

Institution in Jessup, Md.

Another small action in the prison system is delivering old magazines to the Ann Arundel County Detention Center. We used to take magazines to Patuxent (much nearer), but they had "administrative difficulties" and now can't accept these donations. Next, we took them to the House of Correction, another prison in Jessup (a real prison-industry town). When that got into complications, the state librarian suggested Ann Arundel, and they've loved us ever since. Every Monday my wife, Peggy, picks up the discards from the Friends House library as she goes to her "sewing circle" in the nursing home. When we get a garage full, we take them to Ann Arundel.

The detention center librarian is a real jewel! So many of her "clients" have such poor reading skills that they mostly just "look at the pitchers." She'll go out to garage sales on Saturday mornings and scarf up children's books for the prisoners to use for reading practice. Often she'll get the sellers to donate their whole load of books by offering them a tax write-off donation receipt from the county. Neat trick!

The detention centers offer a GED diploma program (high school equivalency), but most of the inmates are there for too short a time to get the full benefit of it. The Sandy Spring Friends elementary and upper school libraries have cleared out surplus books and other teaching materials and donated them to this detention center. The librarian makes the material available to the inmates, but she has been forbidden to do any tutoring herself. Such is the mentality of prison administration!

Jack Fogarty
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Meetings for Healing in the Manner of Friends

by Merry Stanford and Richard Lee

Meeting for healing is a place for Friends to pray together for each other and for those we love.

Eight women and men sit together, silently, in the living room of a Friend. They sit close together, almost knee to knee. One Friend is breathing loudly; all have their eyes closed. A palpable sense of Presence fills the room: an ill friend or relative is being held in the Light. This individual has recently experienced a debilitating accident that has produced terrifying nightmares. Her injuries are healing slowly, and she is experiencing symptoms for which her physicians can find no cause. After some time of silence, one of the women sings a hymn quietly, "Be not afraid. I go before you always." Following another lengthy period of silence, one of the men prays, "Help us, God, to encourage this Friend, to reflect to her all of the love and hopefulness that she has given to us in times past. Guide us in loving her well, so that her healing may progress, and her trust in you deepen." Silence again fills the room. Moments later, another Friend speaks: "This may sound unusual, but I am being led to share that this Friend may benefit from seeking the advice of an osteopathic physician." Silence returns. After some moments, the convener turns the attention of the group to another person who has asked to be held in the Light.

Richard Lee and Merry Stanford are members of Red Cedar Meeting in Lansing, Michigan.

This meeting for healing, held monthly over the past year in our monthly meeting, is a place for Friends of all stripes to pray together for each other and for those we love. Many times vocal ministry is shared, which may take the form of prayer, sharing of insight, song, even information. In all cases, Friends are brought closer together as they surround the person making the request with love and Light.

Richard's English Quaker grandmother participated with Friends in meeting for healing over many years. In their case this was a weekly event, held midweek. Their goal was to hold in the Light any members of their meeting who were physically ill. They not only performed this ministry with regularity but with loyalty, holding individuals in the Light over many meetings until led to discontinue doing so. It was while visiting this grandmother and attending her meeting for worship and meeting for healing in the Cotswolds that Richard first experienced and learned to love Quaker worship. He was moved on his return to the United States to find a Quaker community with which to worship in this way. Although he became an active member of Red Cedar (Mich.) Meeting and visited oth-



ers throughout North America, he was unable to find any meetings for healing of the sort he had experienced with his grandmother. After experiencing some specially called meetings for healing for Friends facing acute illnesses, Richard and Merry decided to co-convene a monthly gathering in Richard's house.

Our experience with this has been simple and profound. Some of the deepest worship we have experienced has occurred in these meetings for healing. We are unsure why this is so, but suspect that it is the result of two things: sharing love and sharing common focus with others in the group. When an individual who is suffering is held in the Light, it is impossible to feel anything but tenderness toward that person. This seems to be true even when the person in question is one whom we may find annoying or tiresome. Opening up to a person's pain gentles even the most resentful heart. When a roomful of people do this together, the love generated is almost palpable!

Sharing a common focus throughout the meeting also seems to deepen the

experience. When we all focus on a specific person and we come together for the distinct purpose of holding that person in the Light, we eventually reach a state of attunement with each other. It is as though we were instruments in an orchestra, coming together for the purpose of playing a specific piece of music. As we settle into each other's presence, we are "tuned"; our spirits find a common tone and play it together. We believe it is the intentional sharing of a clear common focus that helps make this possible.

Some of our Mennonite friends also attend these meetings for healing and have provided fresh awareness of prayer for those of us who tend to be universalist or academically oriented. We have learned that prayer can be more than a bouncing of supplications off a sky-dwelling father, or statements of trust in a benign (and painfully impersonal!) universe. We have learned to pray "where we are," from who we are. Now, rather

We have learned to pray "where we are," from who we are. We have learned to ask boldly for divine help as we passionately involve ourselves in the real-life trials of others.

than merely asking for the intercession of God to heal a depressed person, we cheerfully insist that, if we are to help this individual find her sense of joy, then we must be guided and strengthened. We pray to be led, to be used well, and to develop the sight, hearing, and courage to see, hear, and respond rightly to others' suffering.

Our goal is healing, not curing. It is not our aim to eradicate all physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering from our midst. Our own experience tells us that pain can serve a useful purpose, raising the red flag that something is out of kilter and needs our attention. But there are times in everyone's life when pain seems to compound pain, and suffering begets

suffering. There are times when we fail to learn, or are unable to learn, from our pain. At those times we need the support of people who love us, people who can nurture, listen, physically care for, or pray for us. In this way they help us transform our pain, just as the pain of childbirth is transformed into an exquisitely precious infant. It is our goal, when we hold some-

one in the Light, to do nothing less than to help transform that person's suffering into something beautiful. The wonder of the experience is that, in doing this, we ourselves gradually are transformed into people who are increasingly loving and increasingly patient with the imperfections of others. □

We use the following guidelines in our meetings for healing. Please accept them only as suggestions, using your own creativity and sense of the Spirit to build something that works for your meeting.

☼ Two or more Friends gather together with the intention of meeting for worship for healing under the care of the Inner Light.

☼ The intention is to help someone who wants to be helped. It is important to have the individual's permission.

☼ The intention is to hold a meeting for worship for healing, rather than a meeting for despair, grief, or anger. Participants may be under stress, worried, and concerned and lose sight of the power of love. While it may be useful and healing for the individual in question, or a relative or friend, to express despair, grief, or anger in the accepting company of the meeting, it is best if the tenor of the meeting as a whole continues to be one of quiet, unrelenting, and transformative love.

☼ We suggest that you sit fairly close together in a circle, perhaps even with hands or knees touching.

☼ We have found that in a meeting for healing lasting approximately an hour to an hour and a half, it is best to focus on five to eight folks for healing concern. Selecting more than eight people is considerably tiring, and seems to dilute the effect of the meeting for those involved.

☼ Briefly provide pertinent information regarding each individual before worship. We stress that people generally do not like to have their pain bandied about conversationally, so information should be kept to a minimum, shared respectfully, and held strictly confidential. We discourage each other from discussing the

individual's situation outside of the meeting for healing.

☼ During worship, the convener presents each person's name, in turn, out of the silence.

☼ Each individual is held in the Light separately, and the amount of time spent is as the Spirit moves (as discerned by the convener). The time tends to vary.

☼ The convener position may rotate or it may be that a gifted Friend is a consistent convener. Try to let the Spirit lead.

☼ Vocal ministry may or may not come concerning an individual. It is not unusual to spend much if not all of the hour in silence.

☼ Vocal ministry may take such forms as prayer, sharing of insight as to how healing may progress, song, sharing potentially helpful information, and empathic statements.

☼ Most importantly, keep it simple, in true Quaker fashion!

Those who have requested to be held in the Light may or may not be present during the meeting for healing. The following arrangements have been used in a variety of contexts. Of most importance is creating a trustworthy situation for everyone involved. Please do not force hands-on experiences where they are not anticipated with delight, and do not deny such experiences where they are yearned for.

☼ Those asking to be held in the Light may be present. They may sit as part of the circle or sit or lie in the center of the circle. They may or may not desire to be linked by holding hands or other touch.

Someone may stand behind the individual. The standing Friend is linked to others and places her palms on the individual's shoulders.

☼ Frequently, the individual requesting help is not physically present at all, but has made the request through a friend or relative.

☼ Friends may wish to picture the recipient as being held within shimmering, healing, loving light. Friends sometimes experience specific vivid images. It is usually helpful to share these in the meeting for healing.

☼ The meeting for healing may take on a concern such as healing the earth or healing a conflict.

These words may find a home in Friends seeking a focus for healing ministry. We are available to help you find your way through the initial processes of convening a meeting for healing. We would also love to correspond with those willing to share their experiences with healing in the traditional manner of Friends. If there are enough of us, we may even be motivated to start a small newsletter. You can write to or e-mail us:

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