

## **Caring for our Meetings as the world contemplates reopening: A guided meditation**

Written by Nia Thomas and Noah Merrill for NEYM, May 2020

A video of this meditation can be found at: <https://youtu.be/U7EGyse8fTY>

Our hope in offering this is to give you, as a Friend participating in the decisions your Meeting will face in the months ahead, an opportunity to sit with the complexities of the reopening process.

This meditation is in no way meant to replace the need for regularly seeking and following health and safety advice from trusted sources, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and your state public health authorities.

At any moment during this mediation you can take a break or do what you need to do to care for yourself.

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*Sitting quietly, close your eyes if that is comfortable and take a few deep, slow breaths.*

*Notice how your body is feeling coming into this reflection.*

*Over the last two months, our lives have changed—maybe just a little; maybe more than we imagined possible. For the sake of the greater good, and out of love for one another, we have all given up things that were precious to us. Whether these sacrifices felt very tiny or very big, we can honor that they were real changes to each of our lives that we didn't ask for. Take a moment to silently acknowledge the sacrifices that you have made in this time.*

*Thank you.*

*As the topic of reopening your meetinghouse or returning to physically gathering for worship comes to your mind, take a moment to notice what emotions arise for you. What does this bring up for you? Excitement? Fear? Unease? Hope? Confusion? Anticipation? Anxiety? Relief? Maybe you aren't sure what words to use. Whatever you notice you are feeling right now, take a moment to gently make space for it, to allow it to be held in your awareness.*

*Now, take a moment to acknowledge your responsibility to your Meeting community. You may serve in a formal leadership role or serve on a committee; Regardless, your ministry, reflections, questions, and presence contribute to the life of your Meeting. In being a part of a Friends*

*Meeting or worship group, who have you been called to exercise care for? Take a few breaths and bring to mind the faces of these Friends and your commitments to them.*

*Now, take a moment to acknowledge your connectedness to the world beyond your local Friends community. You may serve in some primary roles in your life outside your meeting—in your family, your neighborhood or town, in your working life. You share countless points of connection with the rest of humanity and the web of Creation. Take a few breaths and bring to mind your connectedness with all that is.*

*For the next few minutes, we'll explore some possible events in the further unfolding of this pandemic and the reopening process. This is a chance for you to notice what comes up in your mind and your heart as you consider situations that may unfold. While we can't predict the future, we can invite the Spirit to prepare our hearts to be a supportive part of our meeting's response. We hope this is an opportunity to turn towards the Inward Guide, who is always available.*

*Imagine that the government in your area relaxes restrictions on gatherings of small groups. How do you feel as you envision this? If your meeting is larger than the group size permitted to gather, notice what arises as you imagine your Meeting considering limiting who is welcome to worship together. What do you notice the still, small voice saying?*

*Imagine that health authorities issue different guidance about participation in public events for different people. If you imagine a reopening process where some people are allowed to gather in person while others are still asked to stay at home due to their age, immunity status, or other factors outside of their control, how does that feel? What wisdom is in your heart?*

*Imagine that larger groups are now allowed to gather, but only with intensive precautions such as maintaining physical distance, extensive cleaning, and face coverings. Some of these precautions may be difficult for some Friends in your Meeting—such as children—to follow. Some of these precautions may require a lot of additional work or money to maintain. How are you called to respond? Turn again towards your Guide.*

*Imagine that some Friends in your Meeting would like to explore “hybrid” worship and gatherings, where some Friends gather in person and others connect digitally. Whose discernment, whose wisdom might you trust to address the questions this situation raises for your meeting? Are there conversations that could begin before these decisions are needed?*

*Imagine that your Meeting begins or plans to begin the reopening process, only to learn that the risk it would pose is still significant. Maybe a swift change of course is needed. What do you want your meeting's response to say about who you are as a spiritual community?*

*Imagine Friends from your Meeting gather again in person, and later learn that someone in attendance has tested positive for coronavirus. How might God work through you in your Meeting's response?*

*Imagine that Friends in your Meeting are sharply divided on how to approach reopening. There may be painful conflict and hurt as tensions rise. How might you stay grounded as you respond? Whose gifts might you turn to as partners in honoring the needs of each person and the needs of the whole?*

*Now, imagine the resilience and care that dwells within each member of your meeting. Imagine the dynamic ministry that, at its best, Friends can offer to one another and to the world. Imagine the gifts of each member of the community being freed for service, each Friend being seen, known, and loved as a vital part of the Meeting. Imagine barriers to that participation removed, through the faithful work of many. And imagine the communities in relationship with your meeting growing more loving, more just, more resilient through the meeting's ministry and witness. What part might you be led to play in helping this vision be realized in the time to come, even in these times?*

*Turning away from imagining and grounding ourselves here and now, let's take a few moments before we close to return and notice what this experience has brought up for you.*

*I invite you to bring your awareness back to acknowledge your place in the global human community, in the web of creation. Thank you for being here.*

*Bring your awareness back to your relationships with your family and friends, those you work with, live near, and serve. Thank you for all the ways you touch upon these lives.*

*Bring your awareness back to your participation in your Friends Meeting. Recall the ways that your presence—through ministry, service, leadership, and holding—make space for transformation. Your every step towards faithfulness makes a difference. Thank you.*

*Over the months ahead, you may need to continue to change your actions for the sake of the health of others. You may be called to make sacrifices, some of which may feel small and some of which may feel so large. Take a moment to imagine yourself in a future moment of difficult sacrifice. What loving reminders and encouragement might you be able to return to in that time?*

*Finally, as we begin to move out of this meditation, take a moment to notice how you are feeling and how your body feels. What small action might you take after this meditation is over to care for yourself?*

*Whatever arose for you in this experience, as we close, please remember: You are loved. You have been given precious gifts that the world needs. Your Inward Guide is always available. In the deepest sense, you are never alone.*