



NEW ENGLAND
YEARLY MEETING
OF FRIENDS
QUAKERS

March 12, 2020

Dear Friends who serve in pastoral care roles in your local meeting:

This has been an unsettling week as communities across the world respond to the coronavirus pandemic. As those serving formally or informally in pastoral care roles in your Quaker community, you may be called on to be spiritually present to others who are coping with new and uncertain challenges including physical isolation.

Attached to this letter is a list of a few gathered resources that we hope may be helpful to you in your service to your meeting. Also, please note that the Yearly Meeting is hosting weekly check-ins for Friends serving in leadership roles in their meeting who wish to gather for resource sharing and mutual support through this time of rapid change. These calls will be Tuesdays from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m. via Zoom. The call access information is posted below.

With care,

Nia Thomas
Quaker Practice & Leadership Facilitator
New England Yearly Meeting
Nia@neym.org

Here is the recurring Zoom information I mentioned in my letter. You can use this to connect *any week*, until further notice.

When: Tuesdays from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m.

What: A Zoom call to support and connect Friends serving their local Quaker meetings during concerns about coronavirus (COVID-19).

How: Join a Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/169309730>

Meeting ID: 169 309 730

One tap mobile

+16465588656,,169309730# US (New York)

+16699006833,,169309730# US (San Jose)

Dial by your location

+1 646 558 8656 US (New York)

+1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)

Meeting ID: 169 309 730

Find your local number: <https://zoom.us/u/abz7t6Ijlc>

NOTE: If you have not used the Zoom platform before, you can try a test meeting to familiarize yourself. [Click here for a test meeting.](#)

Times Resource List Pastoral Care in Covid-19

“Being the church online”. Resources collected by Fresh Pond (MA) Friend Kathleen Wooten on digital ways faith communities can be together.

<http://quakerkathleen.org/being-the-church-online/>

“10 Guidelines for Pastoral Care During Coronavirus Outbreak”. Useful times from The Christian Century.

<https://www.christiancentury.org/blog-post/guest-post/10-guidelines-pastoral-care-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

“Talking to Kids about the Coronavirus”. Tips for being present to the concerns of children from the Child Mind Institute.

<https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>

Dear Church: How to Stay Healthy, Connected and Faithful.

https://app.robly.com/archive?id=785fcd839dc1734c04e847684c9f443d&v=true&fbclid=IwAR3R1fnMMXBbJ96G5XiHrWoxtpCCdThLbrt7q7jI_m4x1aYhnMTxqfGqDwc

“Messaging during anxious times”. A reflection by a UU Minister on how to stay physically separated but still spiritually connected. Note: if you can’t view this link, the text is also pasted at the bottom of this message.

<https://www.facebook.com/sunshine.wolfe/posts/10157853081871023>

NEYM’s updates and resources during the covid-19 pandemic. On the NEYM website we will continually add curated resources as well as updates on how this pandemic is impacted NEYM events. This resource list will be available there.

<https://neym.org/updates-and-pastoral-care-during-covid-19-pandemic>

A Note on Messaging during Anxious Times.

By Sunshine Wolfe

If you are a leader or have a strong following, you have great power in this situation to help people navigate it with grace. Using what we know about neurobiology and trauma, here are some pro-tips from a professional in the field of helping communities navigate great change and challenge. Please keep in mind that MANY if not MOST of the people we interact with are in same phase of trauma recovery, responding to generational trauma, or helping others navigate trauma.

1) Actively listen, be compassionate, affirm feelings, but don't ask people how they are feeling.

Many of the people responding- including possibly yourself- are perceiving much of what is in the world with what I call "amygdala brain." The first place we respond to crisis from is our amygdala. The amygdala is the part of our brain that sends out emotional signals. Being emotionally reactive as well as complete shutdown are common responses during a crisis. The amygdala, if overwhelmed by the emotions of the moment will become further overloaded when asked, "how do you feel?" You want to get folks to a different place. Ask them instead, tell the story of what is happening? What seems possible right now? What happens next? You can name emotions people may be having in a group letter AND don't leave it at that. Shift to language that helps people connect to meaning making.

2) Give language to describe what is happening. Keep messaging simple and repeat it over and over.

Studies of the traumatized brain show that when the amygdala gets overwhelmed, our ability to connect to language is compromised. The Broca's Area is responsible for language. When we are in the midst of crisis we can have difficulty accessing this part of our brains. Helping people find language can help reduce stress and develop resilience in difficult times. While it is important to connect to language- keep it simple and clear.

3) Help people with a narrative that is accurate, easy to comprehend, and resilient in the moment.

When the amygdala is overrun it shuts down the pathways to our frontal lobe. This is the area where decision making occurs. It is also where we create narrative- stories. It is the place where we make meaning. Help people connect with stories of resilience and response. Encourage folks to tell their own stories when they can. Storytelling is an excellent stabilizing tool when used without attempts to edit or change the person's narrative right away.

So, here is an example of these three steps at work:

"Stay Away and Connect"

I write to you now as we deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. This is not the first crisis we as a nation or world have met and it will not be the last. Yet we have survived and will continue to survive together. You may be feeling a lot of intense emotions right now. This is normal and understandable. You are not alone. Those feelings can be overwhelming and we may even want to shutdown or deny that anything is wrong. All of this is normal. Please kind and patient with yourself and others.

There is good news. The steps we can take to protect one another are simple. When thinking about these steps, ask yourself, “what is possible for me right now? What can I do in this moment that is simple and possible?” Do what you can and add on more as you are able.

In this challenging time, I encourage you to stay away AND stay connected.

1) Stay away from the germ AND stay connected to yourself- Wash your hands with care- in body and spirit.

When washing your hands recite a poem, dance a dance, doing a breathing meditation, or putting all of your focus on how your skin and hands feel as you wash them. Make this a time when you ground yourself and finding connection in yourself.

2) Stay away from people AND stay connected in creative and fun ways.

At this time, cancelling events and gatherings of around 50 or more helps reduce the chance of spread. That does not mean we cannot connect. Social distancing protects all of us- especially those high at risk. We also need one another. Call a friend, play Words with Friends, chat with someone online, chat with a neighbor from one another’s doors or porches. Have your friends set a time when you will all go out and howl at the moon. Find creative ways to connect while keeping social distance- make a game of it. Get the holiday lights out and make different affirming messages each day with them. Tell jokes. Sing songs. According to your own ability, find the creative connection unique to you. Distance and connect! Distance AND. Connect!

3) Stay away from information overwhelm AND stay connected to a few reliable resources.

In this day and age- there are tons of places to get information. News outlets make money on crisis and it is not in their best interest to limit that information. Pick two or three places that you will routinely check for information that have reliable and factual information on the virus. For example, you could choose the World Health Organization, your friend Cam who reads everything and distills on their FB page, and your local health department. You do NOT need all of the information (unless you do- some among us manage crisis by having all of the information, that is ok). If you are feeling overwhelmed by the information- you can choose your sources. It is better to pick what is manageable than it is to ignore this all completely.

This is a time of challenge and together we can help make it manageable for ourselves and our world.

Stay away AND connect. Stay away from what is potentially harmful and embrace creatively how we can connect in spite of it all. You are not alone (but if you are, reach out).