

Gifts and Leadings Session Notes

For LEYM Workshop Developed by Bill Warters

From *Inward Light* website- The Apostle Paul frequently writes about the importance of embracing a range of gifts including **preaching, teaching, prophecy, healing, discerning, and ecstatic utterance**. In keeping with a wider view, Friends increasingly use the word ministry to describe a variety of gifts that members offer our faith community and the world around us, including **faith-led social witness, chaplaincy, religious education, spiritual formation, and healing work**.

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;
and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;
and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who
activates all of them in every one.*

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

—New Testament (NRSV): 1 Corinthians 12:4

SHARING SPIRITUAL GIFTS

“Living out our gifts is part of building a stronger faith community. We believe that the first step is recognizing what our gifts are, and claiming them in the presence of a community.” - Johanna Jackson

EXAMPLES OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Wisdom and discernment: seeing the deeper spiritual dynamics in situations, helping a meeting sense when a decision has Life in it, or recognizing when something is off spiritually.

Teaching and shepherding: explaining faith in clear, accessible ways; accompanying people over time; tending the spiritual health of a group.

Service and hospitality: showing love through practical tasks, creating welcoming spaces, noticing and including those on the margins.

Encouragement and mercy: sensing suffering quickly, offering comfort, and strengthening the discouraged so they can continue in faithfulness.

Administration and leadership: organizing groups, seeing how different people and tasks fit together, clerking or facilitating meetings so that Spirit-led work can happen.

Prophecy and truth-telling: perceiving and speaking needed truths—about injustice, hypocrisy, or needed change—under a tender concern rather than anger or self-importance.

Prayer and intercession: being drawn to sustained, focused prayer for particular people, communities, or concerns, often quietly and over long periods.

Healing and reconciliation: contributing to physical, emotional, or relational healing, sometimes through listening, presence, or prayer for wholeness.

What is a leading?

In the experience and understanding of Friends, a leading has these dimensions:

- Recognition of need, injustice, or other work to be done;
- An inward, caring response to the need, injustice, or work to be done;
- A sense that one is somehow being asked to take action to meet the need, correct the injustice, and/or do the necessary work;
- A belief that one's sense of "being asked to take action" arises not merely from one's small self, but from a larger Source — God, Christ, Spirit, the Numinous, the Real, the Unconscious

from *Faith and Practice of PYM*, pp. 59-62

A genuine leading may announce itself through overheard conversation that speaks directly to one's heart [See Gregg Levoy, *Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life* p. 6.]; it may arise as a persistent dream, preoccupation or concern that one cannot shake off; it may become clear through painful realization that one's beliefs and actions are not congruent. Awareness of a leading may unfold slowly over time, as one's heart opens more fully to Truth. It may be work that is begun reluctantly — perhaps assigned by a nominating committee — yet grows into a labor of love.

The Practice of Recording Gifts in the Ministry (opinions vary...)

This selection is from a report from a subcommittee of Vassalboro (Maine) Quarterly Meeting's Ministry & Counsel Committee.

The recording of gifts in the ministry is different from this utilitarian need*. As Faith and Practice says, it is something which may be done when a member has consistently spoken to the edification and spiritual help of the Meeting. Those of us who presently feel that it is a useful thing to do, see it as a possible way of encouraging ministry and calling forth spiritual leadership; a way of encouraging those whose passion is for ministry and whose ministry encourages others to move ever deeper in the way of seeking to grow in knowledge of the Light. This quickening and enlivening is crucial to the health of any spiritual community. We believe that with care and oversight, it can be a useful tool and that by nurturing and supporting individuals demonstrating qualities of spiritual leadership within the Religious Society of Friends, we will strengthen it as a religious body. It is also a way of supporting and affirming the individuals recorded, as representatives of Quakerism outside the Society.

While the gift is there, whether we officially record it or not, the recognition of it, through recording, should imply that we are responsible to this individual and they to us for the exercise of their gift. It is a mutual obligation for support and accountability and we feel that we could do much more in faithfully supporting those recorded, maintaining contact with them, celebrating the ways in which they are being faithful to their gift, holding them to their responsibility to check their leadings with the larger group, and maintaining a tender care of them should they seem to be moving in directions we find troubling or inappropriate.

Those of us who feel that it may no longer be a useful or appropriate practice in the Society of Friends fear that it undermines the importance of every individual realizing his or her responsibility for ministry. We also feel that it can be perceived as implying that some have the gift and some don't rather than remembering that all are gifted at times. While recognizing the importance of encouraging spiritual and organizational leadership, some of us do not see recording as a means to that end. We have a sense that the practice creates a kind of Quaker elite which is not helpful and that it is not appropriate to single out one particular kind of ministry to recognize rather than celebrating the gifts that each member brings to their meeting. Maybe the encouragement of gifts of all kinds is something we could be more intentional about rather than singling out this particular gift for recognition.

**Utilitarian Need refers to situations such as certifying pastoral counselors as part of their profession practice requirements...*

Read Chapter descriptions for examples of followed leadings

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The Quaker phrase As Way Opens is explored by Brent Bill

6 | SACRED COMPASS

PILGRIMS ARE LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

The concept of as way opens takes a different tack from either Ignatius or Warren. Instead of focusing on four-week spiritual exercises or forty-day programs, as way opens points us to the constant presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. **The Holy Spirit is our sacred compass; its role is to show us our way.** Jesus said:

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you.

This Gospel passage reminds us that God is with us on our pilgrimage—the indwelling Paraclete (a Greek word that is sometimes translated as “counselor”) accompanies us. God gives us the Paraclete to guide us into God’s truth. The Holy Spirit fulfills Christ’s promise that God will be with us forever as it works in our souls, teaching and guiding us. As way opens is about learning to pay attention to this Inner Teacher, our sacred compass. When we do so, we see God’s direction for our questions big and small, immediate and lifelong. We sense, through the work of the Paraclete, that God is always present

with us, guiding and directing our lives. We witness the work of our personal sacred compass.

The early Friends believed that the Inner Teacher spoke with a quiet voice heard in the soul, so they worshiped in silence. They sought souls still enough to hear the God who speaks in sacred silence. They weren’t the first to hear God’s voice in soulful stillness. After God directed the prophet Elijah to go stand on a mountain, he discovered that God was not in the earthquake, wind, or fire, but in the sound of “sheer silence”:

“Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.” Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

God’s voice is at times so deep and so holy that it may appear to be nothing but silence—unless, like Elijah, we pay heartfelt attention. Can you think of a time when you heard God in the stillness of your soul? How did you get to that place of quietness and listening? When we quiet our soul’s busy-ness,

As Way Opens | 7

From Sacred Compass: The Way of Spiritual Discernment by J. Brent Bill
<https://www.brentbill.com/SacredCompass.html>

From Steampunk Quaker Navigating Anew Project

This was a imaginary gauge to check on the appropriateness of a particular leading created for the Quaker Fair at LEYM 2023 Annual Meeting



If only we had
one of these!



Example Guidance for Meetings from Illinois Yearly Meeting

Recognizing Spiritual Gifts and Leadings

Adopted 2018 for an indefinite period

All Friends are called into a ministry sooner or later, whether public or private, in word or deed or silent prayer, of long duration or short.

Lloyd Lee Wilson, 1993

All Friends are called to minister to others, but not all are called to do so in the same way. Offering a vocal message during meeting for worship is the best-known form of Quaker ministry, but it is far from the only one. Ministry may involve caring for those who are ill, teaching First Day school, or helping with hospitality for the meeting's events. These forms of ministry rarely call for formal recognition, but they serve to deepen the covenant community that is at the core of every Friends meeting.

Ministry is most effective when it takes place in accordance with one's gifts and leadings. In Quaker parlance, a "gift" is a God-given ability that is intended to be used for spiritual purposes, while a "leading" is a call to action based on a Friend's sense that God has led her or him to take on a particular cause, for example pastoral counseling or chaplaincy in a prison or hospital. Such leadings typically emerge as a result of prayerful consideration of a concern, and they often reflect the gifts of the person who is led to act on them.

In some cases, a gift or leading may call for special recognition and/or support from a Friend's home meeting. Historically, this occurred when a meeting formally acknowledged that one of its members had a gift of spoken ministry and saw fit to "record" that Friend as a minister. Early Quakers felt called to support such members spiritually and practically, often "releasing" those recorded ministers so that they could travel in the ministry for the benefit of the entire Religious Society of Friends. In ILYM nowadays, few meetings record ministers, but some do; and many more formally recognize and support the leadings of their members without recording them as ministers.

Some meetings within ILYM have adopted procedures regarding recognition of leadings and/or recording of ministers, and others might wish to do so. In all cases, such procedures should be regarded as suggestive rather than definitive: while they often prove to be helpful, they cannot replace prayerful discernment by the meeting community.

Recognition of Leadings

Monthly meetings are occasionally called upon to discern whether to formally recognize the leading of an individual Friend. Such recognition means that the meeting agrees to take that leading under its care. A Friend who wishes to have the meeting take a leading under its care engages in the meeting's processes of spiritual discernment, which normally involve the meeting's care and counsel committee (see Section xx-xx).

A clearness committee appointed by the care and counsel committee (or by the meeting as a whole, if the monthly meeting is too small to have such a committee) undertakes discernment on whether the Friend in question is rightly led, and thus whether the meeting should support the leading. This discernment is to be undertaken in the manner of Friends, that is, as a shared search for God's will until clarity has been reached. While no prescribed set of questions or approaches is fitting for all situations, the committee might consider discussing with the Friend queries such as the following:

- What is the nature of the leading?

- What gifts are necessary to follow the leading?
- Is this the right time for you to follow the leading?
- Are there aspects of the leading that you are still seeking to clarify, and for which the meeting can offer assistance?
- What challenges do you expect to face? How can the meeting help you handle those challenges?
- If the meeting provides you with formal recognition, will that help to advance the leading? How so?
- How will following the leading affect your spiritual journey? How might it deepen the spiritual life of the meeting community?
- How will following the leading affect your other responsibilities, including your responsibilities to the meeting?
- What kind of spiritual and practical support will you need in order to follow the leading? How much of that support do you expect the meeting to provide?

Once the clearness committee has completed its discernment process, it reports its findings to the monthly meeting, taking care to note any assistance that the led individual might need if the leading is to be taken under the meeting's care. This assistance involves spiritual nurturing and provisions for a travel companion if the leading involves travel. It might also include measures such as financial support, communication to bodies for which recognition of the leading may serve as a professional endorsement (see "Letters of Endorsement" below), and/or release of the Friend from responsibilities to the monthly meeting for some period of time.

The meeting as a body then decides whether to take the leading under its care. This discernment should involve not only the meeting's sense of whether the leading is a true one, but also the fit between the meeting's needs and resources and those of the led individual. This means that the meeting should query itself concerning its readiness to take the leading under its care, just as the clearness committee has queried the led Friend.

Anyone whose leading has been formally recognized is expected to confer regularly with a support committee selected by the meeting's care and counsel committee. The support committee acts on behalf of the meeting in helping the Friend stay grounded in the spirit as the leading continues to unfold. It is advisable for the led individual to offer a report on the leading to the meeting on at least an annual basis. This provides an opportunity for both the individual and the meeting to grow and deepen their spiritual lives.

Recording of Ministers

In addition to supporting leadings, Friends meetings sometimes choose to record ministers, although this practice has become less prevalent over time. Illinois Yearly Meeting has not made use of it since the early 20th century, but monthly meetings within ILYM are welcome to decide whether they are led to do so.

As with the recognition of leadings, the recording of ministers involves spiritual discernment of God's will on the part of the meeting community. Unlike recognition of leadings, however, it is generally the meeting itself rather than the led Friend who initiates the proposal that a Friend be recorded as a minister. The recording of a minister is also generally intended to be enduring, unlike recognition of a leading, which may end after completion of a particular set of activities. This distinction is approximate, and will depend on the circumstances and on discernment by the meeting community.

The recording of a minister does not confer greater status or more privileges upon that Friend than on any other. On the contrary, it involves significant responsibility, for the recorded minister should expect to be held to a high standard.

[W]e do believe and affirm that some are more particularly called to the work of the ministry, and therefore are fitted of the Lord for that purpose...and that . . . there is something more incumbent upon them in that respect than upon every common believer.

Robert Barclay, 1678

In undertaking discernment concerning the recording of ministers, monthly meetings may wish to consult sources other than this Faith and Practice, including books of faith and practice of other yearly meetings that record ministers. They may also wish to contact Friends from monthly meetings, particularly those meetings within ILYM that have already undertaken such discernment.

As with recognized leadings, recorded ministers should confer regularly, preferably in person, with a support committee appointed by their meeting, and should offer regular reports on their ministry. The meeting should recognize that it has the authority to lay down a ministry as well as to recognize one. All such decisions should be taken seriously and prayerfully.

Preparing for Discernment of Gifts and Leadings

It can be helpful for monthly meetings to prepare themselves for requests involving leadings and ministries. In part this involves simply being aware that such requests may occur, and that they may reflect God's will concerning various members of the meeting community. However, the meeting might also wish to consider how it might handle requests of this kind before they come about.

While general procedures for discernment concerning leadings are outlined in the "Recognition of Leadings" subsection above, those procedures might not be adequate for all meetings and all types of leadings. For that reason, meetings without formal processes regarding requests for recognition of leadings might wish to consider developing them. In so doing, the care and counsel committee should consider asking other ILYM meetings whether they have approved procedures on those matters that can be used as appropriate in developing their own.

If a meeting discerns that it is willing to record ministers, it might find it desirable to adopt formal procedures for initiating and terminating recognition of ministries. If so, those procedures should take into account the case of a Friend who transfers membership into the meeting after having been recorded as a minister in another Quaker meeting or church. The meeting will then be prepared for such situations if and when they arise. Again, the presence of such procedures is intended to enhance, rather than to exclude, discernment by the meeting community.

Travel Minutes, Letters of Endorsement, and Letters of Introduction

Under special circumstances which are often related to spiritual gifts and leadings, a monthly meeting may see fit to issue a letter to an individual Friend. The various types of letters are indicated and explained below.

Travel Minutes

If a recognized leading involves travel outside of one's home meeting, the monthly meeting must first approve of that travel. If it chooses to do so, a designated member of the meeting, usually

the clerk, is expected to provide the led individual with a *travel minute*. A travel minute is a brief letter that indicates the meeting's approval of the leading and requests that hosting Friends offer loving care to the visitor.

It is customary for travel minutes to be read aloud in the meeting that is being visited, usually directly after Meeting for Worship or at the beginning of the Business Meeting or other event in which the visiting Friend participates. The clerk or representative of the visited meeting then endorses the travel minute, noting the date of the visit and offering a return greeting to the issuing meeting. Most endorsements also attest to the faithfulness of the traveling Friend. Travelers are expected to return their travel minute to their meeting when they return home.

Letters of Endorsement

A special case of leadings involves Friends who wish to serve in a professional capacity for which they need an endorsement from a recognized religious community (in addition to other credentials, usually those of a professional nature). This occurs most regularly in the case of pastoral counselors, chaplains, and others who provide psychological and theological guidance in settings such as hospitals, prisons, nursing homes, rehabilitation facilities, and residential care facilities, usually in an interfaith environment. In such cases, the monthly meeting's discernment with respect to the Friend's leading must take into account the type of endorsement that is required. The meeting's endorsement does not certify or imply professional qualification, but rather supports the Friend in undertaking service for which they require a religious endorsement in addition to any professional credentials. The meeting should be sensitive to any deadlines involved with respect to the role in question, treating the request in a manner that recognizes those deadlines while maintaining Quaker processes of discernment.

If the meeting elects to take under its care the leading of a Friend who wishes to serve in a professional capacity of this sort, it authorizes the issuing of a *letter of endorsement* to that Friend. That individual and the meeting should decide upon a mutual process for periodic reporting on the Friend's ministry (see "Recognition of Leadings" above). The meeting should be aware that re-endorsement may sometimes be necessary for certification purposes, depending on the requirements of the organization in which the Friend is serving.

Letters of Introduction

Friends or regular attenders who plan to visit another Friends meeting(s), whether as part of their travel plans or due to relocation to another area, are welcome to request a *letter of introduction* from the clerk of their monthly meeting even if they are not visiting the other meeting(s) on the basis of a recognized leading or recorded ministry. A letter of introduction identifies its bearer as a member of a meeting community, extends greetings from that community to the receiving meeting, and asks that hosting Friends cordially welcome the traveler. (See also Sojourning Members, Transfer of Membership, and Isolated Friends, xx-xx.)

Spiritual Gifts Overview Handout

Spiritual gifts are ways the Spirit works through particular people for the good of the community, not badges of holiness or personality labels. In a Quaker frame, they are “on loan” from God and meant to be exercised under the guidance of the Inward Teacher and tested in community.

What spiritual gifts are:

- Spiritual gifts are capacities the Spirit gives or “quicken” in someone so that specific needs of the body can be met—teaching, caring, organizing, speaking truth, praying, and more.
- They are related to but not identical with natural talents: a talent becomes a spiritual gift when it is surrendered to God’s purposes, shaped by love, and used for the building up of the meeting and the wider world.

How Quakers often describe them:

- Friends often distinguish between “graced natural abilities” (things a person is already good at) and genuinely spiritual gifts that are being sanctified and directed by God in a particular season.
- A key question many Quakers use is: “Does this action, or this ability in me, spring from, express, or increase the Love of God in the world?”; if so, it is likely functioning as a spiritual gift.

EXAMPLES OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Wisdom and discernment: seeing the deeper spiritual dynamics in situations, helping a meeting sense when a decision has Life in it, or recognizing when something is off spiritually.

Teaching and shepherding: explaining faith in clear, accessible ways; accompanying people over time; tending the spiritual health of a group.

Service and hospitality: showing love through practical tasks, creating welcoming spaces, noticing and including those on the margins.

Encouragement and mercy: sensing suffering quickly, offering comfort, and strengthening the discouraged so they can continue in faithfulness.

Administration and leadership: organizing groups, seeing how different people and tasks fit together, clerking or facilitating meetings so that Spirit-led work can happen.

Prophecy and truth-telling: perceiving and speaking needed truths—about injustice, hypocrisy, or needed change—under a tender concern rather than anger or self-importance.

Prayer and intercession: being drawn to sustained, focused prayer for particular people, communities, or concerns, often quietly and over long periods.

Healing and reconciliation: contributing to physical, emotional, or relational healing, sometimes through listening, presence, or prayer for wholeness.

How gifts relate to leadings and ministries

- A recurring pattern is that a person’s spiritual gifts and a person’s leadings start to align—for example, someone gifted in mercy and hospitality may feel led into ministries of welcome, visitation, or refugee support.
- Meetings are encouraged to name and nurture these gifts, helping Friends find the ministries that “fit” their gifts and providing elders, structures, and accountability so those gifts can mature rather than burn out or go unused.

Simple ways to help a group notice gifts

- Ask people: “Where do you most naturally show love?”; “What kinds of work leave you tired but inwardly alive?”; “What do others consistently thank you for?”—their answers often point toward gifts.
- Invite the group to name gifts they see in one another out loud, emphasizing that no gift is minor; each one is part of how the Spirit cares for the whole body through ordinary people.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS INVENTORY

This is not a test. There are no right or wrong answers. Answer honestly about how you usually are, not how you think you “should” be.

Circle one number for each statement: 0 = Rarely true of me 1 = Sometimes true 2 = Often true 3 = Very true

1. People look to me for calm guidance when a group is tense or confused. 0 1 2 3
2. I enjoy explaining spiritual or moral ideas in ways others can easily understand. 0 1 2 3
3. I notice who feels left out and try to include them. 0 1 2 3
4. I am drawn to pray regularly for people or situations. 0 1 2 3
5. I like organizing details so that a group can follow through on decisions. 0 1 2 3
6. I naturally encourage people who are discouraged or unsure of themselves. 0 1 2 3
7. I feel a strong concern for justice or truth and sometimes feel compelled to speak up. 0 1 2 3
8. I enjoy offering practical help (meals, rides, chores, small tasks) to others. 0 1 2 3
9. I find joy in giving money or resources to support people or ministries. 0 1 2 3
10. I enjoy listening to others about their spiritual lives and asking questions that help them go deeper. 0 1 2 3
11. I often see how different people and their abilities could fit together to get something done. 0 1 2 3
12. In worship or group settings, I sometimes sense a nudge to share a brief message or reflection. 0 1 2 3

Scoring: Write your scores (0–3) from each item into the lines below, then total each row.

Encouragement & Mercy Item 3: ____ Item 6: ____ Item 8: ____ *Total Encouragement & Mercy:* ____

Teaching & Insight Item 2: ____ Item 10: ____ Item 12: ____ *Total Teaching & Insight:* ____

Leadership & Wisdom Item 1: ____ Item 5: ____ Item 11: ____ *Total Leadership & Wisdom:* ____

Service, Justice & Generosity Item 4: ____ Item 7: ____ Item 9: ____ *Total Service/Justice/Generosity:* ____

- Notice your highest one or two totals; these may point toward areas where your gifts are emerging or active.

From Beacon Hill Friends House Vocational Discernment Project

<https://www.flipsnack.com/FAABC6AA9F7/bhfh-vocational-discernment-workbook-living-into-your-call.html>

<https://bhfh.org/bhfh-discern/>

Living into
your call:

A contemplative

guide
to

discerning

your
right

next
step



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