

Hamilton Monthly Meeting
of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
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NEWSLETTER December 2005

Refreshment List

December 4 Glenna , 11 Dick, 18 Christina, 25 Open.

The new list for providing refreshments from January - April 06 is up in the foyer. Please sign up for the date that you would like to be on duty as soon as you can. Thank you. Christina

Consultation and Renewal (C'n'R)

I would like to highlight the importance of the visit from the C'n'R visitor, David McKay. This is something that those Monthly Meetings which have experienced it found invigorating and enlightening for their members, especially in the preparation for the visit. I think HMM is a bit wishy-washy about the whole affair, but Carol Leigh, Dawn, and I were very impressed by the enthusiastic and positive responses we heard at Representative Meeting. We hope HMM will take the opportunity seriously and embrace it with alacrity! I think we could use something that will enliven us as a Meeting and help build community, which seems to be the effect this process is having on other MMs.

By Beverly

Cookies and Carols

We are meeting at 11:30 am Saturday Dec10 to have lunch and then deliver cookies and sing carols to shut at home members of Hamilton Meeting. We will be bringing cookies rather than baking them here this year. Please call Betty or Carol Leigh for details.

Hamilton Monthly Meeting
Meeting for Worship for Business
Dec 1, 2005

Present: Dawn, Mona, Glenna, John (Clerk of the Month), Carol Leigh, Blair, Nicki, Don, Ian (recording clerk).

1. Meeting began with Silent worship at 7pm.
2. Minutes of November Meeting for Worship for Business (M4W4B): Minutes were accepted as read.

3. Matters carried over from the Minutes

3.1 Statement on Tolerance

This matter was first brought up in May 2005 by Carol Leigh in response to the media concerning the new Pope. She felt perhaps a Quaker statement on tolerance would be appropriate. She asks if Hamilton Monthly Meeting would like to propose such a statement to Canadian Yearly Meeting. We ask Carol Leigh to seek the support of Peace and Social Action Committee for her concern.

3.2 HMM Annual Retreat

Ian proposed that we schedule a retreat event again this year. Last year it was held on April 1st weekend. We ask M&C to consider this proposal and report back at the next business meeting.

3.3 George Lakey workshop at CYM 2006

We are responding to a request from CYM Programme Committee dated Sept 13th, re a pre-CYM workshop led by George Lakey. Feedback was requested by Oct 20th, and whether HMM would provide funds for scholarships to attend the two day event in Winnipeg 2006. We approve a donation of \$200 to the event and ask the treasurer to write a cheque to CYM re Programme 2006, in the 2006 budget year.

4. Reports

Representative Meeting. Dawn read her report, which is attached to the archival copy of this minute. Key points included CYM finances, a request to donate to Friends United Meeting, which is in financial crisis, CYM nominations. \$4500 remains in special donations after the World Gathering of Young Friends, which will be earmarked for Young Friends. The Consultation and Renewal Group is proceeding with visits to all Meetings and Worship Groups. Dale Dewar is incoming clerk CYM, gathering in Aug 2006, in Winnipeg, George Lakey will lead pre-event workshop, subsidy for travel funds is now up to \$400. NeeKauNis is offering Senior Camp for ages 14-15, not Community camp in 2006, next Rep meeting is May 5-7 in Toronto. We thank Dawn for her report.

5. Business Arising.

5.1 HMM Directory editor

We affirm with thanks the offer from Emily to carry on the work of maintaining the Meeting directory and related tasks. Mona will orient Emily to the work involved.

6. New Business

6.1 HMM Representative on Regional Multifaith Committee

Ian Graham is approved as representative for Hamilton Monthly Meeting of the Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends on the Regional Multifaith Committee of the Ontario Multifaith Council on Spiritual and Religious Care.

6.2 Ballasts on fluorescent lights in Meeting room

We ask the maintenance committee to attend to replacing the humming ballasts.

7. Correspondence

7.1 Quaker Committee on Jails and Justice. A letter from Meredith Egan, Programme

Coordinator for QCJJ, dated Nov 30 has been received. She requests that the Meeting announce that grants up to \$500 are available for local jails and justice concerns.

8. Next Meeting for Worship for Business is Sunday Jan 8th, 1pm.

9. Meeting closed with silent worship.

Reuse

Shopantuk Nylon Shopping Bags for sale \$4 or 3 for \$11

Save 500 times its weight in paper bags if used just once a week. Purchase supports conservation of endangered species through the Canadian Wildlife Federation. Ask supermarkets for refund on not using their poly bags (I got 3c/bag at Fortinos). Very compact, ultra-strong, dirt and water repellent, made and silkscreened in Canada. 15 designs by Canadian artist Chris Kerrigan. Nice for Christmas presents or stocking stuffers. On sale in the library. See Ian.

Library

We are creating a special section of books, tapes and dvds about Energy and Localization, the impacts and responses to the peaking of supply of cheap energy from oil, aka Peak Oil. If you have materials you would like to contribute, see Ian. We have a donated copy of the documentary End of Suburbia on dvd and on vhs.

Potluck Report: Living in the Peak Oil era: What lifestyles work

About 20 people explored the increasing information about oil/energy supply known as 'peak oil' through the medium of the documentary, End of Suburbia, produced by www.postcarbon.org. We tried to discuss the implications for Quaker witness and our community. It proved difficult since lifestyle choices, as soon as this winter, are not flexible. A two page resource list is available from Ian. One on-line source is <http://www.energybulletin.net/>. Local groups include www.environmenthamilton.org, www.raisethehammer.org and www.hamiltoneconet.ca

Eat local food

<http://environmenthamilton.org/eatlocal/directory/> is the online resource to find and support local producers of food. This is a program of environmenthamilton, under the care of Julie Fleming, who attended HMM while a student at Mac.

4 above items submitted by Ian Graham

WHITHER HMM?

I had a bit of a shock the other day when a Friend in our Meeting said, maybe we should just lay Hamilton Meeting down as a Monthly Meeting. We don't seem to have what it takes to keep everything going and to do what we take on. Or words to that effect. Whoa! My immediate reaction was, That's a bit extreme. But --

We can't fill all our committees or offices.

We don't respond to all the requests from Yearly Meeting or its committees, such as to consider particular issues and reply.

Our First Day attendance is dropping.
Our budget just squeaks by.
Our Meetings for Business are tiny.

What does this all mean? Are we not really prepared to continue as a Monthly Meeting? Are we insular, not part of the YM community? If so, is this okay? Are we just too busy with other things to act as a unified group? Do we take on as a Meeting too many of individual Friends' concerns? If so, does this mean we don't trust each other to carry concerns forward adequately? Are we over-organized and under-populated? Should we be putting more energy into growing Hamilton Meeting? or less into external activities? or what?

Is anyone else interested in these questions and their answers? Several of us have been talking about these matters lately and think it may be time to discuss them as a bigger group. Trouble is, there is a huge problem trying to get enough of us together on any one date to have an encompassing discussion! I would like to propose that on the third Thursday of February - a long time from now: we could mark our calendars and HOLD THE DATE - we have a potluck and a serious talk about what and why we are as a meeting and where we're headed. Any takers?

Beverly, bev dot shepard at hwcn dot org

Why Christianity Must Change or Die, by John Spong

John Spong is a controversial, ultra liberal theologian who addressed Friends General Conference Gathering last summer. He was also on the CBC show 'Tapestry' recently, and hearing him made me keen to know more. He is an Episcopalian bishop from New Jersey, who has concluded that Christianity must abandon belief in a 'theistic' God in order to survive in an era in which most people neither can nor wish to believe in a personalistic God who lives in the sky and intervenes arbitrarily in human affairs. He analyses the Apostle's Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and in each case finds major elements which he cannot accept; patriarchy, the demeaning of women, the virgin birth, belief in a physical resurrection, an ascension up into the sky. He talks about how each of these elements offends important current ethical principles or scientific knowledge. In the Biblical recounting of Jesus' life, he rejects the magical aspects of the miracles as expressions of first century thinking, and a desire to stick to the Jewish scriptures to provide legitimacy for Christ

He uses the metaphor of exile to define his own faith. He likens it to the exile of the Jews in Babylon, when their God was taken from them and after which their religion grew from a tribal God to a universal one. Our God has been taken from us by the combined works of western science, from Galileo to Darwin to Einstein.

He expounds a view of God as the infinite centre of life, a mystical presence in which all personhood can flourish, and identifies this view with Whitehead's process theology, and the call of Dietrich Bonhoeffer for a 'religionless Christianity'. Most of all he identifies God as the 'infinite and inexhaustible Ground of all Being' described by Paul Tillich 50 years ago. This God he believes in fervently.

He explores the Jesus of the new testament and how the belief in Jesus as equal to God developed from Paul, who names Jesus the Son of God only after the resurrection, to John, when says Jesus was present at the time of creation and equal to God. Spong goes on to reflect on original sin, on the Jewish custom of sacrifice, on redemption by the sacrifice of Jesus. He finds

the notion of a God who would demand the sacrifice of his son to be repugnant. A particularly fascinating passage for me was his description of the need for Jesus (and later even Mary also) to have a 'virgin birth' to separate him from sexuality, and the role of the inherently sinful nature of sexuality in giving the priesthood control over a 'sinning' and guilty people. He sees the idea of the 'Fall' to be post Darwinian nonsense, as there never was a perfect creation to begin with.

He goes on to describe Jesus as a 'spirit person', one who breathes life into others. Spirit was Paul's favorite word to describe Jesus, as Spirit made God accessible in a new way. Jesus demonstrated that no race, creed, gender or occupation was outside the love of God. Spong says Jesus had true freedom, the freedom to give himself away. He is the life 'in which God has been seen and still can be seen within the limitations of our finitude'. Being a disciple of Jesus, he says, only requires living fully, loving wastefully, and having the courage to be all that God created me to be.

Prayer has been a lifelong preoccupation for him. He became repelled by intercessory prayer when thousands were praying for his ill wife because he was bishop, and she was getting better. He rejected a God who would be more merciful to her than to a poor unknown person who had no one to pray for them. He does spend a couple of hours alone 'in God's presence' every morning. This time is a preparation for the real prayer which is his life with others, when he can express love and struggle for justice.

He finishes with a dream of the future church. He might be describing Quakers. Worship will continue to be fundamental, but it 'will not be marked by chanted words to an external deity'. Worship will be oriented toward the human community, which is where the indwelling God is to be found. It will be less hierarchical and more circular. It will not be bound by one set of scriptures nor believe that revelation has ended. It will acknowledge that the God experience carries us into wonder and awe. All expansionist and exclusivist doctrines will be rejected. The eucharist will be replaced by the holiness of a shared meal.

He ends with an affirmation that eternal life has to do not with an external heaven and hell, but a mystical escaping of boundaries, and love which gives birth to life. Through this love Spong touches that which is timeless, eternal and real. His doorway to this world of love is still Jesus.

I began doing book reviews last fall as an exploration into the boundary between Buddhism and Christianity. This book lays out a vision of Christianity which seems to me perfectly compatible with Buddhism. Spong quotes Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist who wrote 'Living Buddha Living Christ', with admiration and respect. Both Spong and TNH hold to a vision of a spiritual reality as at once both immanent and transcendent, which calls us to live fully and love deeply. Both urge us to surrender our narrow sense of self, and broaden it to encompass all humanity and indeed all creation.

Don Woodside

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