

# THE CALL

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by **Charlotte Basham**

## **Description:**

*“The Call” is a play about a contemporary young adult Friend who experiences a leading to travel in the ministry.*

In her quest to be faithful to this call, she encounters misunderstanding, hurt, and anger but is upheld by an elder in her meeting. She is also mentored by “visits” from three Quakers who traveled in the ministry during the Colonial era.

The play raises questions about the nature of a call to ministry in our time and how meetings might provide nurture, support, and mentorship, especially for young people. It can be produced in a variety of ways, depending on the purpose.

The play was originally produced as a final project for the 8<sup>th</sup> On Being a Spiritual Nurturer Program of the School of the Spirit Ministry, and subsequently at gatherings of a monthly and a yearly meeting. It has been done as readers’ theatre with 8 people reading the parts of different characters. The production takes approximately one hour and can either be performed with an audience or simply read aloud in a small group. In either case, it can be followed by a discussion about the topic.

*Suggestions for using this play in your Meeting and for follow-up/discussion questions are on page 22.*

*For more information about this play or about the FGC Traveling Ministries Program, please contact us at [TravelingMinistries@FGCQuaker.org](mailto:TravelingMinistries@FGCQuaker.org) or 215-561-1700.*

## Characters:

**ANNA:** a young woman who experiences a call to ministry.

**JOAN:** Anna's mother.

**MARGARET:** clerk of the clearness committee. A lifelong Friend. Has gifts of eldering.

**JOHN:** relatively new member of meeting. This is his first clearness committee experience.

**MARTHA:** a lifelong Friend. Is very concerned about following correct procedures.

**CHRISTINE:** companion in the ministry

**BARBARA:** woman at meeting being visited

## 18th century visitors:

**SAMUEL BOWNAS:** (1676-1753) Born in England, traveled widely in the ministry, including many trips to North America.

**ELIZABETH HUDSON:** ((1722-1783) Born in Philadelphia. Traveled to Ireland and England in 1747 and spent four years visiting meetings.

**JANE FENN HOSKINS:** (1694-1764) Born in London, England. Immigrated to Pennsylvania at age nineteen as an indentured servant. Traveled widely in the ministry.

## ACT ONE

*SCENE 1 Setting:* Quaker meeting house. Anna is gathering with 3 members of the meeting in response to her request for a clearness committee. They are sitting in quiet worship as lights come up.

**MARGARET:** We are gathered tonight to consider Friend Anna's apparent call to ministry. She has requested a clearness committee to help her discern the nature of this call. For the benefit of John, who is new to this process, I will take a few moments to review our role.

We are here primarily to listen---first, to Anna, but more importantly, to the voice of the Inward Teacher. This means that we maintain an attitude of worship, leaving space between speakers to consider what has been said. We are not here to answer Anna's question but to help her see more clearly how she is being led. If we can unite in affirming her gifts and this call to ministry, we will report back to the Ministry and Counsel Committee. We will begin by having Anna summarize her question for us.

**ANNA:** Thank you, Friends, for gathering with me. (*pauses*) Whew, this is harder than I thought it would be. (Takes a deep breath to center and settle).

Well, I'm not going to beat around the bush . . . even if it is burning. Hmmm.

(*in a stronger voice*) I am feeling called to ministry. I don't really know what this means yet, but it has been persistent for some time now. More specifically, I am feeling called to travel in the ministry. To visit other meetings. I would like to test this call with you.

**MARGARET:** Anna, can you tell us more about what you're experiencing?

**ANNA:** It first came to me in meeting for worship several months ago. I was deep in worship when I felt my heart quicken. Then this....voice? thought? nudge? arose within me. I really don't have words to describe it. It did not seem to be a message for the group, but it was clearly a message for me. It had to do with ministry.

**JOHN:** How are you defining ministry?

**ANNA:** I see it as a leading to live my life centered in God. Letting my life speak.

**JOHN:** Aren't we all called to do that?

**ANNA:** (*takes some time to center before she answers*) I can only speak for myself. I know that I have been distracted by school, by work, by all sorts of things, including my boyfriend. No, God has not been the center of my life. What I feel called to do is to create space in my life for God to work through me. That may mean making some changes. It may mean I will be asked to do something I don't want to do. I feel that I am being called to gospel ministry. I know that people in our meeting may not be comfortable with the word "gospel" in connection with ministry, but it's a good word, and I would like to reclaim it. It simply means 'good news'. I have sat in meeting quietly for years, wondering why we're there. Vocal ministry in our meeting is rare, and personally I have not found it all that inspiring when it happens. Where is the fire that led early Friends to scatter across the countryside preaching this good news? Do we have any good news now?

**MARGARET:** It sounds like you are experiencing some of that fire.

**ANNA:** Yes, and it scares me.

**MARTHA:** I must admit that I'm somewhat uncomfortable with the idea of a person being labeled a "minister." It sounds like something fixed and immutable rather than a temporary state that we all can experience. Those early Quakers protested that we didn't need the clergy but rather we could experience God directly.

**JOHN** (*to MARTHA*): Yes, I read something about that recently. It was a pretty radical concept. Still is.

**MARGARET:** Friends, we seem to be talking to each other and not listening to Anna. Shall we let her continue?

**MARTHA:** Well, I just want to know if Anna is asking to be a recorded minister, because if that's the case, she needs to know that we don't have a procedure for that any more.

**MARGARET:** I have not heard Anna asking for that. Shall we defer that question until we hear more of what is going on for her?

**ANNA:** Thank you. This concept of ministry is pretty new to me, too. But I have heard about people traveling in the ministry, and that is what I am drawn to.

**MARTHA:** OK, let's hear about the concern that she is carrying. When people have traveled in the ministry they have typically had a concern, like John Woolman and his concern about slavery or Lucretia Mott and women's rights.

**ANNA:** I have lots of concerns. I'm concerned about our ongoing warfare, I'm concerned about climate change...

**MARTHA:** And do you feel that you are under the weight of any of these concerns?

**ANNA:** No. I'm not an expert on anything. What can I say about any of the things I care about?

**MARGARET:** So it seems you aren't experiencing a call to speak about any particular issue. Is that right?

**ANNA:** Yes. Didn't people used to travel in the ministry without knowing why they were called to a particular place?

**JOHN:** So, help me understand what's going on here. You are feeling called to travel in the ministry. You don't know where and you don't know why.

**ANNA:** *(pauses and takes a deep breath)* I guess that sounds crazy, huh? I'm new at this, so please help me here. All I know is that I'm experiencing something, and I'm trying to understand what it means. The only piece I can see right now is that I'm being called.

**MARTHA:** So what kind of support do you expect from the meeting? You know we don't record ministers any more.

**ANNA:** I don't know. *(exasperated)* Right now, all I'm asking is for help in discerning this call. And honestly, I feel that I'm being interrogated.

**MARGARET:** Let's all remember that we're listening for the Inner Light. Can we all try to listen with the ears of the heart to what Anna is saying rather than trying to instruct her?

Anna, can you tell us what it's like for you when you have offered vocal ministry in meeting?

*(pause)*

**ANNA:** It was hard the first time, yeah. I was so scared. My voice was shaking. I could barely stand up.

**MARGARET:** Did you worry about what you were saying then?

**ANNA:** No, not really. It was like the words flowed through me. I was just the vessel.

**MARGARET:** So it is possible that you might be given a message for another meeting?

**ANNA:** That's a scary thought. What could I possibly have to offer?

**MARGARET:** You are offering yourself. What is required of thee? To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? ....

**MARTHA:** I think the key word is 'Humbly.' The danger I sense here is that ego can so easily take over.

**ANNA:** Yes, that's something I worry about, too. But I think before I get to that point I have to accept the call.

**JOHN:** So may I ask a practical question here? *(Anna nods)* You have just recently graduated from college. Is that right?

**ANNA:** Yes. I majored in music.

**JOHN:** And I know this may not sound very spiritual, but if I were your parent, I would be wondering how you were going to support yourself.

**ANNA:** *(Looking to Margaret for help)* OK. I know this is a big question. It's one I live with every day. But I'm not sure how it relates to my call.

**JOHN:** May I respond?

*(Margaret nods)*

**JOHN:** I just wonder if you plan to live off other people's hospitality? How long can that last? And I also wonder what your parents think about this move.

**ANNA:** I live alone with my mother, and she, well, she's not happy about this.

**MARGARET:** Again, I ask that we defer these questions, as important as they are, until we understand more about the call itself.

**ANNA:** I see that there is a lot I haven't thought about.

**MARTHA:** I don't see how we can arrive at unity until we understand how Anna intends to proceed with this.

**ANNA:** Don't you see? It's not what I intend! I'm not making this up. I don't have a plan. I'm just trying to be faithful and take each step as it comes.

**MARGARET:** *(quietly)* I hear a voice that wants to be heard. Are we listening?

*(pause)* Anna, thank you for asking us to gather with you. This is big, and you aren't meant to carry it alone. May I suggest that we allow some time for seasoning and meet again in a few weeks?

*(They sit for a few moments in silence, then hold hands for closing.)*

*(all exit)*

**SCENE 2 Setting:** In Anna's home. Anna's mother, Joan, is sitting at a table drinking a cup of tea and reading. Looks up, musing.

*(Anna enters.)*

**JOAN:** So how did the clearness committee meeting go, dear?

**ANNA:** Hard to say. I don't think they know quite what to do with me.

**JOAN:** What happened?

**ANNA:** Well, they asked me lots of questions I couldn't answer. They are nice people and all, but it seemed like there was a big gulf between us that no one, except maybe Margaret, was able to span. They couldn't hear what I was saying and I couldn't say what they wanted me to say.

**JOAN:** *(Looks at her carefully)* You do realize, don't you, that what you are doing is very. . . unusual? Here you are a beautiful, talented musician poised to accept a position at a prestigious music academy, and you're talking about giving it all up to travel in the ministry!

**ANNA:** You don't get it, either, do you?

**JOAN:** No, I don't. If you had told me you were pregnant, or gay, or both, that would be easier to take than this. And I could understand if you said you were going to Washington to demonstrate against a war or the Keystone pipeline. That's concrete, do-able.

**ANNA:** I wish it were that clear. But didn't people used to travel in the ministry without knowing why they were called to a particular place?

**JOAN:** That sounds pretty presumptuous to me. I mean, having someone blow into town, march into the meeting and say, "I'm here to minister to you!"

**ANNA:** Oh, Mom. I'm sure it wasn't like that. And why does this upset you so much, anyway?

**JOAN:** Upset? I'm not upset! I'm concerned about you, that's all. I don't want to see you throw away your career.

**ANNA:** After all you've put into it, right?

**JOAN:** Damn right.

*(knock at the door)*

**JOAN:** *(gets up to answer it, pauses for a moment)* Hello, Margaret.

*(Margaret enters)*

**MARGARET:** Hello, Joan, hello Anna. I hope I'm not interrupting anything, but I wanted to give you a couple of books, Anna. I think you might find them interesting. *(hands her the books)*

**ANNA:** Thanks.

**MARGARET:** *(Looking at Anna and then at Joan)* I sense some tension in the air. I assume you've been talking about Anna's call. Is there anything I can do to help?

**JOAN:** Look, Margaret, I know you mean well, but this just isn't a good time. I don't want to talk about it any more today. I need to get dinner ready. *(exits)*

**ANNA:** She's pretty upset. She has always wanted me to be a concert musician, and she thinks I'm throwing it all away.

**MARGARET:** I've known your mother for a long time, Anna, and I expect there is more going on than we can see.

**ANNA:** Well, maybe I should go and help her. Thanks for bringing the books by, Margaret. *(Looks at them, reading titles)* Wilt Thou Go on my Errand?

**MARGARET:** It's a good read if you can handle the antiquated language. It's a reprinting of the original journals kept by 3 Quaker women traveling in the ministry during the American Colonial period.

**ANNA:** Sweet. I'll bet they have some good stories.

**MARGARET:** I hope you enjoy them. *(They hug)* See you soon. *(Margaret exits)*

*(Anna looks at books)*

*(Joan comes back in, sits down, and after a moment, winces.)*

**ANNA:** Mom, what's going on?

**JOAN:** It's nothing. Just a small stomach pain. I'll be O.K.

**ANNA:** Look, if I'm upsetting you, I will give this up right now.

**JOAN:** No, I don't want you to do that. *(pause)* I need to tell you something before we go any further.

*(Anna looks up expectantly)*

**JOAN:** I know it sounds selfish of me to want you to go on with your music career. It's just that I wanted that so badly for myself when I was your age. My parents wanted me to be a missionary---can you imagine? I had an offer to go to New York City to study music, but they refused to support me, so I gave it up. I've regretted it ever since.

**ANNA:** *(quietly)* So can you understand how I feel now?

**JOAN:** But you do enjoy the music, don't you?

**ANNA:** Of course. But mostly I've been doing it to please you, not from some deep-down need of my own. I know this is painful for you, but I can't go on living the life you wish you'd lived; I need to live my own life. I don't want to play a musical instrument; I want to be an instrument for God's music.

**JOAN:** Are you sure about this call to ministry?

**ANNA:** Of course I'm not sure. One minute my heart says "Yes," and I feel an amazing sense of joy. Then I hear voices telling me all the reasons why I can't do it: I'm too young, I'm a woman, I have to think about a career, family, children. And then there are the voices that say, "Who do you think you are? You're worthless! No one would listen to you!"

**JOAN:** I think I'm beginning to understand your struggle. And I don't want to stand in your way. More than anything, I want you to be your whole and free self. And now this old self needs to go to bed. Good night, dear.

**ANNA:** 'Night, Mom. *(Joan exits)*

### SCENE 3:

**ANNA:** (*looking at the spine of one of the books*) Hmm. A Description of the Qualifications Necessary to a Gospel Minister, by Samuel Bownas. That certainly is an intimidating title.

(*Samuel Bownas enters*)

**ANNA:** (*looking up at him, surprised*) You must be Samuel!

**SAMUEL:** I am, indeed.

**ANNA:** I'm happy to see you. I have a lot of questions about this gospel ministry thing, and I hope you can help me. I know it was a very long time ago—like 300 years, but can you tell me how you first felt called to ministry?

**SAMUEL:** I was 20 years old, attending First Day meeting. A young woman, named Anne Wilson, was there and preached; she was very zealous, and fixing my eye upon her, she with a great zeal pointed her finger at me, uttering these words with much power: “A traditional Quaker, thou comest to meeting as thou went from it the last time and goes from it as thou came to it, but art no better for thy coming; what wilt thou do in the end?” This was so pat to my then condition, that, like Saul, I was smitten to the ground, as it might be said, but turning my thoughts inward, in secret I cried, “Lord, what shall I do to help it?” and a voice as it were spoke to my heart saying, “Look unto me, and I will help thee;” and I found much comfort, that made me shed abundance of tears.

**ANNA:** That's a powerful story. Did you change after that?

**SAMUEL:** I longed for meeting-day, and thought it a very long week. When time of meeting came, my mind was soon fixed and staid upon God, and I found an uncommon enjoyment that gave me great satisfaction, my understanding being opened, and all the faculties of my mind so quick, that I seemed another man. I learned the difference between a Quakerism only by education and a Quakerism truly alive to the Spirit.

**ANNA:** That's what I am feeling, too. So what about these “qualifications” you write about? Is it like academic credentials?

**SAMUEL:** No. As I said, it means being alive to the Spirit. It implies a process of personal transformation which reorients the ego, the will, and the attention so that one can be trusted purely to receive and purely to give forth an inspired message.

**ANNA:** So what counts as an “inspired” message?

**SAMUEL:** From my own experience, I understand inspiration to be an inbreathing of the divine Word into our minds, that we may make choice of and walk in the path of wisdom. Waiting for the spirit is the foundation of all right ministry. When I find my understanding

inspired, I give up to it, speaking to the assembly according to the present ability received thereby. Inspiration or revelation from God by his Spirit is of absolute necessity to guide a minister in his (*pause, looks at Anna*) —or her— ministry. A minister so conducted by a gospel power and light, inspiring the mind with the how and the what he—or she—shall say, will speak with the Spirit.

**ANNA:** Whoa. This is pretty dense, and it may take me a while to digest it. I hear you saying that the work of preparation and discernment is inward. I like what you just said about gospel power and light, but I’m afraid that in our time the word “gospel” has been appropriated to mean only the written word—the Bible. I sense that you mean more than that.

**SAMUEL:** A minister needs to be familiar with the scripture, but the Spirit that inspired the scripture is available to us—that inbreathing I spoke of earlier.

**ANNA:** OK. You have given me the foundational guidelines, but I certainly don’t feel qualified at this point. Will I ever?

**SAMUEL:** I know you may find this offensive, but in your infant state . . .

**ANNA:** I do find that offensive, but go on.

**SAMUEL:** If you consider ministry as a kind of birth, then one proceeds from infancy into young adulthood, and then to parental status. At first there may be fear and weakness.

**ANNA:** Yes, I know what that means.

**SAMUEL:** But keep humble and low, honestly giving up to be and do what the Spirit would have thee.

**ANNA:** I don’t have a problem with staying humble and low. I think I have the opposite problem.

**SAMUEL:** I advise an inward waiting upon thy gift, to feel the moving thereof in thy own mind, which will by a gentle illumination clear thy understanding and judgment, whereby thee will see thy place and service in the church.

**ANNA:** Hey, can you come to my next clearness committee? I’d like them to hear the bit about gentle illumination. I thank you, or should I say, I thank thee, Samuel. I have lots more questions, but that’s probably all I can take in for now. I’m still an infant, remember?

**SAMUEL:** Oh, I have faith that this seedling will grow in the light. Farewell.

*(Samuel exits)*

**ANNA:** Oh, this is just too much! (*slams book down*) I will certainly never live up to THOSE qualifications! And I'm worried about Mom. I'm not doing what she wants me to do, and I can't leave her if she's sick. And what will my friends think?

*(She sits down, puts her head in her hands. Then she picks up the Wilt thou go on my Errand book)*

I wonder if any of these earlier Friends had doubts about their call, or were they clearer in those days? (*pause*) And here's the journal of Elizabeth Hudson. She was born in Philadelphia in 1722.

*(Enter Elizabeth Hudson)*

**ANNA:** (*looks up, surprised*) Oh, hello, Elizabeth. This is great! I have so many questions. Where do I start? Um, Let's see. How did you experience the call to ministry?

**ELIZABETH:** I shall never forget the day when it pleased the Lord to open my mouth for the first time in public. It was at the Bank Meeting House in Philadelphia. I had been under the weight and exercise of the ministry since my fifteenth year. During that time I had resisted, indeed, wrestled with what God was requiring of me.

**ANNA:** Wrestling. That describes what I'm feeling, too.

**ELIZABETH:** I wondered what it might mean to take my cross and follow Christ.

**ANNA:** Now that's not something we talk about much among liberal Quakers. How can I translate that? Does taking up my cross mean finding my purpose? Giving up my own ideas of what I need and want?

**ELIZABETH:** I had a sense that there was more to life than my friends, although I greatly delighted in them, and the amusements we engaged in. This sense it pleased God to awaken in me before I knew how to serve him or indeed where to seek him. And the truth is, the main reason I resisted for so long was my unfitness for such an awful undertaking and fear of my being mistaken about the call.

**ANNA:** So you did have doubts and fears.

**ELIZABETH:** Oh yes. I spent a lot of time with books, and avoided my time of retirement.

**ANNA:** You mean you didn't spend time in prayer or scripture reading?

**ELIZABETH:** Right. And all preaching during meetings for worship seemed foolishness to me and an interruption to my way of thinking. Sometimes I dreaded seeing a Friend get up to speak in meeting, and I condemned their impertinence. I thought, "How can any one person teach another, especially one with superior understandings?"

**ANNA:** I have certainly had those thoughts about vocal ministry in my meeting.

**ELIZABETH:** I was lost, like a vessel without an anchor on a tempestuous sea. My mind was disturbed by commotions both from within and without. My foundation in religion was shaken and I found myself alone, left both by God and man. When it was night I wished for day and when day wished for the night—wishing to be somewhere far away from everyone. I sometimes wanted to die. I passed several tedious months in this condition until it pleased kind providence to send several of his ministers amongst us who were good instruments in the hands of the Lord towards rousing me from out of that horrible state I had fallen into.

**ANNA:** I think I get it. You felt called to ministry but resisted it because you didn't feel worthy. That sounds familiar. So how did the visiting ministers help you?

**ELIZABETH:** I remember one minister, Samuel Hopwood, it was, who spoke on the subject of a shepherd and his sheep. I don't remember the particulars but it made an impression on me and I began to be reconciled to the humbling power of Truth, that the Lord would give me strength to speak and would tend me as a sheep in his pasture. In a few months I gave up the resistance and found great peace and enlargement of heart. The drawing cords of God's love soon drew me to visit some nearby meetings, and that was the beginning of my travels in Gospel Ministry.

**ANNA:** Let's see if I can translate that into words that make sense to me today. You realized that it wasn't about you. If you let yourself trust in the Shepherd you would be rightly guided. And you felt drawn by love, not duty, which seemed to scare you at first.

**ELIZABETH:** That sounds about right. Not as wordy as my rendition, but worthy nonetheless.

**ANNA:** When you were traveling in the ministry, how did you know where you were supposed to go?

**ELIZABETH:** I received a call to go to a place. I can't really explain it, but it was clear. As my dear friend Esther put it, the Spirit which leads us forth is like the needle of a compass, for so it points where we ought to go, and when the journey has ended. The specific plans unfold as we take each step under direction of the Spirit.

**ANNA:** Were you ever surprised?

**ELIZABETH:** One time, after my companion and I had spent six months visiting meetings in Ireland, we set sail for England. After ten days at sea a storm blew us back close to the Irish coast near Dublin. I had an urging to go ashore, as I wanted to attend first day meeting for worship. When I asked the captain about it, he refused. I broke down in tears, and he relented, taking me and my companion to shore. During meeting for worship, I was particularly uneasy, feeling the burden of a message I didn't feel qualified to handle. I delivered it in fear and trembling. After meeting a Friend told me he did not wonder why I

was driven back; it was to deliver this message. As we were leaving we learned that the winds had shifted and we had to hurry back to the ship.

**ANNA:** That's amazing. It seems to do this work you have to be really tuned in to the Spirit channel.

**ELIZABETH:** I don't understand the reference, but I get the gist of the metaphor. And yes, you have to be prepared for anything.

**ANNA:** Were there ever times when you visited meetings and didn't have a message?

**ELIZABETH:** Yes. As a matter of fact, on that same trip, when we had reached England finally, we went out to Tottenham for their first day meeting, and about forty friends from London came, but they were disappointed, for neither my companion nor I had anything to say. It pleased the Lord to shut up the gospel treasures.

**ANNA:** That must have been embarrassing. Did you just sit there, while all those people were expecting you to speak? I don't think I could do that.

**ELIZABETH:** I found myself with nothing to say. It is clear that words without the qualification are empty, and all I could do was sit in silent prayer. I felt that those who were sitting there with itching ears, waiting for one of us to speak, needed to be listening to the inward guide within themselves. I find great peace in waiting on the Divine Will to be just what my master dictates I should be.

**ANNA:** I'm having some trouble with the idea of submitting to the dictates of a "master." I need to think some more about how to translate these words. Meanwhile, were you ever dissatisfied with a message you had spoken?

**ELIZABETH:** I do recall one time I experienced a meeting as hard and uncomfortable.

**ANNA:** I'm sure the benches were that.

**ELIZABETH:** Indeed. But this was an internal feeling. My companion had preached well. I attempted to speak, but it came off badly, nothing seemed to come together.

At other times when meeting didn't turn out so well as I could desire, I was too impatient and restless under such disappointments and was often tempted to murmur and repine in spirit.

**ANNA:** I've felt that way, too, sometimes, when I've spoken in meeting too quickly. What did you do about it?

**ELIZABETH:** You probably don't like hearing this, but it's true. You're young. I was young and inexperienced at the time, too. I came to understand that grumbling about the past or

worrying about the future were not acceptable to the one who holds time and seasons, and I learned to subject myself to divine inspiration. All we have is the present moment.

**ANNA:** There's that divine inspiration thing that Samuel Bownas talked about. Did you know him?

**ELIZABETH:** Yes, we met, when I was traveling in England. He was an inspired teacher. I'm glad to hear he wrote down some of his instructions.

**ANNA:** Talking with you has been very helpful, too. I like the way you are open about your feelings; it's good to know that others have experienced doubts and fears.

**ELIZABETH:** Oh my, yes. You will no doubt hear similar tales from other ministers if they are honest about their experience. I wish you well on your journey, my dear. *(exits)*

**ANNA:** *(picking up another book)* Here's another interesting one. Jane Fenn Hoskins. She was born in London and came to this country as an indentured servant. After many harrowing experiences she ended up with a Quaker family in Philadelphia and began attending meeting with them.

*(Jane Fenn enters)*

**ANNA:** Welcome, Jane. Wow. I know life was really different in your day, but could you tell me something about how you experienced the call to ministry?

**JANE:** I was sitting in meeting one day and heard an inner voice telling me that I had been chosen for the ministry. I must confess, this awful word of Divine command shocked me exceedingly, my soul and all within me trembled at the hearing of it; yea my outward tabernacle shook insomuch that many present observed the deep exercise I was under. I cried in spirit, "Lord I am weak and altogether incapable of such a task. "

**ANNA:** That sounds familiar. What happened next?

**JANE:** For six or seven months I continued to resist the command to speak in meeting, until I could withstand the pressure no longer. I stood and spoke a few broken words.

**ANNA:** So that was how it started for you? How did people react to your speaking?

**JANE:** There were some visiting ministers that day, and one of them spoke to me after meeting for worship. I was terrified. He said he wanted to talk to me, and I was invited to dinner at the Lloyd mansion. When I arrived I tried to go among the servants, not thinking myself worthy, but Danson, the visiting English minister, took my hand and encouraged me in the work he believed the Lord was preparing for me.

**ANNA:** And then?

**JANE:** At Danson’s request, the Lloyds took me in and employed me as a housekeeper, but I was free to go wherever Truth led. I began to preach at meetings. Many eyes were upon me as I sat in front of the meeting house, facing the other worshippers. I was become like a city set on a hill which could not be hid. When I asked myself, “Will the Almighty engage a poor unworthy creature in so great a work?”, the divine word to me was, “Trust in my sufficient power, that shall properly qualify thee for every service.”

**ANNA:** So how did you begin to travel in the ministry?

**JANE:** Whenever I felt concerned to travel on religious service, the Lloyds released me from my housekeeping duties. I had many journeys to Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, Long Island, New England, Barbados, and the British Isles. In thinking about my life, I admire at the ordering of Providence, in thus providing for me.

**ANNA:** So let me ask you this. Women in your time were not typically free to speak in public. How did you deal with this?

**JANE:** Well, it’s true that what we were doing was not condoned by society at large, but Friends held to the belief that ministry could come through anyone—man, woman, servant, child. As we traveled together—we usually traveled in pairs, we women got to know each other pretty well—we shared our experiences. We all spoke of the reasoner. I don’t know what word you would use for that today. But it was the voice that told us we were mistaken about the call, that we were inadequate or unfit. If we listened to this voice and resisted the divine command, we experienced periods of dryness and depression, sometimes even physical illness.

**ANNA:** So how did you get over this dark period?

**JANE:** It was a matter of “giving up: of surrender, not only of our will and pride, but all sorts of things: being with our families, our children.

**ANNA:** I don’t have children, but I have my mother to look after. Is that the sort of thing I will have to give up? And is that what Elizabeth Hudson meant when she spoke of ‘taking up the cross?’

**JANE:** Yes, probably. It is a matter of being obedient to the inner guide, no matter the cost. Sometimes we were away from our families for months and even years at a time. But we were being faithful to God’s call.

**ANNA:** I can’t even imagine what it must have been like to travel for so long and under such harsh conditions.

**JANE:** We couldn’t have done it, if we had not been chosen instruments.

**ANNA:** Now that’s a term I can relate to. Maybe I’m a chosen instrument.

**JANE:** And you have your own challenges. As my story illustrates, way often opens in unexpected ways. I pray, dear one, that you will walk worthy of your calling. You will be given what you need.

*(Jane exits)*

#### SCENE 4

*(Anna is still carrying the books. She dances around the room)*

*(Joan enters)*

**JOAN:** What are you so up in the air about? If I didn't know better I'd say you were in love.

**ANNA:** Maybe I am. What do you know about me, anyway?

**JOAN:** I know that the scumbag you've been dating wouldn't bring this kind of joy.

**ANNA:** *(comes down with a bang)* Ouch. Well, this has nothing to do with Darryl anyway. Would you like to hear what I've been doing?

**JOAN:** *(sits down next to her)* Yes, I would. Maybe this joy is contagious.

**ANNA:** I've been reading the books Margaret brought by, and they are really speaking to me.

**JOAN:** And what are they saying?

**ANNA:** Are you ready to really listen? Are your hackles down?

**JOAN:** Try me.

**ANNA:** This is serious, mom. I'm trying to come to terms with some heavy stuff here. Do you remember the story from the Bible of Jacob wrestling with the angel?

**JOAN:** Vaguely, yes.

**ANNA:** Well, Jacob ended up getting his name and his whole identity changed after that interaction. One of the journals I was reading spoke of wrestling like that. Really struggling with questions of who or what is in charge of my life. You have been a major force up to now, making a lot of decisions for me, and I have followed along but it hasn't felt like my path.

**JOAN:** Go on. I'm listening.

**ANNA:** Now I'm feeling drawn by something larger than myself. I don't know what to call it. Maybe God will do for now. And how can I surrender my identity when I don't feel I have one? I haven't had time to know myself, and now I'm being called to surrender that self, to take up my cross.

**JOAN:** Whoa, you're losing me, sweetie. That is not language I'm comfortable with at all.

**ANNA:** It's new to me, too. The way it is used by the Quaker women whose journals I've been reading is not what I've heard from my fundamentalist Christian friends. It's not focusing on Jesus being crucified. It's about following his example of being faithful to God's leading. My struggle is how can I find my purpose in life and deny my ego at the same time?

**JOAN:** And what about your gifts? Your musical talent, for example?

**ANNA:** Yes, what about that? Am I to give that up?

**JOAN:** I hope not.

**ANNA:** Maybe it's like Abraham and Isaac. I have to be willing to give it up.

**JOAN:** I've been thinking lately, too, about what it means to give up my life. I'm not ready to die. Not just yet. But I may not have much time left.

**ANNA:** What are you talking about? What haven't you told me?

**JOAN:** I didn't want to alarm you. Anyway, nothing is certain. I've been to the doctor and they've done some tests.

**ANNA:** Oh, Mom. I had no idea. And here I've been so wrapped up in my own concerns.

**JOAN:** No, you were right. You have to find your own way.

**ANNA:** Well, I'm not going to leave you alone, that's for sure.

**JOAN:** I don't want to hold you back from doing what you need to do.

**ANNA:** I keep thinking about those early Quaker women traveling. What I kept reading was that when they were called to travel they could do no other. Some of them had small children. How could they have left them? How can I leave you?

**JOAN:** I'm not your child, and you don't need to take care of me.

**ANNA:** I'm glad you told me about your illness. I want to be here for you.

*(Lights down)*

## **ACT TWO: ( a year later)**

*SCENE 1:* Anna and her companion in the ministry, Christine, are visiting a meeting. The meeting had requested a visitor to help them learn more about ministry and eldership. They are about to join an informal social gathering prior to a workshop.

*(Several people are gathered in an informal way, some sitting, some standing, talking amongst themselves, holding tea cups.)*

*(Anna and Christine approach stage left, but they are still outside the meeting space.)*

**ANNA:** I'm really uncomfortable with these informal gatherings. I feel awkward and don't know what to say.

**CHRISTINE:** Take a deep breath and ask for guidance. You are well prepared for the workshop tomorrow, and you'll get through this, too. OK? *(Anna nods)* Let's go in.

*(A woman rises from the group to greet them)*

**BARBARA:** Hi, You must be Anna. I'm Barbara. *(shakes her hand)* Welcome to our meeting.

**ANNA:** Thank you. This is Christine, my companion in the ministry.

**BARBARA:** People are still arriving so we'll just visit for a few more minutes before we begin eating. Let me introduce you.

*(takes Anna by the hand and takes her to one person to introduce her. They shake hands)*

*(Christine, meanwhile goes to someone else and shakes hands)*

Comments from the group: *(said to each other as Anna is going around shaking hands and meeting individual people)*

--She's so young!

-She looks like she's in high school.

--She looks younger than my daughter.

--Out of the mouths of babes . . .

**BARBARA:** As a young person, perhaps you can help me understand something. I've noticed over the years that our children disappear from Meeting once they become teenagers. Do you have any ideas about how we can keep these young people interested?

**ANNA:** *(looking around the room)* Well, if you were a teenager, would you feel like you belonged in this group?

**BARBARA:** I suppose not, but how can we change?

**ANNA:** I don't have the answer, but I suggest that we raise the question in the workshop tomorrow.

*(Barbara wanders off without saying anything, leaving Anna standing alone.)*

*(Christine comes over to where Anna is standing.)*

**CHRISTINE:** How are you doing?

**ANNA:** OK, I think. I just need to keep reminding myself that this is not about me. They don't have to like me. I can't make myself older, or taller, or change my sex, at least not without great difficulty. All I can do is be faithful to whatever ministry I'm being called to here.

**CHRISTINE:** And my job is to hold you to that.

*(All Exit)*

**SCENE 2:** Anna is meeting again with Margaret, Martha, and John, now gathered as her care committee

**MARGARET:** We haven't met for a while, so perhaps you could begin by telling us how God has been with you since last we met.

**ANNA:** By way of checking in, I can say that Mom is doing better. Last year was a very stressful time for both of us. I felt torn between wanting to be there for her and wanting to do what I was being called to do. Then something shifted in me. Taking care of Mom was no longer a burden. I feel that I have grown a lot.

**MARTHA:** After the struggle we had with the meeting approving your travel minute, I think we have all grown a lot.

**JOHN:** Yes, that process certainly opened MY eyes. At first I was really impatient with how much time it took the meeting to come to unity, but I can see now that it was a spirit-led process.

**MARGARET:** Anna, can you tell us more about how you've grown?

**ANNA:** Well, for one thing, my relationship with my mother has changed. When Mom got sick I sort of put everything aside and tended her. We became much closer. I understand more about her story, and she has come to accept my path. I don't think John and Martha

know that Mom's parents were Evangelical Friends, and they really wanted her to be a missionary. They both traveled a lot and I think Mom resented their being away so much. When they refused to support her in pursuing a music career, she gave up on both music and the church. She pretty much rejected Quakerism, or any religion, altogether. When I started attending the West Philadelphia worship group when I was in college, she didn't like it much. During the past year though, we've had some good talks about our spiritual journeys.

**MARGARET:** Can you say more about how things shifted for you over the past month?

**ANNA:** I guess what happened was something like a transformation of my will. Once I gave up my notion of what I was supposed to do and really submitted to God's will, Way opened.

**MARTHA:** (*taking out her notebook*) I wrote down the last time we met—let's see, that was in November—that you were going to a gathering of young adult Friends with a focus on ministry and then you were going to visit a meeting somewhere in ....Kansas?

**ANNA:** Yes. Both of those things happened. The visit to a small meeting in Kansas was with Deborah Fisch under the FGC Traveling Ministries Program. It was my first visit with that program since you recommended me for it last year, and I was well mentored and well used. Mostly, Deborah was called to speak, but sometimes I was. We supported each other in prayer. I now understand why early Friends traveled in pairs.

(*pause*)

I was given a message in meeting for worship. At first I resisted, because I was the companion in ministry and didn't feel I was supposed to speak, but then I was almost pushed off the bench and up on my feet. I don't remember exactly what I said, but I think it was something like God's love is over all, and we sometimes forget that, and our daily stuff gets in the way. If we open our hearts to the guidance of that loving presence, everything changes.

(*Silence*)

**MARTHA:** And how about the gathering of young adult Friends?

**ANNA:** (*after a pause*) It was really good to be among other people my age who are experiencing a rekindling of the fire of Quakerism. We all get discouraged sometimes, but many of us are being called to ministry among Friends. Hey, why not proclaim, like George Fox did, that the Kingdom of God is among us, if we would just wake up and pay attention. That is such a "sweet, pure, totally butt-kicking concept," as my friend Kody Hersh puts it. It's a vision of a world transformed. I just find that so exhilarating.

**MARGARET:** Oh, Anna, this is really inspiring to hear!

**MARTHA:** And I certainly don't want to get in the way of all this excitement, but I do feel the need to ask you, because we need to report to meeting, whether you feel you have been faithful in responding to God's call.

**ANNA:** In most cases, I have felt well used. In fact I often feel used up. I return home exhausted. I don't know how those early Quaker women kept up those brutal schedules of visiting four or five different meetings in a few days, holding multiple gatherings, visiting with families. And they traveled by horseback. I feel like such a wimp by comparison. But yes, to the extent that I am able, I feel I have been faithful.

*(pause)*

**JOHN:** I want to tell you, Anna, that serving on your care committee has been a transforming experience for me. Wrestling with your questions and helping you discern your path has deepened my faith in ways that I never imagined. And I'm grateful.

*(Silence)*

**ANNA:** *(reaching out to take others' hands)* I appreciate your faithful companionship on this journey, Friends.

**THE END**

### **Notes:**

1. The words of Samuel Bownas are taken from his journal as quoted by William P. Taber Jr., ed., in his Introduction, and adapted from the text itself : *A Description of the Qualifications Necessary to A Gospel Minister: Advice to Ministers and Elders among the People Called Quakers*. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1989 (orig. 1767, London), pp. xxviii, xx, 18, 21, 27, 28, 29.
2. The words of Elizabeth Hudson are extracted from her journal as presented in Margaret Hope Bacon, *Wilt Thou Go On My Errand? Three 18th Century Journals of Quaker Women Ministers*. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1994, pp. 127-130, 159-164, 173, and one quotation from Rebecca Larson, p. 4.
3. The words of Jane Fenn Hoskins are constructed from a description of her life and ministry in Rebecca Larson, *Daughters of Light: Quaker Women Preaching and Prophesying in the Colonies and Abroad, 1700-1775*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999, pp. 47-50; and from an excerpt from her journal in Margaret Hope Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism: The Story of Quaker Women in America*, 2nd ed., Philadelphia, Friends General Conference, 1986 p. 32.

## **Suggestions for using this play in your Meeting:**

1. The production can be as simple as gathering a group of at least 8 people to read the play together with no concern for matching age or gender. This can be followed with a discussion about the themes. It would be suitable for a gathering of a monthly or yearly meeting ministry and nurture (or equivalent) committee.
2. For a full production, one person should be designated as the director. That person, in consultation with others, discerns who in the Meeting might play each role. Acting experience or ability is not necessary, but the person should be able to read aloud clearly and with expression. Once the cast has been assembled, it is useful to have one rehearsal. This can be a time of fellowship, with a simple meal provided. The play is read through once, stopping if needed for clarification or guidance. For the production with an audience, minimal props are needed (e.g., 4 chairs for Act one, Scene 1). It is fun to have the 18<sup>th</sup> century visitors in costume: the women in Quaker caps (easy to make), long skirts, and shawls, and the man in plain dress if available, or whatever might suggest it. The meeting is then invited to attend the production and engage in discussion at the end. This would be suitable for a yearly meeting's annual sessions or as a special event in a monthly meeting.

## **Suggestions for follow-up/discussion questions:**

1. What, if anything, did you learn about Quakers and ministry from this play?
2. Did any of the characters "speak your mind?"
3. Did anything in the play trouble you?
4. Does it matter that Anna is a young adult? How might the story be different if the main character were older?
5. Does the play leave you with any questions?
6. What about the messages from past ministers? Did you hear anything that "spoke to your condition?"
7. In what ways did the ministers from the past provide mentoring for Anna? How might meetings provide that kind of mentorship?
8. If you were Anna, how would you feel about the first meeting with the clearness committee?
9. If you were a member of that clearness committee or later, of Anna's support committee, how might you respond to Anna's call?

## Sources:

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Philadelphia, PA: Friends General Conference, 1986.
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