



Gale Stutz

It's been nearly two and a half years since I first came to Indianapolis First Friends Meeting to serve as the associate pastor. Though I am an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), I joined First Friends Meeting several months ago because I feel very much at home among Friends.

One of the things I love most about Quakerism is the freedom for each person to pursue his/her own faith journey using whatever methods, practices, processes, or experiences speak best to him/her. There is great diversity in Quakerism and I find that refreshing and rare. As a pastor and Christian Educator, I appreciate the freedom to explore my faith, to wrestle with the really tough questions, and the opportunity to encourage my congregation to do the same.

I believe Quakerism is much more concerned with asking the questions than prescribing the answers. I continue to feel blessed to be among seekers. I hope these articles stir questions in you.

The photo above shows me ("Mother Superior") and two of my young friends following a spirited game of Bingo during Game Night at First Friends!

BIBLE READING: Philippians 1:3-11

Last summer I spent a weekend at Pendle Hill Retreat Center in Philadelphia, participating in a workshop called, “An Inquirer’s Weekend: An Introduction to Quakerism.” I thought it would be helpful to me as I am still a relatively new Quaker pastor.

The workshop was led by two young Quakers from the unprogrammed tradition, thoughtful, enthusiastic facilitators who really knew their stuff! One of the most fascinating sessions of the workshop was the history of Quakerism—from its inception through the many splits, ending with where we are today—with our rich and diverse expressions of Quakerism throughout the United States and the world.

It wasn’t necessarily an easy weekend for me. I was the only extrovert in our group of 20. So I often found myself looking for someone to talk to while others were in various stages of prayer and contemplation. Those who know me well understand what a challenge this was for me!

But the best part of the weekend was the hospitality of the folks at Pendle Hill. Hospitality is obviously a huge piece of their mission. They “loved us” in prayer before we arrived. They “loved us” in meal preparation, in making our rooms ready for us, in providing snacks and drinks during our sessions, in planning our retreat, in making themselves available to us for any question or need, and in praying for our safe trips home. I felt “loved” the entire time I was there, like I was being wrapped in a soft, warm blanket.

SONG: Here I Am, Lord

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Holy and loving Creator, help us to open our hearts and minds to the new ways you continue to reveal yourself, not only in the Scriptures but in and throughout all of creation.

—Gale Stutz

BIBLE READING: Genesis 1:26-31

I wonder why peace is so elusive. I wonder why humans have needed to “fight for peace” almost continuously since the beginning of time. I wonder why humans have never really been able to achieve peace in any real sense. Is it because of a flaw in our very nature? Did a loving God intend that human beings would seek ways to harm one another or to wrongfully take things from one another or to try to dominate one another throughout the course of history? I can't imagine that was ever God's intention. I doubt if that's what God had in mind when humankind was created “in his image.” What do you think?

2008 marked the 50th anniversary of the Peace Symbol. I've thought a lot lately about all the protests, programs, marches, sit-ins, demonstrations, speeches, sermons, books, pamphlets, television programs, workshops, legislative acts, radio broadcasts, podcasts, Presidential addresses, political platforms, and promises throughout history that have been aimed specifically at trying to promote *peace* in the world. And, where are we now? We're still trying to promote peace. Does it exist anywhere in our world? Has it ever existed? Is it even possible?

I suppose if the world ever really became a place where equal rights and social justice existed for everyone, then peace might be possible. But, I am not giving up hope that peace is possible. And whether or not we ever achieve peace in any real sense, it seems to me it's the work itself that is most important. As we work for peace in our world, let's be mindful that true peace begins within each of us.

SONG: Let There Be Peace on Earth

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Gracious Lord, help us remember our purpose as your children: to promote a more loving world where peace and justice exist for everyone.

—Gale Stutz

BIBLE READING: Hebrews 13:1-2

What is the difference between hospitality and being friendly? Is there a difference? Or are they the same thing? Let's think about that for a moment. Think about a time when you experienced true hospitality and not just someone acting friendly toward you. True hospitality is much more than being friendly. It is essentially "making room" for someone—in your congregation, your home, your community, or your heart.

Do we find ways to "make room" for visitors in our churches and meetinghouses? "Making room" is more than just sliding down the pew when someone new enters our worship space. It's taking the time to introduce ourselves and others, inviting her to Coffee Hour, inviting her to come again next Sunday, and maybe even inviting her to lunch. It's taking the time to explain to him the more unusual aspects of our worship service and our faith. It's asking him about his faith tradition. It's following-up with a postcard or an email a few days after she's visited us (and not just a card or letter from the pastor).

"Making room" isn't easy. But it is absolutely essential to our faith. May God bless us as we seek to be a blessing to others.

SONG: Sanctuary

PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Our loving God, may we find ways to "make room" for those who are different from us. May we remember that they, too, are loved by you just as we are loved.

—Gale Stutz

BIBLE READING: Exodus 20:1-21

How many of you know the Ten Commandments by heart? We're familiar with the "Thou shalt not" commandments, aren't we? But, what about the fourth one, the one that simply says, "Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy"?

Apparently the author of Exodus understood the commandment about keeping Sabbath was pretty important. So much so that it contained a lengthy explanation afterwards. So, how well do you "keep Sabbath"? Can any of us really afford to set aside an entire day to do nothing? That idea seems to suggest we're wasting time if we're not being productive. And who has time to waste these days?

Let me suggest that Sabbath practices are not about "vacating" but are rather about "being present." During a workshop for clergy renewal, Rev. Kevin Armstrong told us, "The life that is really life requires Sabbath." The three indicators of true Sabbath are these: delight, thanksgiving, and praise. If these three things are present, you are truly experiencing Sabbath time. Delight is the joy you experience when you realize something is happening beyond your control. Thanksgiving is the overwhelming feeling of gratitude for the experience. And praise happens when we begin to try to see others and the world as God sees them.

I challenge you to carve out some Sabbath time this week. Mohandus K. Ghandi said, "There is more to life than increasing its speed."

SONG: It Is Well with My Soul

PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, help us to take the time to create, enjoy, and sustain Sabbath this week and in the weeks to come.

—Gale Stutz

BIBLE READING: Matthew 19:13-15

“Herding cats.” According to Wikipedia, this saying “refers to a task that is extremely difficult or impossible to do, due to one or more variables being in flux and uncontrollable.” On a Friday evening last March, I used the term “herding cats” while 17 of our youth helped paint their classroom under the gentle supervision of a few adult sponsors.

It felt like “herding cats,” but it was one of the most meaningful and memorable youth gatherings I’ve ever attended. Those young people ate together, worked together, ate together, sang together, ate together, played together, and ate together in an atmosphere of excitement and joy. They respected each other, painted each other (literally), kidded each other, and just enjoyed each other. They could have been doing any number of other things that night, but they chose to spend five hours at their church, painting their classroom because it was important to them.

How often do we adults get caught-up in “nit picking,” not being able to see the true miracles around us because we become so bogged down in “process” that we forget to notice the things that are really important?

The very best thing we can do for our young people is to love them and provide them with a safe place in which to grow and learn, a place that truly belongs to them. And when you enter a space they have worked hard on, like our youth room, I pray that you enter it with the eyes and heart of a young person.

SONG: This Little Light of Mine

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Loving God, help us to remember what it is like to be a child. Help us remember how to use our imagination, to be creative, and to raise our children with love and respect.

—Gale Stutz

BIBLE READING: Exodus 3:1-22

Conner Prairie is a living history museum just north of Indianapolis. Known as an “interactive history park,” it’s a place where families of today engage, explore, and discover what it was like to live and play in Indiana’s past. One of the most meaningful programs offered there is called, “Follow the North Star,” a simulation of the Underground Railroad in which participants take on the role of slaves who’ve been brought to Indiana by a ruthless slave trader. The slave trader soon discovers that Indiana is a free state and the “slaves” become runaways when he slips away for a few minutes.

The “slaves” must move carefully through the dark woods trying to make it to a place where they’ll truly be free, encountering various people along the way. Some people are helpful, some are indifferent, and some try to take the slaves back to the slave trader.

Last fall I took our youth group to Conner Prairie to participate in this program. One of the homes the “slaves” encountered was that of a Quaker family who met us with warmth, kindness, encouragement, and food. Watching my youth group hear about their heritage made me feel proud to be a Quaker because *they* were proud to be Quakers. It was written all over their faces.

I didn’t know much about Quakers when I came to First Friends in July of 2007. To now realize that these young people and I come from such a brave and courageous heritage makes me proud to call myself a Quaker. May we make our young people proud as we work today for justice and equality.

SONG: Go Down Moses

PRAAYER SUGGESTION: God of the ages, help us in our work for peace, justice and equality throughout our world. Remind us that there are young people watching us in the ways we treat one another and care for our world.

—Gale Stutz

BIBLE READING: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

I attended a clergy wellness retreat this past summer for pastors serving in their first five years of ministry. The retreat was designed to provide pastors with information, skills, and resources to stave off burnout. “Why,” I wondered, “do so many pastors burn out so early in their ministries?” The answer became clear to me throughout the retreat. A major cause of clergy burnout is conflict in the congregation.

I was surprised. Most congregations, like most families, have conflict. But I didn’t fully understand the toll conflict takes on pastors. Dr. Dan Moseley, one of the presenters at the retreat, told us, “Every conflict in the church is about loss. Each side is worried about losing something.” He went on to say, “It really isn’t about what color the carpet should be or whether or not to change to a contemporary worship service. It’s about losing something.” And the job of the pastor, said Dr. Moseley, is to accompany people in their loss. He said we help people grieve their losses when we help them to “remember well the things they are losing. Once they remember them well, those things no longer have the same power over them and they are able to make room in their lives for other things.”

Nearly every denomination today is experiencing conflict in one way or another. Myriad “hot button” issues face the church and many of those issues polarize congregations. As a pastor, I believe it is my responsibility to help people identify those things they are most afraid of losing and walk alongside them in their journey.

SONG: Spirit of the Living God

PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Loving and gracious God, please help us to remember well the things we have loved dearly in our lives. And then open our hearts to the things you might be creating all around us.

—Gale Stutz