

Hamilton Quaker Newsletter

December 2020



Do you work gladly with other religious groups in the pursuit of common goals? While remaining faithful to Quaker insights, try to enter imaginatively into the life and witness of other communities of faith, creating together the bonds of friendship.

Advices and Queries #6

Upcoming Events and Announcements

December 13 will see a Zoom-based meeting of the Reading Club. Please email Dick at prestonr@mcmaster.ca if you would like to join this group. This meeting will focus on chapter 6 (Gratitude) of Richard Wagamese's book, *Embers*. The final section, "Joy", may also be covered, so that the book and the year finish together. The meeting will convene at 3 p.m. A Zoom link will be provided to all those who have expressed interest. In 2021, Dick would like to see the task of co-ordinating the book club pass to someone else. Please speak to him if you would be interested in taking it on.

December 17 CFSC invites people to join them on Zoom from 7 to 9 pm Eastern as they host long-time partners Dan and Mary-Lou Smoke for an evening of stories, music and learning. Since 1991, Dan and Mary-Lou have been hosts of the First Nations radio program "Smoke Signals" (CHRW 94.9 FM), a radio-magazine news program that bridges the gap of understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Register for free at <https://quakerservice.ca/DanAndMaryLou>

December 18 is the next meeting of the Cambridge Worship Group. We convene at 2 p.m., each in our own home. Zoom-space fellowship to follow. All are welcome!

January 17 will be our next Meeting for Worship for Business. The meeting will be held at 12:30 p.m. in our Zoom Meeting space. Email will be sent inviting members and attenders to this meeting.

January 23 is a Zoom session of Canadian Yearly Meeting, beginning at 1:30. Items include Reporting and Clearness sessions for CYM Trustees, and for CYM Finance Committee.

February 6 is a Zoom session of Canadian Yearly Meeting, beginning at 1:30. Items include a Reporting and Clearness session for CYM Archives Committee, as well as a number of items related to CAST.

CFSC in Action! A videoclip from Parliament!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPcohrr4dqY>

Conversation with Prime Minister Trudeau

by Paul Dekar

On Thursday, December 3, 2020, I joined a conversation with Prime Minister Trudeau on the Contribution of Faith Communities in a Time of Pandemic. Christian Interfaith Reference Group (CIRG) of the Canadian Council of Churches, for which I represent Canadian Yearly Meeting, was one of three sponsoring groups along with Canadian Interfaith Conversation and Canadian Multifaith Federation. MP Filomena Tassi initiated and introduced the event. Leaders of ten faith communities spoke, three minutes each, often citing sacred texts. Prime Minister Trudeau responded to each and acknowledged pointed questions like, why are places of worship not deemed “essential services”? The Prime Minister promised to consider this.

National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop Mark MacDonald highlighted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Prime Minister Trudeau announced the introduction in Parliament today of Bill C-15, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*.

Bhanti Saranapala, an urban Buddhist monk, characterized our time as one in which we “row, row, row our boats,” “spreading kindness, not Covid.” Calling for increased kindness, the Prime Minister said he would never again think of that song without thinking of efforts to serve.

The event reflected what the late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks called “the dignity of difference.” I drew encouragement from hearing how members of many faith communities have provided crucial support for members not only of represented communities, but also of wider society. This is especially true in the area of mental health help for stressed front-line workers or congregants.

The Prime Minister acknowledged that this is a time of hope as well as desolation. He urged that we “hang in there” without undue expectations and focus on addressing the needs of others. He acknowledged that government programmes have not reached everyone but that, as a vaccine or vaccines becomes available, effort will be made to vaccinate everyone.

Once Upon a Time in Iraq

by Jane MacKay Wright

TVO has been running a BBC documentary called *Once Upon A Time In Iraq* which has stirred memories of my time there with Christian Peacemaker Teams. I served in Baghdad in 2003, the first year of US occupation following its invasion. The Americans had successfully bombed public services in this great city so there was no public water service nor waste management, only sporadic electricity, erratic traffic closures, and invisible police. US military vehicles patrolled the busy city streets with guns circling on turrets. The team lived in an apartment building owned by a congenial businessman who lived upstairs with his family. It was a mixed neighbourhood of homes, small shops, and a rooster that crowed every morning. We could see the Green Zone on the other side of the slow-moving Tigris River.

The episode called “Insurgency” brought back particular memories. It featured Lt Col Nate Sassaman, commander of a huge army base near Balad, a city about 80 kms from Bagdad. Sassaman had been leading a vicious campaign in the area and we persuaded him to meet with local lawyers who were asserting their rights to fair treatment. At the time a prominent city elder had been killed at a US checkpoint and the city was outraged. It was brave of the group of lawyers to agree to meet with Sassaman. We heard that he took several of them into custody and had them sit handcuffed all night sometime before the meetings began, but the lawyers did not want us to talk about this. The meetings took place in a local courthouse with cases being adjudicated in other rooms nearby.

At the meeting I attended, Sassaman put up quite a show of arriving in full military gear in a convoy of armoured vehicles with military bodyguards outside on the ready while we talked. The lawyers had serious concerns which we wanted the US military to hear. We challenged Sassaman to see locals as worthy of respect and hoped they could develop a reasonable relationship. In later years Sassaman was court marshalled for having had his men deliberately throw a couple of Iraqis handcuffed off a bridge into a river where they drowned. In the documentary Sassaman seems shaken by his Iraq experience and now appears

antiwar. One of our team members had joked that his mission was to turn Sassaman into a pacifist, like us.

The episode also features NY Times reporter Dexter Filkins, who wrote about a farming village called Abu Hishma which had come under particularly harsh treatment by Sassaman and his soldiers. The town had been encircled by barbed wire and then subjected to nighttime bombings. On the basis of Filkins' article the CPT team decided to visit Abu Hishma. Although the whole team, along with our translator, had not planned to visit the village, we all got caught inside town limits by the US-imposed curfew. We ended up being treated to dinner at the home of the local mukhtar and stayed overnight sleeping on the floor on foam mattresses they provided. There were no bombs that night. The next day townspeople, who were amazed that ordinary Americans would show up like that, were quick to show us the bomb craters and destroyed houses. They were both furious and fearful of the US soldiers.

The documentary series which presents a moving and accurate picture of the effects of US military action in that country is available on the TVO website. Several episodes include a Hamilton resident, an Iraqi refugee with family in Baghdad. As for me, I had many other adventures with the CPT team in Iraq and got to know its people. I am disheartened that they are still living in chaos. It was a useless and destructive war.



Christmas 2020

Transformative hope is the Message for Christmas.
Some of the words used to describe Christmas 2020 may be,
unusual, singular, unique, worrisome, even daunting.
We wonder what our life will look like in Christmas 2021?
We wonder about our longevity right now, too,
and yet, the human spirit is resilient.
The Divine Spirit is transcendent.

Transformative hope lies in Tradition and Celebration.
Tradition is the Celebration of the Birth of Jesus, of Mary and Joseph,
the Manger, the Shepherds, the animals, and the praises of the heavenly host.
Celebration is singing Christmas Carols, gift giving, gatherings, storytelling, surprises,
and delicious delicacies had only at Christmas time.
Tradition is remembering when good time humor made us laugh together.
The Divine Spirit is transcendent.

Transformative hope is expressed by human resilience.
We want to overcome the improbable in the expectation of collective improvement.
Wars, economic depressions, seemingly insurmountable obstacles like plague and
death have paled in the face of humanity's determination to survive.
Historical precedent tells us that species survival is more than accident.
Survival is the eternal evolution of the Cosmos from in the Beginning into the Future.
Christ's Resurrection to Eternal Life exemplifies transformative hope.

Transformative Hope is the gift of Courage from the elderly to the next generation.

Sheldon Clark

Blessings

Great Spirit

I see you

In the moments and minims of nature

In the hawk aloft

In the sweep of trilliums

In the wash of ocean over my feet

I can see your hand so clearly

I can reach out to touch it.

Yet you are not in such things only

You are in the potted ivy

The mother's fingers

The city sparrow.

I am blessed with woods and sky and meadows

But there are other blessings

For other folk

And gratitude enough

For all.

Beverly Shepard



The Pansy

by Bill Dandie

When you came home from the nursery you were slightly puffed, the outdoors changed that as I observed you each day

I noted a tribalism of sorts as the whites and the oranges kept to themselves

Your resilience became apparent as showers bedraggled you, a little tender care righted that

The pejorative connotation of your name caused me to question, how could this be

One had nothing to do with the other, you were you throughout

France 1500 AD and the word “pensée” are the culprits

Clarity is mine; you have confirmed for me the resilience of life



Winter Light

Of course it is low,
sweeping round the southern rim
of my northern home,
and it is long,
stretching from the distant sun
as earth inclines away,
and these are things we know
and understand, or claim to,
as natural consequence of
our planet's revolution,
but
this reasoning cannot explain
how winter light
gleams with such delicacy
through skeletal woods,
illumines sky and snow
with silken wisdom,
spreads with a grace that
transforms grey to pearl,
reveals
the heavens' soul.

Beverly Shepard

