

Report to meeting 1/15/25

Dear Friends,

The quiet of winter is a good time to stop and consider how things are with us. The farmers have bought their seed for the coming season, and laid out their planting calendar, considering what plots will be planted, and what left fallow, and what experiments or new tasks might best serve the life of the farm organism in the coming year. These annual reports to the meeting can sometimes feel like a similar process of clearing, preparing, sorting, and imagining, on my own small allotment of time and space

Every year I ask myself in prayer, "Does this concern continue, is there life in it?" I believe that it does. As always, I am accountable to you, the meeting. If you see any evidence that my discernment about my calling is wrong, or the gift not being carried faithfully, it is right for you to say so, and guide me in love into a better path.

I am going to excerpt here from last year's report, in characterizing my concern; I don't find any better way of putting it this year:

I understand my calling to be "gospel ministry," and I want to say a little thing about what that means, as I have come to see it. A minister is a servant, who acts under orders, but often must figure out how best to understand and implement those orders, and this (sometimes scary) freedom may grow as the minister's experience grows. A minister of the gospel is one who serves the life of the gospel, which is Immanuel – God with us – in ourselves and others; and calling it "gospel" indicates that this living God is inextricably linked with the character and person of Christ, before, during, and after the revelation in and through Jesus.

While the implications of this commitment are not always obvious or easy to identify, still it does constrain us, because thereby we know that we are seeking to know and live by a spirit whose commandment is love of God and of neighbor, who calls us to a perfection as articulated in, for example, the sermon on the mount, and whose being embraces life and death, joy and suffering, human and non-human, now, in the past, and in the future. The minister's "job" is in support of this search.

Traditionally among Friends, the ministry of the gospel was in prayer and speech, under the immediate guidance of the spirit of Christ. But the work of the ministry as Friends understand it is not in preparation of ideas or messages, nor in "leadership," but in listening and inward travail (travel). From this inward work, ministers may find themselves led into a wide variety of modes of working – in meeting, or in homes, or other settings, drawing near to the witnessing Light of Christ in companionship with others, and acting, speaking, or keeping silent as led. When I open a new travel journal, I copy in these famous words of John Woolman, as a reminder of what the work consists in:

Love was the first motion, and then a concern arose to spend some time with the Indians, that I might feel and understand their life, and the spirit they live in, if haply I might receive some instruction from them, or they might be in any degree helped forward by my following the leadings of truth among them.

Well, this has been my intent, my understanding of the work I am called to. Sometimes I have been adequate to it, often not.

Looking back

Writing. Last year, I foresaw continued writing, both on my blog *Amor Vincat* (amorvincat.wordpress.com) and in other forms. Although the frequency of posting on *Amor Vincat* has

been slower than in past years, it has continued. I have also revived another blog, *Bloghaunter* (*bloghaunter.wordpress.com*). This originated in an extended series of short pieces on science education and policy, for some projects at my work. The focus includes also related issues (at least issues I think are related), such as public understanding of science, climate change, and related politics and policies.

However, the big project on hand, the last time I reported was a book, *The gospel in the Anthropocene: Letters from a Quaker naturalist*. I felt it was reaching final form, and I was beginning to seek a publisher for it. Since my report, the book (with input from my oversight committee) underwent some more revisions, and I am glad to tell you that I have entered an agreement with Barclay Press which will publish the book this year. Darcy Drayton has been creating a large series of remarkable illustrations for it, designed to support and encourage meditation. Although the project is moving more slowly than I'd wish at the publisher's end, it is moving ahead, and I am trying to do what I can to speed it along.

Along with this report, I will attach some of the introductory pages in case Friends are curious.

Other writing projects have emerged. I contributed to the Winter issue of *Illuminate*, Barclay Press's quarterly Friends Bible study series. The theme for this issue is "Christ in Creation," and I contributed notes and commentary on *Genesis* 1 and *John* 1. I also am writing an introduction for the Yearly Meeting's publication of Lloyd Lee Wilson's address to last year's annual meeting – and I am late getting it done!!

Ministry to ministers. Last year, I also indicated that my concern to encourage ministers continued, both in contacts with individuals and in convening (with Noah Merrill) gatherings for gospel ministers around the yearly meeting. This has borne fruit. We have met roughly quarterly, and moved our location around the yearly meeting, so as to be in reach of the whole territory. In the period of this report, we've gathered at Hanover, Durham, East Sandwich, Hartford, and Putney meetings. These meetings have been welcoming and hospitable to our gatherings, and local meeting members have joined us who might not otherwise have been aware of the opportunity. We meet from mid-morning to mid-afternoon, and the time is spent in worship, in telling each other about how it has been with us since the last time— what we have done in the line of ministry, and what blessings and challenges we have encountered. Over a relaxed lunch time, conversations continue informally and very usefully; and we spend some time in the afternoon in consideration of a topic or two that has seemed of particular interest or importance in the morning session. There is a core of Friends who are typically there, but it is open to anyone who is carrying a sustained concern for vocal ministry, and attenders are encouraged to invite others for whom the gatherings may be appropriate.

Other travel. Finally, I felt an opening to further travel and teaching, as way opened. This also has borne fruit. I have given two workshops on the work of the recording clerk – one for our yearly meeting, and one for New York Quarterly Meeting of NY Yearly Meeting. I have also led two sessions on James Nayler's "last words," at the request of Falmouth QM and of Connecticut Valley QM.

Midweek meditations. I have continued this year with my "midweek meditations," which have been some use to Friends over the past few years.

Looking ahead.

Writing. I am expecting that my book will take up much of my time this spring, at least, as the book is edited and prepared for publication. Moreover, since the book is not intended only for Friends (though it includes some Quaker material, for sure!), I will need to take an active hand in helping the

Press publicize it in circles beyond the Quaker press. When promotional materials are available, I will make sure that all my friends can help spread the word if you want!

I expect to continue writing on my blogs, and though I cannot claim a huge readership, I do find that they are read with interest, and sometimes quoted or passed on, which is encouraging. I also will be considering if there is material accumulating for another book.

The work that I began on an edition of William Dewsbury's works, in which Gordon Bugbeen joined, has been on hold because the *Gospel in the Anthropocene* seemed urgent (and since the election seems even more urgent!) However, this still feels like a live concern, and I hope to return to it this year.

Ministry to ministers. This seems likely to continue this year, as the leading for it continues to have life for me and for Noah.

Travel. I continue to feel that I should be visiting meetings around New England as way opens, so that (as min the Woolman quotation above) *haply I might receive some instruction from them, or they might be in any degree helped forward by my following the leadings of truth among them.*

I also am very open to invitations to lead workshops or retreats on topics from Quaker history or spirituality.

Midweek meditations. These monthly sessions will continue for this year (2024-5) (the theme is "Quaker sermons") and next year (2025-6, drawing from memorial minutes) which I see will be the last in this series.

Personal news that relates to all this. If things go as we foresee, Darcy and I will be putting our house up for sale in late spring/early summer, and (assuming a sale) we will be moving to Massachusetts in early fall. This will be a strenuous project, as you can imagine (involving heart, soul, strength and mind). and will take top priority much of the time. If all goes according to plan, we will be transferring our membership to a meeting near our new home, and my report next fall will be to two meetings – Weare, our spiritual community since 1996, and the next meeting we join.

When we married in 1975, Darcy and I told each other that we would always make our home within the bounds of New England – both because of our love of the land and sea here, and because New England Yearly Meeting has been in many ways "home" for us no matter where we have lived. I am very grateful that we have been able to do this, and it makes the anticipation of this move much less daunting.

Moving to a new meeting, whenever that happens, will require me to reflect on my service to ministry in a fresh context, and so I will be especially grateful for counsel and questions during this transition.

In Christian love your friend,
Brian Drayton