives, while affirming her feelings. Sometimes this was helpful, sometimes it made little or no difference at all. Sometimes she just asked if we could meet another time in the following week.

The last week of Shirley's life, particularly the last three days in which I spent several hours with her each day, was the most blessed time we had together. Having been with my father the last seven days of his life, and being with him when he passed from this world to the next, I had a fairly good idea of the dying process. Not only this, but she herself told me she was dying. I listened, I held her hand, I observed the physical changes, we talked at times, and I did not try to talk her out of her sense of impending death. She asked me questions about what

was happening, and if this was what it was like to die. I told her that I thought that it was probably different in some ways for each person. I told her of my love in Christ for her, of the gift of friendship that she had given to me, and I asked her if there was anything I could do for her during that time and following her death. She was able to use my cell phone to talk with her son and granddaughters the night before she died, and I was amazed at how she rallied her strength in such a way that I thought that perhaps I had been mistaken to think that she was dying. The next morning, her son called me to tell me that his mom had died that morning.

There was one incident that last night that struck me. I asked Shirley if she would like me to read something from the Bible. She said that she wasn't too familiar with much of the text. I was thinking of reading this portion from Revelation (21: 1-4):

*And I saw a new heaven and new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Be hold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither*

*sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.*

As I was turning the pages to it, Shirley said that she would like to hear something from Revelation. After I read this, she seemed to be comforted. Yet, in all, it was the watching over her as she drifted in and out of consciousness, and the holding of her hand, and telling her that I was with her, and that God was with her always, and just listening that formed the core of what I did—I was present.

Early Friends understood that pastoral care (the central responsibility of overseers), as with ministry, and eldership, is a gift, and that though some may be given a greater measure of one or more of these gifts, all may be called into service to exercise their measure of any of them in a given situation. Friends have a unique gift for pastoral care. Our way of worship — waiting, expectant, in silence, without a program — provides us with ample experience in patient listening, waiting, and responding in the Spirit, and these are essential to pastoral care in any setting.

Robert Hopper

Robert is a member of Evanston MM (Illinois YM) and an affiliate member of Middleton MM (Ohio YM). He participates in Friends Gathering in Jesus Christ, a Chicago area Christian Friends worship group.

## Visiting in the Name of Christ

Some Friends do not recognize Christ as Lord but do accept portions of Jesus' gospel. When we visit these Friends, there will be some individuals who will be open to gospel ministry. We can encourage them to seek Christ, who can lead them into Truth. On visits in the ministry, we should avoid becoming involved in local concerns unless clearly directed by Christ to do otherwise. Above all, we

should urge the new found Friends in Christ to worship together in His name. Then they will become the Lord's instruments in their own gatherings.

Arthur Berk

Arthur is a member of 15th Street MM (New York YM) and an affiliate member of Rockingham MM (Ohio YM). He lives in New York City.

## Financial Contributions Appreciated

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*The Conservative Friend* #36  
c/o Susan Smith  
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Return Service Requested

## Meeting for Worship

Connoisseurs,  
We meet at the spiritual exchange,  
Cherishing pearls of great price  
Folded in the black velvet cloth,  
The gathered meditation, of silent worship.

With loving care we unwrap,  
Quaking, we reveal  
The precious, priceless gems  
Vouchsafed to human custody.

With awe we contemplate,  
With tenderness we appraise,  
With quiet joy we revere  
What the spirit shall reveal.

We cast not before swine,  
For each pearl is precious;  
For that we also are precious,  
Our meek souls not for rending.

And for the swine are precious,  
Not yet in meet condition  
For nourishment of pearls,  
Yet meet for love and prayer.

Ralph Hill

Ralph is an affiliate member of Rockingham Meeting (Ohio YM). Ralph and his wife Daphne live in Bexhill, England, along the English Channel coast.

Ed. note: This is one part of a four-part poem presenting meeting for worship in different ways. The other parts use imagery of swimmers (published in *TCF* #34), students, and radio hams.