

Friends Fellowship of Healing

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Sixty Years of Fellowship

(1935 - 1995)

Origins

A concern emerged in the mid-1930s among a group of Friends based mainly in Leitchworth and London, that the healing ministry of Jesus had for too long been neglected by the Church, and was no longer regarded as an integral part of his life and teaching. Meeting together regularly for study and prayer for the sick and needy, they issued an invitation to any interested Friends to meet them at Yearly Meeting in 1935. Much encouraged by the support and sharing they experienced on that occasion, they repeated the invitation the following year, to find the numbers doubled, and to learn that a number of similar groups all over the country were meeting regularly for study and intercessory prayer. So the Friends Spiritual Healing Fellowship was born.

The purpose of the Fellowship was clearly set out in an early leaflet ... "Membership at once puts one in the way of prayer. Prayer is both a directional force and an area of power. Prayer links all people who have the same aims with God to whom all prayer is directed. Prayer signifies the aspirations of man. It is praise, adoration and supplication, the human reaching out to the divine. There is no special time, there are no set words, but all the deeds, the longings which can animate the human frame can be consecrated as prayer ... There is loss when anyone who can does not pray, loss to himself, loss to others."

... and in paragraph 312 of *Christian Faith and Practice* (1960 edition), "We would encourage Friends, therefore, reverently yet daringly to make fuller experiment of the life of trust and consecration through prayer, that they may know relief from the burden of anxiety and perplexity and realise the joy of health and victory, whereby they may become centres of radiant energy for the help and healing of others."

The movement continued to grow quietly and steadily in spite of difficulties during the war years, to be taken up with renewed vigour after the war ended, under the chairmanship of Olaf Hodgkin. Based on the Central London Group, a panel of speakers visited other groups throughout the country, encouraging established groups, helping to form new ones, promoting Quiet Days and Retreats, and the names of Olaf Hodgkin, Gertrude Saunders, Hannah Leather, Sonia Syner, Charles Hartwell and Jean Campbell still arouse echoes of inspiration for a number of us. Dr. Howard Collier, as a busy G.P. was not so free to travel, but a number of his helpful talks and writings were published as pamphlets, and still encourage us today. Charles Hartwell led a small group on several occasions from 1956 onwards to visit Friends in Europe, and promoted correspondence with Friends in Denmark, Norway, Switzerland and Greece: while Gertrude Saunders became responsible for correspondence with American Friends.

Room 23

In 1953 a room was acquired in Friends House, and Room 23 became the headquarters of the Fellowship for over twenty years. A weekly prayer meeting was held there at 4.00 p.m. on Wednesdays; Sonia Syner and Jean Campbell offered their therapies with relaxation and music, massage, meditation and healing prayer on Tuesdays and Wednesdays; and Hannah Leather the blessing of the gift in her hands through physiotherapy, on alternate Thursdays. A rota of Friends offered a befriending and counselling service to cover most of the rest of the week.

Regular evening meetings were held once a week for prayer and study, often with a speaker, when close contacts were enjoyed with other Healing Guilds and well-known pioneers such as Godfrey Mowatt, Dr. Evelyn Frost, Ursula McConnell, and Father Jim Wilson.

A pattern emerged of regular conferences and retreats, inspiring talks at Yearly Meetings, visits, a newsletter, and the publication of pamphlets in co-operation with the Home Service Committee in the early years, such as Sonia Syner's *Gospel of Wholeness*, *Aids to Spiritual Healing* by Cuthbert Dukes, *Spiritual Healing and the Christian Message* by Olaf Hodgkin, *Health and the Quaker Way of Life*, and *Spiritual Healing in Quaker Meetings* by Howard Collier, while Fred Tritton's *Prayer and Healing* was soon translated into German and Swedish.

Claridge House and Lattendales

From this basis of prayer have sprung all the activities of the Fellowship. "Whenever we intercede in prayer we must be prepared for an answer that lays an obligation upon us ... this service has led to the discovery that many people need to be taken from their environment into a quiet place where there is an atmosphere of belief in Healing ..."

So in October 1948 an experiment was undertaken for a trial period of six months to establish a 'Rest Home' at Elms Farm House, Penn, the home of Constance and Hilda Fox, with Katharine Edwards as warden. Though a number of guests derived help from its peaceful atmosphere, it proved an unsuitable venue, and it wasn't until January 1954 that Claridge House was opened with Margaret Leather as warden, and Lillian James her assistant. Many have found refreshment and healing there and we owe much to those who over the years, often in face of difficulty and stress, gave themselves in the service of others to build and maintain a place of beauty, peace and power-for-renewal on a shoe-string budget that had to be self-financing.

Later threatened with increasing aircraft noise from Gatwick, and the encroachment of London overspill, an alternative location was sought in a quieter, more remote area. In 1971 'Lattendales' in Greystoke, near Penrith, Cumbria, was sighted, and negotiations started for its acquisition - but then an outcry arose in defence of the retention of Claridge House, and after much prayer, the sale of some spare land belonging to Claridge House, an appeal to Friends, a bank loan, and above all as an act of faith, it was decided to attempt to launch a 'sister-house' in the North. In 1972 Peter and Elizabeth Mathews prepared to open the house to guests, and a small miracle arrived in the guise of Ted Thomlinson to take charge of the garden and greenhouse. Unfortunately Peter Mathews died within the year, but after a period of waiting and consolidation, Desmond and Joy Saunders were appointed to lead the staff team; they built up the house through a number of changes to offer the same atmosphere of peace and joy in renewal that had blessed so many. They also established a winter programme (from November to March) of weekend study-groups, retreats and gatherings to broaden the purpose and usefulness of the House.

In 1988 Desmond and Joy were succeeded by Tim and Mary Upchurch, followed in 1990 by David and Joan Eljison, the present wardens. In 1993 an exciting development took place at Lattendales with the purchase of 15 acres of pasture land beyond the garden. This step was in part taken to avoid possible building

encroachment from development in the village. It has secured in perpetuity beautiful open views and an extensive area for recreational use by guests.

Margaret Leather served as warden of Claridge House for eleven years, to be followed by Derick and Muriel Eveleigh for the next six years, when John and Esme Brighton took over. John started worship/fellowship weekends at the House (some led by Frank Taylor and by Damaris Parker-Rhodes) which had great appeal. After John's wardenship ended in 1979 a period of frequent staff changes followed, but the work settled down again in 1987 when Tom and Paulin Pool took over as wardens with the status of managers. They gradually developed their own healing skills and brought a new emphasis to the House with the offer of spiritual healing, counselling and massage to all guests who wished to receive them. An extensive programme of weekend courses particularly related to different aspects of healing was also built up. The House was given a new roof and outbuildings were adapted to provide a special unit for the disabled and a new staff flat.

Healing Groups

Mary Thomas undertook to keep postal contact with scattered groups in 1949, perhaps laying the foundations for the Postal Group service which Nan Warner took up in 1952, and which Isabel Harvey organised and convened in 1954. Later Rosemary Frost took over, and continued long after Joan Hackwell inherited the responsibility of convenorship, writing hundreds of warm, supportive letters right up to the time of her death in 1985.

Now there are over 60 prayer and healing groups throughout the country which are registered with the Fellowship; Anne Smith coordinates the postal groups, each with their secretary and helpers, making links with folks who request prayer for many kinds of needs and to whom she distributes newsletters quarterly. There is a postal lending library of books on healing and related subjects. In 1986 a group originally organised by Constance Peters and carried on by Sylvia Burton, to offer prayer specifically for 'The Mother and her Unborn Child' was affiliated to and warmly welcomed by the Fellowship. There is also an 'Immediate Prayer Group' convened by Rosemary Bartlett who can be contacted by telephone in times of accident and emergency.

Changes

The Fellowship has grown and now has nearly a thousand members. From a committee of officers meeting once a month, with a variety of sub-committees, a wider committee developed which meets three times a year to deal with all the Fellowship's activities, except for the literature which is dealt with by a small sub-committee.

The name 'Spiritual Healing Fellowship' had proved a stumbling-block to some Friends over the years, and gave rise to misunderstanding of the prayer approach to Wholeness which is the basis of the Fellowship, so after much discussion and consideration the title was changed to Friends Fellowship of Healing at the A.G.M. at Yearly Meeting in 1963.

Joan Hackwell was our longest serving secretary, completing nearly twenty years of faithful, self-effacing service. Our first chairman, Olaf Hodgkin, who emigrated to Australia at the age of 91 and proceeded to lay the foundations of the Healing Fellowship there before he died at the age of 102, held that office until 1961, when Phyllis Taunton Wood with her artist's eye and hand, her deep psychological insights, her gift of words in poetry and prose, together with her beautiful speaking voice, took over for the next nine years, to be followed in 1970 by Bernice Joachim, who was succeeded by Alan Pearce in 1984. Treasurers have not been quite so 'hardy' and have changed rather more frequently, but Les McIver has served faithfully since 1976.

The newsletter, begun in the early days as a link between scattered groups, has grown and developed into a journal, originally published quarterly, now three times a year, with reports of meetings, conferences and groups, book reviews and articles of varying lengths – all providing thought and inspiration 'Towards Wholeness' as its title so aptly suggests. It has been edited with dedication by Joanna Harris since 1984.

The substantial task of maintaining the membership records was for many years conscientiously carried out by Donald Coles, who developed a unique healing ministry of letter writing. In 1991 he was succeeded by Leonard and Lilian Palmer.

There has been a remarkable growth of interest in contact healing over the last decade. A quite large group of Quaker healers now meet three times a year at Claridge House for mutual support, the sharing of information and ideas and the development of their healing gifts. The wardens of Claridge House have evolved a whole series of courses to help and to encourage people to develop their potential as healers. These courses have proved very popular.

Literature

In recent years an extensive series of leaflets and booklets has been produced to meet a variety of needs. Many of the brief, inspiring poems of Louie Horne have been reproduced in two booklets. An inspiring anthology prepared by Anne Smith, *Friends find words*, has been published. The topic of bereavement has been covered in three booklets: *Handicap and bereavement* by Joan Fitch; an anthology prepared by Joanna Harris, *Mourn us not*, and *Grief experienced* by Valerie Cherry. Beth Stubbs brought together writings of Friends on depression in *Coming through the Darkness*. The growth of interest in contact healing was covered by David Hodges in his booklet *Seeking to heal?* David also produced a substantial work on *Science, Spirituality and Healing*.

The Future

As we come towards the end of the 20th century there are encouraging signs of a growing recognition of the contribution the Fellowship makes to deepening the life of the Society of Friends; renewed interest in prayer and its expression in different language and ways; the recognition of the value of natural therapies to complement orthodox treatment and a growing demand for counselling help.

Healing is so much more than a relief or release from symptoms – it is a making whole – a growth of the individual in relation to God, and therefore in integration of the self, reflected on all levels of one's being. It may be like a cataclysmic removal of a mountain, or like a seed growing silently to fruition, and the story is not confined to this earth-dimension since we are dealing with eternal verities. But if we are attentive and sincere, we shall become increasingly aware of God's purposes being worked out not only through the individual, but also on the cosmic level, and it is no small thing to find ourselves called to become fellow-workers with God. We have seen so much happen in 60 years – wherever the future may lead us in our search for Wholeness and in opportunities of service, we know ourselves to be one in the fellowship of prayer, with those whose friendship and love have challenged and inspired us from the past, as well as those who will carry the story into the future. Glory be to God.