
THE CONSERVATIVE FRIEND

Number 31

A Publication of Ohio Yearly Meeting of Friends

Second Month 2008

Charity - A Fruit

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. (1 Cor. 13:13)

Charity is a fruit of faithfulness, a gift from God that we consciously accept and practice. The word “charity” comes from the Latin word “caritas,” which means selfless loving-kindness to everyone; it is “agape” in Greek. In contemporary secular English, “charity” refers to giving to the poor, but that is a narrowing of the broader, theological meaning. Charity meets another person’s deficiencies with love and offers what is needed. Charity is the precursor of peace, personally and among groups.

Do we make excuses for others? That's not charity. That's false justification. It implies that if only the other person knew better, or were healthier (mentally, physically, spiritually), if only the missing piece were found, they would behave differ-

ently. That may be so, but it may not be so. They may simply want to smoke, get drunk, overeat, or be enraged because they *like* to or are in the habit, and they don't actually care how it affects others or themselves. Charity doesn't say, "They are only this way because . . ." Charity says, "They are this way." And it doesn't stop there. Charity then does whatever charity needs to do *based on God's grace* and not out of a reaction to the behavior or out of a desire to manipulate the behavior. Sometimes charity stands back and waits until the time to help is at hand. Sometimes charity intervenes. Sometimes charity just holds its nose and spends time in the other's presence, with love. Charity always prays.

D. Raye Rodgson

Raye, a member of Short Creek MM (OYM), lives with her husband Randolph in central Connecticut where she teaches biology in an inner city high school.

The Fruit of Peace

How one defines peace, what peace is and what it entails determines its meaning and practice. For the ancient Romans, peace was “absentia belli,” the absence of war, which for them meant being prepared for war, and letting potential enemies know it, that being the best deterrent to war. For Gandhi and for Martin Luther King, Jr., the absence of open conflict, a static peace, did not necessarily indicate the presence of peace, particularly when legal, structural injustice and oppression ruled the relationships between individuals and groups of people in a given society or community.

What was known as the “Cold War” was a static peace. The undeclared conflict between the West and the former Soviet Union was fought using proxies, and for those caught in the middle it was not cold at all. Here the Roman concept is evident: the “peace” of the Cold War, a static peace in which the two super powers did not fight one another directly, was kept through the mutual threat of a nuclear holocaust, while the proxies of the super powers

fought little wars for the advantage and interests of one or other of the two super powers. This “peace” of the Cold War was enforced by violence and the threat of greater violence, and therefore it was really no peace at all.

Shalom, the Hebrew word for peace, entails more than the absence of war. It describes the presence of mercy, justice, and right relationships between individuals and communities. Shalom is not a static state in which there is no conflict. Jesus reminded his disciples that they would have trouble and conflict in this life.. He promised his peace, which, he said, was not as the world gives it. Thus it is not a static peace or the absence conflict that he promises to those who hear and obey him, to those who take up their cross daily, following Him and walking in love as He loved us. He taught us how to approach conflict, and that it is how we handle conflict, not its absence, that gives evidence of whether or not we are living in His peace.

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Scheduled Meetings for Worship

(For worship at OYM monthly meetings see www.ohioyearlymeeting.org)

Meeting	Location	Contact Person	Contact Information	Meeting Schedule
Athens Christian Friends	Athens, Greece	Themistoklis Papaioannou	papathem@gmail.com; P.O. Box 21121, Athens 11410, Greece	Weekly / First Days, 5 PM
Chatahoochee Friends Worship Group	Atlanta, Georgia	Scott King	770-315-9478; a_lang@bellsouth.net	Call or email for info
Crossroads	Flint, Michigan	Phil Helms	248-360-2074; admin@ michiganquakers.org	Weekly / First Days
Friends Gathering in Jesus Christ	Evanston, IL (near Chicago)	Robert Hopper	847-733-7226 ; friendrobert61@sbcglobal.net	Twice a month / 2nd and 4th Seventh Days
Goshen	Scone, Scotland	Paul Thompson	UK # 01738 620688; Book- seeker@blueyonder.co.uk	Twice a month / 1st & 3rd First Days
Greenwich	London, England	Simon Watson	simonw@quaker.org.uk	Weekly / First Days
Richland/Ashland Friends	Loudonville, Ohio	Scott Savage	419-368-9419 (leave message)	Monthly / 2nd First Day
Ripley Christian Quakers	Ripley, Derbyshire, UK	Mike Wake- field	UK # 01773-541424 Rcquakers@lomaxes.me.uk	Weekly First Days, 10:30 AM
Salisbury	Salisbury, Maryland	Kye Parsons	410-749-8221 kyeparsons@hotmail.com	Weekly First Days, 1:30 PM
	Little Falls, New York	Geoff Gilmore	315-823-0616 geoff@gsgilmore.com	Monthly / 3rd Fifth Day

Financial Contributions Appreciated

The Conservative Friend is financed through contributions from readers, with help from OYM. Small donations for *TCF*, as well as larger ones, are gratefully accepted. Please make checks (postal orders for donations outside US) to “The Conservative

Friend” and send them to Elvina Krekler (address below). The value of a subscription is \$10/year. Any excess over \$10 that a person contributes for a given year’s subscription is probably tax deductible, because *TCF* is a publication of Ohio YM.

The Conservative Friend is published four times a year under the care of the Wider Fellowship of Conservative Friends Committee of Ohio Yearly Meeting of Friends, Barnesville, Ohio 43713. For more information about OYM, visit www.ohioyearlymeeting.org.

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The editor welcomes articles for publication, those written recently as well as excerpts from earlier Friends’ writings. Subscriptions are funded through readers’ contributions and an appropriation from OYM.

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How do we practice this peace in our daily lives? There are many passages of Scripture that tell us what the practice of peace requires in terms of speech, conduct, character, and what is present in our heart. This practice of peace, as taught by our Lord, requires forbearance, among other things, and sometimes the renunciation of one's "rights" in the interest of reconciliation and healing, both for others and for ourselves. Peace must be practiced in the everyday conduct of husband and wife, child and parent, brother and sister, employer and employee,

coworkers, friends, etc. Ordinary everyday life is the place in which we have constant opportunities for walking in love as He loved us. This peace begins in the heart of each one of us as we are raised up and renewed in Him, translated into His kingdom, and brought under the government of Christ Jesus, who takes away the occasion for wars and violence.

Robert Hopper

Robert and his wife Rosemary are active participants in Friends Gathering in Jesus Christ, a group that meets in the Chicago area twice monthly.

Unity in Business - Another Fruit

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. (Proverbs 3 : 5-6)

Early Friends taught that Jesus Christ is with us and that we are to seek and accept His guidance in the totality of our lives. Today, individual Friends are often aware of Christ's guidance. Meeting for business is an opportunity to seek and find God's guidance corporately and thus to move into unity.

When we intend to conduct business, we gather initially for worship, in reverent love and devotion for God. In worship we are caught up in the wonder, glory, love, and power of God, while perhaps being aware of our own insignificance. Sometimes messages of ministry or prayer spring forth.

Eventually an appointed Friend suggests that we "turn to the business at hand." We do not call what we are doing "meeting for worship for business." That phrase muddles the meaning of worship, which does not really include thinking about things like the

First Day School curriculum or the need for more light on the porch. Having two different names (meeting for worship and meeting for business) helps Friends enter fully into worship when that is our corporate intention, and, when it is time to attend to the meeting's business, to do so carefully, under the guidance of God.

As we seek God's answers to business questions, our success is affected by the participating members' attitudes and actions, by the clerk's gifts and faithfulness to God's immediate direction, and by the meeting's traditions and expectations.

The attitudes and actions of all the Friends present create a context for the business meeting. When participants believe that God is about to lead them to the right decision, they act differently than do people who are expecting to find consensus through an exchange of intelligent analysis. In our corporate seeking, Christ is our Teacher and Guide for us both as persons and as a body. Whether, when, and what each person says should be under God's immediate

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In this Issue

This issue takes its theme from the epistle to Friends everywhere, written by Friends who gathered in the Spirit of Christ at Powell House in eastern upstate New York last Eleventh Month. In that epistle we are exhorted to faithfulness which, through God's grace, may be blessed with fruit. Charity is an early

fruit, a basis for others. True peace grows from charity, that all-encompassing love given us by Christ Jesus. When we conduct our business in charity and faithfulness, we move into unity in Christ, coming truly to love one another and to know ourselves as a fruitful people of God.

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direction, just as speaking in meeting for worship should.

Leaving the direction of the meeting to Christ may be very difficult. Many of us are accustomed to using knowledge and intelligence as our own tools in a secular discussion. Sometimes it is hard for a person to discern the difference between influencing a business meeting toward their own understanding and plainly giving a message that God wants spoken aloud. Waiting for clearness from Christ about whether to speak is important, as is humble discussion with an elder after the meeting.

Besides pushing forward one's own ideas when speaking to business, there is the opposite error of waiting too long to speak. We may fear upsetting what seems to be a foregone conclusion, or not want to seem ignorant, or dislike being different from previous speakers. Sensitivity to the Voice of God is important. Are we holding back from fear, or from a stubborn assumption that we are not worthy to speak? Faithful responding in a small matter strengthens a person for clearer discernment and more faithfulness later.

In addition to prompting individuals during business meeting, God also directs the meeting corporately. Sometimes God will lead a series of people to offer bits of information which together lay out the whole story. Sometimes God opens a way through which people with previously very different points of view can go forward together. This is more than compromise or finding the least common denominator; through Christ everyone gains a new perspective.

Members can assist in corporate finding by maintaining self-discipline: Speak only when moved by God, concisely and to the question. Do not quibble, but be willing to speak if something seems wrong or more should be added. Expect to speak only once on a topic, and do not get lured into ongoing exchange with one or several other Friends. Listen carefully, to God and to each other. Actively pray, perhaps silently, especially when contention or confusion arises.

Friends can also help by exercising the gift of eldering: When led and with love, when contention has halted progress, suggest that the meeting stop and wait to refocus on God's guidance. Gently and lovingly, and only as led, after meeting say a few private words to a Friend who spoke without Christ's guidance – and to a Friend who was noticeably helpful in furthering God's work for the meeting

The clerk's gifts and faithfulness are also important to the meeting for business. The clerk is not the director or leader of the meeting. Christ is the leader. The clerk is the servant, first in service to God and also to the meeting. The clerk helps the meeting find the answer that God intends. The clerk should be careful not to have a particular outcome in mind, or even "in hope." The clerk should not present optional outcomes from which the meeting may choose, arrange a presentation to facilitate a certain decision, or stop deliberation before unity is reached. The clerk should be yielded to the Lord's will. Undergirding the whole process with prayer, before and during the session, is essential.

In addition to the clerk's spiritual preparation through prayer, outward preparation is required. The clerk needs to assure that relevant information will be available to everyone and should arrange the agenda in a helpful order. Opening the meeting with a selection of Scripture sets an appropriate tone. If confusion arises, the clerk can ask clarifying questions and remind Friends of the specific topic at hand. In OYM meetings the clerk does not extend permission to Friends to speak. We leave that function to God and to members' own sensitivity to His prompting.

In OYM one clerk both facilitates the corporate seeking and writes the minutes. Writing a minute involves discerning Truth. This is a weighty responsibility that cannot be done in one's own strength, any more than giving a true message in meeting for worship can. God opens to the clerk alertness to the bits of truth in what people are saying. The gift of clerking includes the ability to listen with an outward ear to what is being spoken, while at the same time listening with an inner ear to the prompting of

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God and then writing down those kernels of Truth. When all Friends have finished speaking to a particular item, all that remains for the clerk to do is to arrange the written kernels into a coherent minute. That can usually be done quite quickly by adding a few arrows and numbers, and then the minute can be read aloud to the meeting.

Next the meeting needs to discern whether the minute both includes the important points Friends have spoken and states a conclusion that does reflect Truth, as the meeting has come to understand it. Reading back each minute before starting another topic is useful in several ways. It clarifies at the time and for later record what business has been accomplished. It maintains a deliberate pace and rhythm, allowing time for prayer and reflection between topics. Reading back each minute affirms the servanthood of the clerk, for it is the meeting that ultimately decides whether the minute reflects God's truth. The clerk needs to be alert to whether reading the minute has settled the meeting into unity or has opened a need for continuing to seek God's answer.

The meeting's traditions and expectations also affect the process of a business meeting. Our custom of reading a passage of scripture just before the opening of business provides a transition from worship and brings everyone's thoughts together. Our expectation that people will speak to an item as they are led by God, rather than with permission of someone else, helps focus Friends' attention on God's guidance. We also expect only members to speak to business and each person to speak no more than once on any item. These expectations are very rarely enforced by an OYM clerk but are nevertheless commonly understood and followed. However, in all of these traditions, room is made for exceptions under the hand of the Holy Spirit.

Another of our expectations is that the gathered body will maintain much of its own discipline through the words of someone led at the moment, rather than always through the clerk. I have often appreciated the work of some OYM elder who stood to say that we needed to return to the ques-

tion at hand or to wait a bit longer for reflection between spoken contributions. Another helpful tradition is Friends' waiting in prayerful silence while the clerk finishes a minute. Prayer should prevail at that time, rather than note taking or whispering.

Whether we find unity immediately or after a long search together, we interpret unity as a sign that we have found Truth. By that we mean more than "a good answer." We mean the right answer, the one toward which God has been directing us. Similarly, we interpret disunity as a sign that we have not found the right answer, and that some or all people are holding onto their own understanding. The best thing to do in that case is wait, while praying for more divine guidance.

Some years ago, the housing community where my parents lived was experiencing a lot of contention in their business meetings. My mother, who is not a Friend, wondered if I could come and explain to the assembled homeowners how Quakers work out their differences, so that my parents' friends could do likewise. I regretfully told her that there is a fundamental difference between our sense of unity and secular consensus. Our process is based on our common faith in Christ as our shepherd, a faith that my parents' community did not share. Furthermore, not only do we Friends share a common faith, but that faith includes our experience-based conviction that as we each grow in hearing and obeying Christ, we grow in love and in unity with each other. Christ wants to bring us into that unity, and He will guide us to it as we trust Him.

As we undertake business, we are called into trust – trust in the business process, trust in our meeting's members, trust in the clerk's exercise of his or her gift, and trust in God. *Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*

Susan Smith

Susan is a member of Rockingham MM (OYM). She has been a clerk at yearly, quarterly, and monthly meeting levels. She and Jack live on a dairy farm in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. This article is adapted from a presentation to Quaker-Camp at Stillwater given last Sixth Month.

Being a People of God, Here and Now

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light; Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God.... (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Although the world has changed in many ways since these words were written, we Conservative Friends are no less widely sown, with individuals and groups planted in places several hours to several or more days away from one another. Although we have means of communication that connect many of us twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, we have a keen awareness of the distances between us--distances of geography, or distances created by the encroaching busyness of a world out of balance, a world that demands our time and energy in return for a facade of rest and connection through possessions and outward activities. What is required of us to be a people of God, here and now?

First, we must recognize that we are called and gathered by Christ Jesus, the head of His church, to listen and to obey. Our individual conviction was not a call to individualism, but the first step in the call to become a people of God: *Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture (Psalm 100 : 3).*

Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. (Isaiah 43:10). This sense of people-hood defines the character of our relationship to God, to our community, and to the world. God called a people, not just people.

In #29 of *The Conservative Friend* Frances Taber insightfully commented on her childhood experience of people-hood in a Conservative Friends community where she learned corporate identity first and individual identity second. Some people say that the sense of corporate identity, which Fran called "people-hood", that was a given in smaller,

rural communities of Friends is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve in the world today. Perhaps they are right, yet our situation today is not much different from that of the early Christians or the early Friends. Called and gathered by Christ Jesus, they traveled great distances and corresponded with each other to strengthen, support, and provide accountability in the body of Christ. So must we. The world was perhaps no more in balance in the First or the Seventeenth Century than it is now. As it was then, so it is now necessary both personally and corporately to commit to, and to sacrifice for, the building of kingdom of God.

The second requirement is to recognize the importance of gospel order. According to William Taber, there are two types of gospel order referred to by early Friends (see "A Vision for Unity and a Vision for the Way Forward," published by OYM, 1991). One type is gospel order as described in Matthew 18, which must govern our relationships to one another, and as a people in relationship to others. We must seek to give as well as receive gospel order for there to be health and wholeness in Christ's body.

The other type of gospel order is that which Bill learned about from Lewis Benson, who explained George Fox's use of "gospel order" in reference to our conduct of our business meetings and our whole way of life. This gospel order grows out of being in communion with the Word, a communion that comes only with obedience. When we live in gospel order, we are enabled to go forward in unity, even though we may not have unity with words. As Bill pointed out, this unity is not derived from a formula or a set of rules but through experience of a "spiritual reality which must be felt, and known and lived in." (p. 21) Key components of this spiritual reality include loving patience, deep listening (including "listening" to body language, facial expression, etc.), and avoidance of hasty reactions. During our time at last summer's consultation and Yearly Meeting, we experienced and observed this spiritual reality. It is truly of the Lord and his work in and amongst us.

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The third requirement if we are to be a people of God is to recognize that there is a separateness of such a people based on being strangers and pilgrims in the world, not on being a clique or a clan. We bear witness in all that we do and say (see 1 Peter 2:9-10, and Numbers 14:14, for example), and this creates a separation between the church, namely those who are called and gathered by and to Jesus Christ, and the world.

Fourth, we must bear one another's burdens and share one another's joys. We must seek and create opportunities for strengthening our fellowship and our sense of people-hood through visitation, small group projects, visiting one another, etc.

Although we collectively are called to be a people, we must acknowledge that we are still people, with feet of clay. We will sometimes inadvertently step on each others' toes in any number of ways: forgetting a birthday, responding to a cheerful greeting in a grumpy mood, misinterpreting something said or done, or responding hastily to some unintended slight. Sometimes we will have sincere disagreements with one another about our understanding of God's calling for us. Sometimes we will be frustrated, sarcastic, even spiteful. These times are not to undermine our fellowship, to weaken the Body of Christ. Rather they are to call us anew to walk in His footsteps, in mercy and love.

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? If ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (Matt 5: 44-48) We Friends like to pride ourselves on our peace testimony; we claim that we do love our enemies, as Christ has commanded. But to have some vague

compassionate feeling for some faceless and nameless terrorist in Iraq is not what the Lord means. He means that we must consciously surrender all that we have and all that we hold dear, most of all our egos and our sense of justice, surrender it all to Christ to use to bless those in our daily lives and meetings who irritate or even misuse us. This is not an easy thing to do. It is contrary to the natural man, who is programmed to defend himself and his territory. It can only be done by surrender to Christ.

But when it is done, that surrender opens the door to miracles that the natural man could never achieve. I have a colleague whose personality grates on my nerves. Once, when I felt particularly irked, I responded with angry, sarcastic, vengeful words. I felt fully justified, satisfied at the time, but later I was remorseful, for I had betrayed my duty to be a witness for Jesus and His love. I bowed down before Him in prayer and begged His forgiveness. There was no immediate answer, but as I maintained this state of mind and heart for a few days, I was suddenly given an answer. I took a bucket of warm water, a wash cloth and a bar of soap, and I went to my colleague and told him I had come to wash his feet. He refused vehemently, but he acknowledged that he understood what my offer meant, and that he had been sorry, too, for our exchange.

That was years ago. His personality has not changed; it still sometimes irks me. But through my act of surrender to the law of Christ-like love, I had put myself in the same place, with regard to that colleague, as is a parent with a child. No matter what he does, I love him. I am patient with him, I am long-suffering, I am not puffed up, I do not keep score. My love for him will not stop.

This is the approach we must all take, first with our own households, then our extended families, our neighbors, coworkers and meeting members, then with the whole world. Only as we people offer up ourselves as living sacrifices will we be a people of God, distinct from the people of the world.

Conrad Lindes and Robert Hopper

Conrad, a physician, is a member of Winona MM while Robert is a member of Middletown MM, both of OYM. Robert works in a private school as an administrative assistant.

The Conservative Friend #31
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Appeal for Fruitfulness

An Epistle to Friends Everywhere

Friends in the Spirit of Christ, meeting this weekend at Powell House in Old Chatham, New York, where we were tendered in the love of Christ, greet Friends everywhere with this message of our love and our concern, our desire that you be strengthened and supported in all your efforts to be faithful, and our prayers for your well-being now and always. May our Lord Jesus Christ make our good wishes for you abundantly fruitful.

In His love,

Friends in the Spirit of Christ

11/18/2007