

**Epistle from a Consultation
regarding a School of the Spirit Ministries Program in the West
December 5, 2009**

"Listen carefully. Imagine a sower going out to sow, scattering the seed widely. ..." (Mark 4:3)

Dear Friends everywhere,

We greet you with joy to share God's movements among us during a regional consultation of Friends gathered Dec. 5th at North Seattle Friends Church, in Seattle, Washington. Together, we resoundingly affirm the authenticity of the leading described in the attached vision statement modeled after the program, "On Being a Spiritual Nurturer," under the care of "A Ministry of Prayer and Learning devoted to the School of the Spirit." We prayerfully considered many questions and new ideas, and discerned way forward in coming months. Now we wish to invite all western Quakers into the circle of our prayer over this seedling of a program, and welcome your participation in its growth and development.

What is a program "On Being a Spiritual Nurturer"? In a full-blown form, it would be a series of residential retreats over two years; it would invite participants to deeper spiritual practice and communal support, to study scripture, the Judeo-Christian heritage and Quaker spirituality; and its aim would be to nourish growth in relationship to God and spiritually enrich our home faith communities. A similar program of prayer and learning has been active in the Eastern United States for nearly 20 years and has included some Friends from the West Coast (<http://www.schoolofthespirit.org>).

Thirteen Friends gathered December 5th to tend the leading for a western program. Our number included members of four Western yearly meetings, both pastoral and unprogrammed Friends: North Pacific, Northwest, Western Half-Yearly Meeting of Canadian Yearly Meeting, and Alaska Friends Conference. Christine Hall facilitated the consultation with eldering support from Cathy Walling and accompaniment by Charley Basham and Patty Levering. Patty is one of three core teachers of the "On Being a Spiritual Nurturer" program in the East under the care of the School of the Spirit Ministry.

The interweaving of experience of pastoral and unprogrammed Friends at this consultation provided rich learning throughout the day. Deep respect and appreciation for our many strengths enlivened our consideration. In addition, we were richly tended by the hospitality of North Seattle Friends Church. Both lunch and dinner were offered through the generous talents of North Seattle Friends Church member, Patty Federighi.

We began on Saturday morning by hearing the spiritual hungers of our far-flung faith communities and the "soil conditions" for potential planting of a School of the Spirit Ministry program in the West. Christine Hall, Charley Basham and Patty Levering shared the story of the leading thus far. As we began to connect Western communities' longings to the vision, we were caught up in affirmation, especially for the desire for a program like this closer to home, the right use of Quaker gifts on this half of the continent, and the joy of contributing to the work of healing and reconciliation between the various branches of Quakerism. We considered questions

that rose about what needed further discernment. We were united with enthusiasm in our “Yes!” and felt no “stops” at all. The afternoon bubbled with energy in three small working groups that brought forth new ideas on finance and corporate tending, outreach and promotion, and curriculum and program development. Before dinner, all were invited into a time of silent creative reflection and integration offered up in honor of Lynn Waddington, artist and Washington Friend whose memorial meeting took place the same afternoon.

A recurring theme throughout the day reminded us of the incredible abundance of God—like small seeds yielding a hundredfold harvest, or generous plenty revealed unexpectedly in Jesus' feeding of thousands. Together we grew in trust in Divine generosity to counter fears of scarce resources and skeptical communities. We experienced Way Opening as we lived into the blessings that come from moving forward in faith.

In the evening, we addressed action steps and our personal leadings to commit to some portion of this work. Several stepped forward to serve on a start-up “Western Program Oversight Committee,” including: Charley Basham (convener), Susanne Kromberg, Marge Abbott, Ashley Wilcox, and Eugene Norcross-Renner. They intend to meet via phone conference to create a plan to present to the Board of the School of the Spirit Ministry at the end of January. They will discern and nominate others to serve on a more permanent Western supervisory board. Christine Hall was affirmed to serve in the role of administrator and core teacher to continue moving this vision forward. Her first responsibilities will be to draft a start-up budget and draft follow up communication with everyone who was invited to this consultation. We concluded our gathering by sharing thoughts for this epistle. The day ended with gratitude, affirmations, prayer, and the song, “We shall go out with joy, and be led forth in peace...” (Isaiah 55:12).

We recognize that starting up a program of prayer and learning will not be easy, just as participation in the program itself will not be easy. It will ask much of us in many different ways. Yet those challenges feel exciting, stretching, and somehow freeing. What began as a delicate seedling entrusted to a small circle of Friends, is ready to share with the wider Quaker community. First one or two, then this small consultation group and soon more will gather around something wonderful God is doing in our midst. The Divine Spirit has fired us up, enlivened us with energy and ideas for this ministry. If the story of what God is doing among us moves you as well, please consider how you might contribute or participate. Opportunities abound for service on the Western oversight committee, in planning, fund raising, outreach, teaching and of course participating in program offerings. Will you join us?

May the seeds of this possibility find fertile soil in your faith community and multiply a hundredfold for the spiritual nourishment of our Religious Society of Friends.

Respectfully offered on behalf of consultation participants by,
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Participants:

Marge Abbott, *Multnomah Monthly Meeting*, Portland, Oregon, North Pacific Yearly Meeting
Charlotte Basham, *Chena Ridge Monthly Meeting*, Fairbanks, Alaska, Alaska Friends Conference
Patty Federighi, *North Seattle Friends Church*, Northwest Yearly Meeting

Christine Hall, attending *Whidbey Island Worship group*, Washington, member of Chena Ridge Friends Meeting, Alaska Friends Conference

Kathy Hyzy, *Multnomah Monthly Meeting*, Portland, Oregon, North Pacific Yearly Meeting

Susanne Kromberg, *Salmon Bay Monthly Meeting*, Seattle, Washington, North Pacific Yearly Meeting

Patty Levering, *North Carolina Yearly Meeting Conservative*

Eugene Norcross-Renner, *Oysterville Worship Group*, Washington, North Pacific Yearly Meeting

Lynne Phillips, *Vancouver Island Monthly Meeting*, Western Half-Yearly Meeting of Canadian Yearly Meeting

Cathy Walling, *Chena Ridge Monthly Meeting*, Fairbanks, Alaska, Alaska Friends Conference

Lorraine Watson, Pastor of *North Seattle Friends Church*, Northwest Yearly Meeting

Ashley Wilcox, member of *Freedom Friends Church*, Salem, Oregon, sojourning with University Friends, Seattle, WA, North Pacific Yearly Meeting

Jan Wood, *North Seattle Friends Church*, Northwest Yearly Meeting