

Meeting for Worship for Healing

By [Richard K. Lee and Sarah M. Lloyd](#) in the April, 2018 issue of *Friends Journal*

Meeting for worship for healing (healing prayer) is a gathering for the purpose of holding people, concerns, and situations in the Light. Jesus Christ was a healer. There are 42 stories of his healings in the New Testament, and he assured those whom he called “friends,” rather than “servants” (John 15:15), that they would be able to do the same miracles he did and even more (14:12). Healing has been an activity of Friends from the very beginning. George Fox, James Nayler, Elizabeth Hooton, Mary Penington, and other members of the Valiant Sixty were healers, but records of their healing work were suppressed out of fear of persecution: Friends did not wish anyone to think they were drawing upon or claiming occult powers. George Fox recorded his miraculous healings in a book in order to prove that he followed in the footsteps of Jesus, having the intention it be published after his death. This book, however, and other mentions of healing work were suppressed by Friends of his time, and remained in the shadows until the mid-twentieth century.

Historian Henry J. Cadbury reconstructed some of the book of miracles using the index of Fox’s writings, Fox’s letters, and his unedited *Journal*. It was published as *George Fox’s Book of Miracles* in 1948, with an extensive introduction and notes relating to the healing activities of early Friends. It was reprinted by Quakers Uniting in Publications (QUIP) in 2000. Friends Fellowship of Healing, in England, has supported the healing work of Friends and meetings for worship for healing since 1935. It has among its publications many pamphlets dealing with healing, including *George Fox and the Healing Ministry* by R. D. Hodges. Healing and miracles did not stop when the Valiant Sixty passed on.

Richard Lee first encountered meeting for worship for healing in the home of his English Quaker grandmother when he visited her in Frampton-on-Severn, Gloucestershire, in the late 1960s. Although she was part of a continuous practice passed down from early Friends, it was little known and rarely practiced by North American Friends at the time. The tradition of meeting for worship for healing rose out of early Friends meetings for sufferings during the time when Quakers were being persecuted and thrown in jail on the slightest pretext, often leaving children, livestock, and crops behind and in need of care. At these meetings for sufferings, Friends would gather and worship with attention to what needed to be done to alleviate suffering brought on by persecution. As led by the Spirit during worship, they would then divide up tasks. When the persecutions subsided, the focus changed to folks who were ailing. Gradually, some of the meetings for sufferings evolved into meetings for worship for healing.

Richard’s grandmother Florence Rose Morgan began instructing him in the ways of healing prayer when he visited her several times in his late teens and early 20s. She held meeting for worship for healing in her home, following the tradition passed down to her through the Foresters of the Forest of Dean in Cinderford, where she spent most of her adult life. Based on this tradition, she appreciated the work of James Nayler more than that of George Fox, although she recognized them both as healers. Friends she knew in Arlingham had records of early Friends

meetings for sufferings going back to the 1600s, and they shared this information with Richard in 1966.

In the mid-1980s, Richard began holding occasional meetings for worship for healing in his home. He and Verne and Shirley Bechill also offered them at Lake Erie Yearly Meeting and at the Friends General Conference Gathering as an interest group. In the early 1990s, he traveled to meetings throughout North America and visited England, where he interviewed elderly Friends who had lived into the tradition. He also met with representatives of the Friends Fellowship of Healing and collected their published materials. In 1994, Richard established a regular monthly meeting for worship for healing in his home under the care of Red Cedar Meeting in Lansing, Michigan, that continues to this day.

Meeting for worship for healing is a Quaker meeting for worship that differs from First-day worship in that the clerk directs the attention of worshipers to the persons, concerns, and situations for which healing prayer has been requested. Messages are welcomed. Laying on of hands is also welcomed, if the person requesting healing is comfortable with that. Meeting for worship for healing is not exactly “faith healing,” nor is it shamanic or Reiki. It is, however, friendly to and supplements other healing modalities including Western medicine. Laying on of hands, in particular, can be an important supplement to Western medicine, which rarely includes touch. The purpose of healing prayer is to shift the energy in and around the person or situation in the direction of wholeness. It is usually not intercessory prayer. Spirit is present within and around us all the time and illuminates the worship for Friends from within. Friends assembled often experience a sense of being surrounded by Light or warmth or a loving Presence. Holding the person or situation in the Light both corporately and individually, we join with Spirit to help make the change that is needed.

Wholeness can come in many different ways. People can receive their heart’s desire as a result of healing prayer, but sometimes the problem presented is a metaphor for something else in life that requires a person to explore further. We may discover that someone or something close—an herb, a pet, a family member—can open the door to healing. The emotions around the request can be important. When meeting on behalf of someone seriously or dangerously ill or something direly wrong, it’s important for us to share our fears when the request is first mentioned, and then later, as led by the clerk, go into worship and see what Spirit can do. When physical healing is experienced, it is important to check the situation out with medical or other professionals. Our group has experienced what many of us would term miracles.

Red Cedar Meeting’s meeting for worship for healing is held from 7–9:00 p.m. on the third Monday of each month, and usually there are at least eight to ten of us who faithfully come together to hold individuals, concerns, or situations in the Light. Some Friends come early to help with setting up and having the important preliminary social conversations. Others arrive when they can and slip in quietly, if worship has started. It is better to come late than not to come at all. Healing prayer can take a lot of energy, so there is always food plus a variety of hot teas.

The formal part of the evening begins with the clerk asking for signs of hope, including updates on folks who were held in the Light at earlier meetings for worship for healing. Richard places great importance on the training of clerks, and he has been at this for 23 years, so we have a lot

of folks who can serve. Someone clerking for the first time will find a lot of guidance and support from other participants. The group helps the clerk compile the list. Generally, we aim to keep our primary list of requests to around eight, giving priority to folks who are physically present. It's important to keep requests confidential within the group. After a period of centering, as the clerk is led, he or she will introduce the requests one at a time into our gathered worship, and we will hold it in the Light with full attention. Each clerk has her or his own style of determining the order of the requests and the length of time devoted to each one.

Friends also have their own approaches to healing prayer, and very different experiences of the presence of Spirit. Some folks see colors; others visualize physical problems in detail; some are led to sing or to give vocal ministry as they would in a First-day meeting for worship. Others may be led to laying on of hands. Since not everyone is comfortable with being touched, a chair is placed in the center of the healing circle and persons who wish laying on of hands and who are able can move to it when their request is presented by the clerk. Persons who stay in place in the circle will be held in the Light but not physically touched, unless they have requested it. When those requesting can't be physically present, worshipping with us from wherever they are can be helpful. Toward the end of our worship, folks are encouraged to name other individuals or concerns, expanding our healing prayer to include many more requests than the original seven or eight. We aim to keep a framing silence after each offering. We find that as the evening progresses, the worship deepens. Sometimes Friends experience a very deep connection to each other and to the Spirit, and the closing of worship is difficult because it is truly covered.

Before the next meeting for worship for healing, we usually follow up and check in with folks who have been held in the Light in the previous gathering. Our aim is for wholeness, recognizing that a situation might be part of a larger picture. We each approach the Light as we are individually and corporately led, and we are careful to pray as the focus person would wish. Therefore, we don't pray in judgment or condemnation. We also don't pray for someone who does not wish for prayers. At the end of the evening, Friends often share our individual and corporate experiences that have come out of the worship. Sometimes the conversations continue well into the evening.

Coming into wholeness can take a variety of forms. After healing prayer, a friend facing surgery might find during pre-op testing that the surgery is no longer required. A Friend may realize during healing prayer that a long-standing family feud is being caused by his own greed. A Friend may discover while being held in the Light that forgiving someone instead of wanting to kick him may allow a stubborn ankle sprain to heal. Vocal ministry heard during healing prayer may lead a Friend to a new attitude, a new course of action, or a new doctor. Wholeness may manifest immediately or slowly over time, and sometimes it is achieved only after the person dies: a good death can be a form of healing.

Since 1994 Richard has led or co-led 22 weeklong workshops at the Friends General Conference Gathering. Sarah Lloyd, Richard's assistant, has been the person of presence at the last two. The workshop size has ranged from 8 to 35 Friends. These workshops have "taught Friends how to do it" while also providing a space for individuals, families, and friends to experience healing. Richard has also led more than 30 workshops at Lake Erie Yearly Meeting and done weekend workshops for monthly meetings.

For more descriptive, historical, and background information in support of the meeting for worship for healing, please go to the Red Cedar Meeting website, *Redcedarfriends.org*, and type “Meeting for Healing Resources” in the search box at the bottom of the Home page.

This work is all a blessing, and healing can “confound the calculus of rationality” as South African Friend and physicist George F. R. Ellis once remarked. Please feel free to use the resources provided and gather for Quaker meeting for worship for healing in your own community, wherever you are. Strive to be open to miracles, Friends, in your own lives.