

Clerk's Visitation Initiative - Report

Friends I wish to share with you a leading that has come to me over time as I've been serving as your clerk, and that is that we need to visit one another. By that I mean we need to visit monthly meetings and worship groups other than our own. And not just visit, but sit in worship with them.

I know this isn't a new reflection. Friends have held a concern for "visitation" for many years. We have just heard from the Priorities Working Group, and they too are calling for an increase in visitation.

It's important to acknowledge that some programs are already underway. There's a yearly meeting effort, the Inter-Visitation Group (formerly Traveling Friends Advisory Group), and there are at least two regional efforts that I'm aware of. One is taking place in Northeast Region and the other, I believe, here in Farmington-Scipio Region.

So there already is something at work among us. I'm simply trying to lift up that which is needed, that which is opening up to us, and that which will enrich us. I don't claim to have an original leading, just a persistent one.

Speaking personally, my partner and I have visited and worshiped with many meetings over the years. We find it joyful and enlightening to be with another group of Friends in their own surroundings. So many things are familiar, and so many things are different. Friends are not always skillful and polished in receiving visitors, but they are always open and welcoming.

I know several other Friends who enjoy visiting as well, and they also experience it as an important part of their spiritual life. When one travels among others in the Spirit, one gains confidence in the Spirit's presence beyond our home meetings.

Friends, I fear that our home meetings are often very isolated. The demands of our modern lives can overwhelm us, and the society we live in can be uncaring. It rarely speaks to our spiritual needs as a first priority. All too often we are pitted against others in a competition not of our making. Call it the "rat race" or the hustle and bustle of everyday life, it saps our energy.

So Sunday becomes a blessed event when we can find an hour of peace and then fellowship with familiar faces who affirm there are other, and more important, things in life. We drink deeply in the renewal this brings us. And many of us participate in the life of our meeting communities. These obligations, outside of our weekday routines, also sustain us.

Yet I worry when this is all we do. When our meetings become islands in the midst of an otherwise uncaring and often turbulent secular ocean, they run the risk of becoming insular as well. Friends, I think many of our meetings have become this way. And it's not good for us.

I'm speaking of our experience as Friends who share a Yearly Meeting. I know that some Friends make broader Quaker connections through FGC, FUM and other Quaker umbrella groups. The FGC Gathering is a regular event on many Friends' calendars. Some Friends, to varying degrees, also attend our regional, quarterly and half-yearly meetings. And of course Friends attend our Yearly Meeting sessions as all of you are doing today.

These are important, and even essential, activities. Friends who travel widely among other Friends then return and enrich their own meetings, and nurture the wider network of Quaker practice that makes our presence known in the world.

But I am speaking first of the practice of visiting our neighboring monthly meetings and worship groups. This experience is different, and important.

I envision a year in which Friends reach out to one another by visiting each other in monthly meetings and worship groups throughout the area of our yearly meeting.

I envision a sharing of community that helps us understand we are more than isolated meetings who can only relate upwards to regional and yearly meeting structures and broader Quaker organizations.

I envision that we will build new relationships among our sister meetings who share our hopes and struggles.

I envision our meetings becoming enriched by an understanding of the many small and interesting ways in which other meetings hold worship and fellowship, manage their facilities, and express their sense of shared community.

I envision a time when we begin to understand we are not so isolated after all, but rather part of a network of meeting communities.

And I envision that our individual spirits will grow and strengthen as we nurture the growth of relationships among us.

I confess I worry a little that calling for something as clerk of the Yearly Meeting could lead to the opposite of what is needed. Friends may think I'm calling for a top-down approach, and some may even feel they are being told what to do.

But we don't need a single "top down" program nearly so much as we need an opening among Friends at all levels. I'm asking for all Friends, each in our own way, to explore possibilities, and programs, and plans, and spontaneous acts of visiting.

We need individual Friends with individual leadings. We need monthly meetings and worship groups who understand how they are enriched when their members visit and worship with other meetings and worship groups. And our regions might encourage visitation among constituent meetings, as some are doing already. Rather than a single program, we already have a few, and it's my hope we might have many more.

So I lay it in the hands of all Friends everywhere in our yearly meeting. As clerk I can place a call and give some encouragement. As a body of Friends in our 86 meetings and worship groups, we will see what rises among us.

Along with placing this call, I want to make our efforts visible so that we can see how our work unfolds. As Friends are moved to live into this concern, our efforts may feel small, insignificant and unrecognized. Some visible measurement might encourage us and lead others to join in our efforts. So I've arranged to set up a simple online form that allows any Friend to report a visit that has been made. And all Friends may then check online to see the number of visits Friends have reported.

These simple tools, the form and reports, are already being used and we have recorded 23 visits so far this year. I'd like to see these tools more widely used, so I ask you to help spread the word. On the documents table outside you will see a yellow sheet that briefly describes what I've just said and gives the links to the online form and reports.

To summarize, Friends I ask 3 simple things.

1. Visit another meeting or worship group sometime this year.
2. [Make a simple report of that visit.](#)
3. [Let other Friends know](#) about this visitation initiative and encourage everyone to participate.

Friends, I invite and encourage you to lift up the topic of visitation in our meetings and worship groups, and I look forward to contributing individually to our effort as well.

Thank you for your time this morning.