

Spiritual Friendships

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During the past few years, a number of Friends serving on the Religious Education Committee of Friends General Conference have discussed the importance of spiritual friendships. In their work with faith development, they have come to know and emphasize the value of sharing one's experience of spiritual growth with one particular Friend who is also strengthening his or her faith. As an encouragement to Friends and meetings to explore spiritual friendships at a deeper level, a few guidelines are offered here. They have also collected important resources that describe the purpose of spiritual friendships, how to go about finding a spiritual friend, and different ways spiritual friends can work together. These are included in the Reading List section at the back of these Resources for Quaker Meetings.

Guidelines for Spiritual Friendship

- Spiritual friendships most commonly involve two people who invite God's working in their lives; who make an intentional commitment to hold each other in the Light, and to share with each other their experiences, doubts, ponderings, and prayer times as their spiritual lives unfold.
- Spiritual friendships can exist for any length of time, from a weekend at a workshop to a spiritual partnership lasting many years. Ideally, spiritual friends can meet face to face on a regular basis, but if circumstances don't allow that closeness, a spiritual friendship can be conducted by means of letters, phone calls, or even email! What is important is that there be an intentionality about the relationship.
- Meetings can be structured in a number of ways. Usually a session begins with a time of worship. Then one friend listens while the other shares her/his spiritual progress through the period that has elapsed between sessions. Sections from personal journaling are often shared, as well as efforts at maintaining a regular discipline, or areas in which one is especially focusing. One of the purposes for sharing is to name out loud how one experiences God's presence.
- The listener pays supportive attention to what is shared, at times reflecting back to the speaker something that is noticed. More listening than reflecting usually takes place. It is important to remember that this is not a co-counseling or a therapy session, but a time to allow God into the relationship.
- After a set period of time, the roles are reversed. Silent worship should conclude the session. Many friends allow a time for informal sharing about non-spiritual matters before the beginning or at the end of the session.
- Spiritual friends may choose to engage in a planned discipline between meetings, such as meditating or praying at the same time each day, journaling, reading a predetermined

passage or book, or fasting. These shared practices can deepen the spiritual relationship between friends by serving as a constant reminder of each other's commitment and support.

- Spiritual friendship, though it may arise between individuals who begin with a casual relationship, is a commitment that requires hard work and a level of trust that takes time to build. Yet if the commitment is strong, having a spiritual friendship is one of the best ways to nurture personal faith development.

— *First published in the February, 1992 issue of FGC Focus.*

Resources for Spiritual Friendship

Friends General Conference Religious Education Committee

Bankson, Marjory Zoet. *Seasons of Friendship: Naomi and Ruth as a Pattern*. (LuraMedia, 1987)

Bankson uses the changing relationship between these Biblical women to discuss different kinds of friendship. She shares a great deal from her experience. Contains wonderful journaling questions and could serve as an exercise book for a spiritual friendship between women.

Devers, Dorothy. *Faithful Friendship*. (Faithful Friends Mission Group, The Church of the Saviour, Washington, DC)

A handbook setting out many readings and exercises that might be taken up in the course of a spiritual friendship. Some Friends may find the heavily traditional Christian language hard to get through, but it is still a valuable book for Friends. Unfortunately, it is difficult to find.

Edwards, Tilden. *Spiritual Friends: Reclaiming the Gift of Spiritual Direction*. (Paulist Press, 1980)

A practical discussion of the why, what and how of spiritual friendships. Grows out of his work with the Shalem community and their use and promotion of spiritual friendship as a means of faith development.

Friendly Woman. Volume 8 Number 2 "Friendship." (Spring, 1987)

A set of articles about all kinds of friendship including one about spiritual friendships among early Quaker women and several about contemporary spiritual friends.

Hobday, Teresa. *Rediscovering Prayer*. (Quaker Home Service, 1992)

Traces an allegorical friendship between two women that opens up the way to prayer.

Jones, Alan. *Exploring Spiritual Direction: An Essay on Christian Friendship*. (Seabury, 1982)

Jones discusses the need for companionship on the spiritual journey and the very special role played by the spiritual director.

Weavings, Volume 8 Number 4. "Spiritual Friendship" (July/August 1987)

Articles about contemporary spiritual friendships.

Yungblut, John. The Gentle Art of Spiritual Guidance. (Amity House, 1988)

Yungblut writes about the spiritual guide from a Quaker and Jungian perspective.

"A faithful friend is a sure shelter. Whoever finds one has a rare treasure."

— Ecclesiasticus 6:14 (Jerusalem Bible)

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