

The Calling of Quaker Ministers to Ministry

by
Margaret Benefiel
Instructor, Pendle Hill
Northwest Yearly Meeting

"Divine Guidance is away from self-indulgence, often away from outward success; through humiliation and failure; over rough roads and against opposing forces--always uphill. It's evidence of success is in the inmost, deepest most spiritual part of our existence."--

Caroline Stephens, (1834-1909)
QUAKER STRONGHOLDS,
1890, A Quaker classic that has
gone through several printings.

Thanks to Jack Wilcutts, NWYM for this
quotation. See an excerpt of Jack's letter on
page 9.

Women have held an equal place in ministry in the Society of Friends since the beginning. Early Quaker women expected that God would call them, as well as men, to ministry. They learned to listen for this call in themselves and in others, and to support one another in faithfulness to it when it occurred.

Responding to God's call, however, was not always easy. Many early Quaker women struggled for some time before they responded. And once they did, the results were mixed. Sometimes there was an experience of great joy, a strong awareness of God's presence and love. At other times, there was more struggle, darkness, doubt, and insecurity.

Martha Routh (1743-1817) is a good example of one of these ministers who served during the first century and a half of Quakerism. Martha received the call to ministry at age fourteen, but did not respond until she was twenty-nine. In her journal, she records her struggles related to her call. For most of her adolescence and young adulthood, she felt inadequate. She believed that she could not live the kind of exemplary life that a minister should live. Ministry was for other, more holy people, but not for her. So she hesitated for fifteen years. During this period, her call would sometimes recede from her awareness for greater or shorter lengths of time, but it always returned. At one point, when she was head of a school, her call returned with some strength and was evident to many around her as well as to herself:

The spirit of prophecy was given both to servants and to handmaids; those who came from far, as well as those who were near, clearly pointed out my state in public ministry; and some of them told me afterwards [that] they could have laid their hands on my head (Memoirs.) p. 25

But it took three more years of struggle and serious illness before she finally responded. It was through the patient support and encouragement of Catherine Phillips, Mary Ridgway, Jane Watson, and other ministers that she was finally able to respond and then continue in faithfulness to her ministry.

Catherine Phillips (1727-1794), one of those who supported Martha Routh, received her call to ministry at age twenty-one and responded immediately. But she recorded in her journal her years of preparation prior to her call, and the struggles she experienced then. Catherine was popular, high-spirited, and pretty. Responding to a call to ministry would set her apart socially, perhaps cause her to lose her popularity. Becoming a minister meant trusting God to meet her social needs as she exchanged some of her "frivolous" social activities for journeys in the ministry. Catherine, like Martha, received much support, encouragement, and training in ministry from Mary Peisley, Mary Abbot, and other ministers more experienced than she, as they traveled together in the ministry and as she shared with them her spiritual struggles and received their attentive, prayerful listening.

Responding to God's call often meant leaving one's husband and children for weeks or even months, in order to travel in the ministry. Such a decision was not made lightly, and the basis for the decision was the group discernment process. As a group of trusted f/Friends met with a woman to help her discern whether her leading to take on a particular ministry was genuine, it was assumed that if she were being irresponsible with regard to her family, that would be revealed in the process. On the other hand, if it became clear that her leading was from God, she could do no other than respond in faithfulness and entrust her marriage and family to God and to the care of f/Friends.

Reflecting on the lives of early Quaker women ministers gives rise to some queries for me:

Do we, as twentieth-century women, expect God to call some of us, as well as men, to ministry? Do we listen for that call in ourselves and in one another? Do we accept struggles and doubts as a normal part of the process? Can we trust God to take care of our social lives, our marriages and families? Do we seek support and guidance from other more experienced women ministers? Do we offer support and guidance to those in whom we have seen the call? Are we creative in building the kinds of support networks that will help us be faithful to the call?

May we learn from these foremothers in the faith as we reflect on the example of their expectancy in listening to God, vulnerability in struggles, and creativity and commitment in building and sustaining support networks!

GOD'S CALLING: A CONTINUOUS JOURNEY

by
Mary Glenn Hadley
 Associate Secretary for Meeting Ministry
 Friends United Meeting

Responding to God's call began at an early age for me. In eighth grade I rebelliously wrote about my anticipated career as a secretary instead of nursing which I knew was God's will. I carefully chose courses I felt comfortable with in my first year of high school, avoiding things like Latin and Chemistry that would prepare me for nursing. My freshman year left me feeling unhappy inside. Happiness would be restored only if I were obedient to God's leading in life. Therefore I began making those choices for nursing.

My choice to go to William Penn College was happy but, aware that nursing was not offered, I transferred to Iowa Methodist School of Nursing my second year. It was a surprise to sense that God was calling me to enter mission work in my junior year. It took courage to write the letter asking for information from the Mission Board of FUM. I carried it around for months before I mailed it.

The reply came quickly suggesting that when I finished with nurses training I contact them again. At that point, I told God that the next step was God's. I was surprised when the pastor of the meeting quietly asked if I had ever considered going to the mission field. When I told him what I'd done, he asked for permission to submit my name again. Thus began some of the most delightful years of my life serving in Kenya as a nurse and developing the Theological Education by Extension Program over the period of 1962-1980.

There was definite closure of that experience. I sensed before I went out for my fourth term that I was to request a two year term instead of the usual four year. Not knowing why, I trusted God through the still small voice, and made my request. The Mission Board accepted. Two months before I returned home, I received a telegram that my father had cancer. It was clear why I was to return home at the close of two years. My father died six months later.

During the next six years I worked in a hospital in Des Moines, Iowa. The Des Moines Ministry and Counsel called a meeting with me to tell me that they recognized the gift of pastor in me. Would I be willing to allow them to submit my name for recording? I felt so affirmed by that, for many of the things I had done in Kenya had been very pastoral. Recording came from Iowa Yearly Meeting in 1987.

Another door opened for service in 1985 to work as a member of a medical team in the famine in Ethiopia. While there, in my little tent, I sensed that I was being released from nursing but I wasn't sure what lay ahead.

Upon returning to the States, I felt led to apply for a couple of positions within the church structure. In applying for those, I had to work through several aspects of life: lesser salary, loss of pension, adjustments in living arrangements, etc. Neither of those worked out, but, having worked through many things, I was prepared when I was asked if I would accept the position as Associate Secretary for Meeting Ministries Commission of FUM.

Being obedient to God's calling has meant joy for me. God has allowed me to have my sights broadened, my understanding of the world God created to deepen and my desire to follow God strengthened. I have appreciated support and affirmation from my family and church/meeting. I continue trusting God for all of Life's ventures knowing that God is a reliable guide.

For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is not seen is not hope. For who hopes for what she sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience...

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love God, who are called according to God's purpose...

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?...

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us.

Romans 8:24-25, 28, 35, 38.

CAN YOU HELP?

We need financial help to send five Latin American women and five underprivileged North American women to the International Theology Conference for Quaker Women, July, 1990 in Woodbrooke, England. The cost will be about \$10,000. Send contributions to:

ESR:Women's Conference
 c/o Judith Middleton
 228 College Avenue
 Richmond, IN 47374

See Brochure on page 10 and 11.