



Third Haven Friends Meeting

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Easton, Maryland 21601

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SEPTEMBER 2007 NEWSLETTER

Are we at peace with one another?

Third Haven Friends Meeting Minutes of the 6th Month 10th, 2007 Meeting for Business

Attending: Paige Bethke, Cynthia Browne, Lorraine Claggett, Susan Claggett, Joe Davis, Doreen Getsinger, Marsie Hawkinson, Peter Howell, Katharine Johnson, Susan Leibman, Connie Lewis, Bob Marshall, Sumner Parker, Jim Paul, Anne Rouse, Jim Rouse, John Schreiner, Candace Shattuck, Cathy Thompson, Norval Thompson, Winslow Womack, and Ralph Young.

Clerk of the Meeting Anne Rouse clerked the Meeting for Business. The meeting opened at 11:40 am with a period of worship.

Query for Sixth Month -- The sixth query, "Equality," had been read during Meeting for Worship. A Friend reflected that equality is a radical, difficult notion that turns the world on its head regarding how we treat others, absolutely requiring that we live by the golden rule. Hearing the query read aloud was disquieting for one Friend, who felt that the answer for our Meeting at this time is "no," and that we as a Meeting are compounding our failing by being unwilling to talk about it. A Friend shared that the way the query had been read conveyed the clarity of message this query presents us, and another despaired at how far we are from achieving equality, either here in our Meeting, or in the world.

Approval of Minutes -- The minutes of the 5th Month 2007 Meeting for Business were APPROVED with two corrections. The loan guarantee request from Interfaith Housing is not for a Salisbury project; that project is completed. The request is for a future project. Also, the cost for the new door closers should be \$502.00, not \$205.00.

The Clerk shared correspondence from John Todd regarding membership in the Meeting. This request was happily forwarded to Overseers. The Clerk then read a letter from the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship thanking us for our hospitality.

Overseers -- Doreen Getsinger reported that Overseers recommends allowing Kathy Stromsem and James Gross use of the Meetinghouse for their wedding on 10th Month 20th, 2007, for the customary fee. Overseers recommended Leigh Ann Dodge and Rob Weiland for membership in the Meeting, and this recommendation was APPROVED by the Meeting, with much rejoicing.

A welcoming committee consisting of Susan Claggett (convener), Cathy Thompson, Peter Howell and John Schreiner was appointed. Overseers has received a request from Steve Escher, Jane Escher's son, for use of the Meetinghouse for his wedding, planned for 6th Month 28th, 2008. Overseers recommended approving this request, and waiving fees except for the caretakers' fee. This recommendation was APPROVED by the Meeting. Finally, it was reported that Steven Gerni and Susan Dabney were married under the care of the Meeting on 6th Month 9th, 2007.

Meeting treasurer Joe Davis gave the Treasurer's Report. During 5th Month 2007, the Meeting had total income of \$1,579.78 and total expenses of \$3,994.54, for a net deficit of \$2,414.76. Year-to-date figures are \$52,362.03 of total income and expenses of \$46,571.26. Compared to the prior year, the Meeting has slightly less income and much higher expenses. Current total assets are \$72,284.17 and total liabilities are \$9,015.87. Proceeds from the Carriage Shed Sale will be approximately \$4,200.00. The Meeting APPROVED the report with many thanks to the treasurer.

Worship & Ministry Committee – In his final report as committee clerk, Bob Marshall shared his view that the teachings of Jesus root and ground our faith as Friends. We should not pull back from that position in the hope of having more universal appeal. With regard to the question of same gender unions, we were not able to speak to one another with love, nor truly listen with love. Many of us are not at peace with where we are on this issue. We need to determine how we can communicate in love. Friends were moved by this opening, and shared many offerings. One Friend suggested that we may be too hung up on the “routine” surrounding marriage. Commitments are made between two people and God, so anyone should be able to come to Meeting and give voice to their commitment. Another Friend spoke of the special importance of involving one's spiritual community in the public declaration of marriage or commitment. Quaker Meeting should be the easiest place to listen in love. We must aspire to meet this goal, because we should be able to come closer here than anywhere else in life. Several Friends urged the Meeting to keep the issue open, and to carefully continue dialogue while trying not to open old wounds. Several Friends shared thoughts about the roots of Quakerism beyond our Christian heritage. An imperative of continuing revelation is that we are bound to deal with the results of our truth seeking. If we decide to pause our truth-seeking, we must decide when will resume, because this issue is clearly still alive among us. Loving is hard work, and the Bible admonishes us to forgive not seven times, but seven times seventy times. Friends were appreciative of the opportunity to share on this topic, and expressed deep gratitude to Bob for his service to the committee and his dedication to enhancing the spiritual health of the Meeting.

Budget & Finance committee clerk Winslow Womack presented the revised budget and highlighted three changes: Sam Webster's health care costs increased significantly (\$1,100.00); general administration was increased to \$800.00 in anticipation of costs associated with equipping a new treasurer; and support for the Talbot Alliance of Clergy and Laity (TACL) Good Samaritan Fund was moved to a separate line item (\$300.00). Friends asked that trash fees be moved under Utilities, for clarity, and then APPROVED the budget. Winslow then reported that the Meeting has had no provision for scholarships for Friends schools, and requested establishment of a scholarship committee to consider the matter. Larny Claggett, Monimia Barker, Mark Beck, and Peter Howell have been recommended by the Nominating Committee to serve in this capacity. Friends APPROVED establishment of the requested committee. Finally, the committee recommended that the treasurer report to the Meeting for Business only four times per year, rather than monthly. This schedule will free up business meeting time while still

providing the Meeting with adequate financial information. The proposed reporting schedule would be at the 9th, 1st, 4th, and 6th Months' Meetings for Business. The Meeting APPROVED this recommendation. A Friend requested that the committee consider placing a cap on cash reserves, with excess donated to a worthy cause. The committee will take this idea under consideration.

First Day School – Susan Claggett presented the annual report of the First Day School Committee. During the past year, First Day School (FDS) has served 10-23 children each First Day morning. Curricula have included Bible stories, Growing in the Light, story books, other religions, Faith & Practice, and Godly Play stories from storytellers Amy Crump, Cathy Thompson, Susan Claggett, and Candace Shattuck. The committee also arranges for childcare during Meeting for Business, although it has been underutilized this year. All adults are encouraged to invest in the future of our Meeting by volunteering with FDS. The Meeting APPROVED the report with thanks. A copy of the report is attached to these minutes.

Cathy Thompson, one of the representatives to Interim Meeting, reported that Jada Jackson will serve as clerk of Interim Meeting, and Arthur Larrabee as General Secretary of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (PYM). The annual fund is currently approximately \$86,500.00 short of this year's goal. Green renovations, including geothermal heat and rainwater reuse systems, are planned for Friends Center. PYM holds one-third equity in this building, and will support the increased cost for environmentally-sensitive renovations.

Other Concerns – Lorraine Claggett brought a request from Larny Claggett that the Meeting serve as a guarantor for \$45,000 of a \$450,000 line of credit for Interfaith Housing, to be used for an affordable housing project in Caroline County. A Friend clarified that our liability would be limited to \$45,000, inquired how often Interfaith has defaulted on a loan, and received the answer that they have never defaulted. A Friend encouraged the Meeting to gather up its faith and support the proposal. The Meeting APPROVED the request.

Cathy Thompson introduced and asked Friends to welcome her friend Connie Lewis.

A Friend thanked the Clerk for the protocol reminders printed at the top of the agenda.

Meeting for Business will not be held during 7th or 8th Month. Southern Quarter will hold a beach meeting on 8th Month 19th, 2007. Quakerism 101 will begin on 8th Month 31st, 2007.

No further business appearing, Friends concluded at 1:35 pm with a period of worship, purposing to meet next on 9th Month 9th, 2007.

Respectfully submitted,
Susan Hersemann Leibman
Third Haven Friends Meeting

Meet a Friend (or two!)

The buildings and grounds of Third Haven Meeting fairly ooze history. The Old Meeting House still has no heat, light or running water. Many of the gravestones are so old, it's hard to read the inscriptions. It's very easy to assume that little, if anything, has changed since the first Quakers worshipped here in 1684.

Think again. Third Haven is a living, dynamic organism that adapts to the changing needs of its congregation. And no one knows more about how it has changed in the past 25 years

than Sam and Vickie Webster. While most of us visit the grounds once a week (maybe twice if we serve on a busy committee), the Websters live here. For a quarter century, they've seen it all.



Sam and Vickie have been Third Haven's caretakers since Sept. 1, 1982. Each traveled a circuitous route to 405 South Washington Street.

Born in Cambridge, Sam was raised in Federalsburg. When he was in the fourth grade, his class visited Third Haven on a field trip. Many years later, he would realize what a fateful day that was. As a young man, he earned two degrees at Salisbury State University: a B.A. in Liberal Studies and an M.A. in English. Did he once contemplate a career in academe?

"That was one of the things I thought about, yes," he said in a recent interview. But his destiny, it seems, lay elsewhere. For the past 13 years, he has worked for Delmarva Community Transit, first as a driver (10 years), and most recently as a dispatcher.

Unlike her husband, Vickie is not from the Mid-Shore. Rather, since her father served as a fighter pilot in both the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Air Force, she seems to be from everywhere. Born in Fairhope, Ala., she spent most of her youth in Hampton, Va. She subsequently lived in Boston and Boulder, Colo.

"She grieved those mountains" when she came east, says Sam. "She really loved it out there."

When her father retired from the military, her parents bought land near Harris Creek and moved to Talbot County. In 1976, Vickie came to visit them and stayed for a while — long enough to run low on money. So she took a job as a technician in Dr. Alden James's office. It was there, while examining his eyes, that she met Sam. Love trumped the Rockies, and they were married March 11, 1977. Their son, Samuel, was born almost a year later. Four years old when he came to Third Haven, he is now grown with a family of his own.

Although Vickie and Sam were raised in the Catholic and Methodist churches, respectively, they were both unaffiliated when they married. So they went looking for a church to attend. Third Haven happened to be first on their list. They liked what they saw and heard, and never went anywhere else.

"We just felt like we had come home," says Vickie.

When the Websters joined Third Haven, Bob and Cora Councill were the caretakers. When they retired after 16 years, a notice was posted announcing an opening for caretakers. One of the Websters (Neither one seems to remember which) suggested almost flippantly that they apply for the job. The idea was quickly put on a shelf. Nevertheless, it kept coming up from time to time, and each time it seemed a little less farfetched. Finally, they applied for the job. The son of a

building contractor who started working for his father at age 10, Sam had all the handyman skills the job required.

The Websters remember when there was no Common Room, and the room that is now the office in the Brick Meeting House was a kitchen. Construction began on the Common Room in 1982, and was completed in late summer or early fall of the following year. Its location is not what the congregation originally had in mind. Plan A would have entailed felling the red maple that stands behind the Common Room, but the Maryland Department of Natural Resources wouldn't hear of it.

"They just about laughed us off the phone," remembers Sam. "You can't cut that tree down," he was told. "We'll put somebody in jail if you do."

"Then they started looking at the Old Meeting House," recalls Vickie, "and found it was about falling down." Termites, powder post beetles and water had taken their toll on the foundation.

The entire building was raised five feet, and the siding and asbestos-shingle roof were removed. "It looked just like a corn crib," says Sam. The asbestos shingles, which were too heavy, historically inaccurate and a health hazard, were replaced with hand-split wooden shingles, which were replaced again earlier this year.

"For the amount of work that was done, it looks about like it was originally," says Sam, "and that's quite an accomplishment."

Still, much has changed at Third Haven. When he and Vickie moved in to the caretaker's cottage, he and his brothers raised the roof and installed a shed dormer, enlarging the building by 400 square feet. The carriage shed has been moved, not once, but twice. The upstairs of the Brick Meeting House was rehabbed for the First Day School. And its sanctuary was painted for the first time in 50 or 60 years. The list of repairs, maintenance and improvements goes on and on. Point to just about any tree in the churchyard, and Sam can tell you whose name it bears.

In 25 years as Third Haven's caretakers, Sam and Vickie have never been away for more than three nights at a time. "It's always one thing and another," says Sam: wood stoves to tend in the winter and yard work in the summer. And Lyme disease makes it difficult for Vickie to travel.

Yet they seem to have no regrets and no desire to get away. Back in 1982, says Vickie, they expected that the specialness of Third Haven would eventually wear off. Twenty-five years later, they tell me they were wrong. *by Peter Howell*

First Day School Annual Report-Third Haven Monthly Meeting June,2007

First Day School has been enriched by many friendly adults who take the time throughout the year to learn with our children. To enlighten and to be enlightened by our children. Our children in First Day are enriched and spiritually fed; and it is because of these adults that Third Haven has the spiritual foundations it has and allows our children to grow. I now name these

wonderful Quaker adults who have helped in the 2006-2007 year: Helen Womack, Lorraine B. Claggett, John Hawkinson, Molly Burgoyne, Susan Leibman, Amy Crump, Janice Shreve, Christin Dickey, Paige Bethke, Mary Cotton, Cathy Thompson, Sam McCall, Cindy Browne, Larny Claggett, Candace Shattuck, Jamie duHoffman, Beth Mufson, Jessica Rice, Lorraine T. Claggett, Stephen Gerni, Susan Dabney, Margaret Small, Dawn Ferguson, Mark Beck and occasionally I, Susan Claggett, go up. Each of the adults listed above bring their own gifts and the children drink it up and draw from it.

First Day School was held every First Day (except New Year's Eve) starting around 10:20.

Attendance averaged anywhere from 13 kids to 23 with our largest gathering happening only one month ago on April 20. 25 young people and around 10 adults took tarps and blankets out to the poison ivy patch and became captivated by our guest speaker that day, Dawn Ferguson. Dawn taught those present a song she wrote called, "Children Singing Peace." It was a very moving First Day School and it got me thinking, hmm, 1) Guest Speaker 2) music 3) outside. . could be worthwhile guidelines for future FDS lessons.

Other issues and classroom topics the FDS tackled were Bible Stories, Growing in the Light, a PYM curricula, storybooks from our upstairs library, other religions, Faith & Practice and of course Godly Play stories told by our 4 storytellers: Amy Crump, Cathy Thompson, Susan Claggett and Candace Shattuck. Special events from throughout the year included: hearing about the then upcoming mission trip to Panama by Molly Burgoyne, creating homemade flower cards for the entire Meeting's use, making Christmas crafts and sending homemade Christmas cards to older members of Meeting, performing a Christmas play and having a Christmas sing-a-long with Susan and Stephen and our UU guests. In January, FDS working closely with PYM Children's Religious Ed staff in hosting Southern Quarter Meeting. The theme was multi-generational with a format called Share Shop. In February, Cathy Thompson shared a Godly Play story with parents only called "The Great Family" and Candace hosted a Godly Play workshop for a group of PYM Friends. THFDS decorated peace puzzles that were sent to Annual Session at 4th and Arch in March. A query was sent-Where does our piece (peace) fit in? April brought Easter, Earth Day and Dawn Ferguson. Meetings were held regarding the implementation of the children's garden. The work there is ongoing. In May the children helped in 3 different booths at the Carriage Shed sale. FDS also hosted a welcoming breakfast for our newest attender, Maeve Mufson, and presented her with a homemade pillow. And under the leadership of Christin Dickey, some FDS families supplied salads to hungry volunteers working on the Idlewild Park Project. Finally, last week on June 3, FDS presented Faith & Practice to our rising 8th graders and graduating Seniors. This year our Rising Up day honored Sarah Thompson, Robert Burgoyne, and Norval Thompson Jr.

First Day School will only be as rich as the adults who take the time to be a part of our children's spiritual lives. We were all kids once.

Submitted,

Susan B. Claggett, THFDS Clerk

Condolences

The meeting sends its sympathy to Lila Line whose sister, Evelyn, recently passed away.

**Third Haven Friends' Meeting
Called Meeting for Business
Eighth Month 5th, 2007**

Present: Anne Rouse, Nancy Mullen, Jim Rouse, Irene Williams, Ann Williams, Peter Howell, Carla Cronin, Cindy Browne, Nicola Green, Pinny Claggett, Lorraine Claggett, Robert Wieland, Leigh Ann Dodge, Heidi Wetzel, John Schreiner, Marsie Hawkinson, John Hawkinson, Cathy Thompson, Norval Thompson, Ralph Young, Meredith Watters, Leonard Baynham, Clay Owens, Susan Claggett, Bob Marshall

The clerk, Anne Rouse, opened the meeting at 11:15 with a moment of silence.

Meredith Watters, clerk of the Nominating Committee, began by expressing gratitude to Joe Davis for his long, dedicated service to the Meeting, which he performed with aplomb and without complaint, in a tenure that lasted far past what is customary. She explained that upon the occasion of the need to designate a new treasurer, Rob Wieland came forward to offer his services. After a training period that Rob has spent with Joe, the committee is now ready to recommend that he replace Joe as treasurer, with a term of two years.

Friends APPROVED this motion heartily.

For clarification purposes it was established that PO Box 2379 will remain the address to which to send contributions to the meeting.

The clerk of Budget and Finance expressed relief that the approval of the new treasurer was official and that all his duties were now under approval by the meeting.

Another friend stood to express gratitude for Joe's service, and also to ask if requests for payment should continue to be dropped in the treasurer's box in the meetinghouse. Rob replied in the affirmative and also asked that all requests be accompanied by an explanation of what the expenditure was for and pertaining to which committee. As an aside, Rob said that Joe is not completely out of the picture and will be providing guidance and support for some time to come as Rob learns his job.

The clerk closed the meeting at 11:22 with a brief moment of silence.

*Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Mullen
Assistant Recording Clerk*

Announcements

THIRD HAVEN FRIENDS MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP

First Days 10am	Fourth Days 5:30pm
September 2	September 5
September 9	September 12
September 16	September 19
September 23	September 26
September 30	October 3

Quakerism 101 for Third Haven and the three other meetings of Southern Quarter began August 26. INSTRUCTOR: Thomas Macaluso at Third Haven Friends Meeting, Easton, MD
Four sessions will be on Sundays at the rise of meeting (11:15 a.m.): August 26, September 16, October 21, November 18. Two sessions will be on Friday evenings at 7:00 p.m: October 5, November 2.



The course began with a survey of the history of Quakerism, including the culture and climate in England in the middle 17th century. Thomas Macaluso will also speak to the schisms that split Quakerism in the 19th century. The second section of the course will cover Quaker theology - faith and practice, modes of worship and conduct of meetings for business. The third section will cover Quakers in the greater world.

Thomas Macaluso recommends, but does not require, that participants read Howard Brinton's book, "Friends for 300 Years" or the updated version of the book, "Friends for 350 Years"

Syllabus for Quakerism 101

1. First Day	8/26	History of Quakerism	Politics and religion in 17th century England
2. First Day	9/16	History of Quakerism in America	Division
3. Sixth Day	10/5	Quaker theology	Creed-less?
4. First Day	10/21	Quaker worship	Mysticism
5. Sixth Day	11/02	Quaker business and organization	Decision making
6. First day	11/18	Quakers in the world	And not of it?

August 29 (fourth day) 4:30pm The Budget and Finance Committee will meet in common room.

September 5 (fourth day) 5pm Property and Grounds Committee will meet in common room.

Sept. 8 (seventh day) Camden Friends will host clerking workshop taught by Arthur Larabee, General Secretary of Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting. Schedule as follows:

9:00 - 12:00am Workshop - Teacher Arthur Larabee

12:00 - 1:00 Lunch - (Please bring a bag lunch.)

1:00 - 3:30pm Workshop continued Contact: Linda Simpson simpsonlin@comcast.net

September 9 (first day) Meeting for worship followed by meeting for business. Please send your agenda items to Anne Rouse by September 2. First Day School begins; child care will be available during meeting for business.

September 23 (first day) Meeting for worship followed a brief address by Arthur Larabee, General Secretary of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

October 7 (first day) Meeting for worship followed by a celebration of the 25 years that Sam and Vickie Webster have been the resident Friends at Third Haven: a potluck lunch is planned by the Hospitality committee.

The Thursday night Silent Peace Vigil has been resumed. Until further notice, the Vigil takes place on Washington St. in front of the Courthouse each Thursday for 1/2 hour starting at 5p.m.

Volunteers (2) are needed in the Lending Library of the Talbot County Detention Center. Tasks include updating a library data base whenever books are loaned out and when they are returned, pulling and returning books to the book stacks, entering new books into the data base and periodically updating the printed lists of all books in the library which are located throughout the detention center. There are about 5,000 books in the library and weekly circulation varies from sixty to one-hundred books. There is no direct contact with inmates. Volunteers are needed on Monday and/or Friday mornings from about 9:45 until noon. For more information contact Ralph Young, 410-819-0050.



Reminders

- Send a contribution payable to: Third Haven Monthly Meeting
Mail to Third Haven Treasurer, PO Box 2379, Easton, MD 21601
- Send a contribution payable to PYM Annual Fund (mention Third Haven)
Mail to PYM Development Office, 1515 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102.
- If you have an announcement or newsletter article, please submit it soon to hawkjm@goeaston.net
- Notices of committee meetings, e-mail and other address changes should also come to this address. The directory on the Third Haven Website is updated every week. Please let us know if you have moved.

Please review the newly updated index of coming events listed by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and other major Quaker organizations. Full accounts of these events may be found on the Third Haven Website, <http://www.thirdhaven.org/> by clicking on Complete Text Material on the home page.

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Index of Events for 2007

Updated August 14, 2007

GENERAL (undated)

Quaker Worship Group Forming near Pottstown
Concerned about the War on Drugs?
Using PYM Library materials
Join the PYM Library Services Group
Quaker Parenting Project offers Discussion Series
Friends Counseling Service

SEPTEMBER

September 7 – 9 Pendle Hill Weekend for Peace Committee Clerks
September 15 Do you seek deeper spiritual experience? Spiritual Formation Program
September 14 & 15: FWCC 70th Anniversary Celebration
September 16 and 23: Valley Meeting Offers Public Lectures
September 28 to 30 Spiritual Formation Opening Retreat
September 29: Buckingham Peace Fair
September 29: Congressman Speaking at Haverford Meeting

OCTOBER

October 13 Downingtown Fall Festival
October 27 Quaker Arts Conference in Bristol
October 27 Treasurers Session
October 27 - November 10, 2007. 2007 Olive Harvest Delegation to Israel/Palestine

NOVEMBER

November 2-4 Fall Quakerism Workshops at Pendle Hill
November 11 Opportunity for Young Adult Friends
2008
2008 Quaker Pilgrimage to England

FRIENDS EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

PYM Job Opportunities
Director of Arch Street Meeting House
Executive Assistant to the General Secretary
Director and Representative, Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO)
PYM Seeking Social Workers
Program Assistant, Middle School Friends Program, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting
Friends Hospice seeks registered nurses and social workers
Outreach Coordinator, Haverford Monthly Meeting
Friends Journal seeks Development Officer
Temporary Job Opening with Friends Center Capital Campaign
Call for Licensed Mental Health Professionals

A Precondition for a Same-Gender Discussion

by Bob Marshall

There is general agreement that it is too early to reopen a discussion of the same-gender issue. People speak of healing and reconciliation. But, in the background, a large number of meeting community members and attenders remain unsettled and disquieted by where the issues have been left.

This meeting has some hard work to do. It is not unique to this meeting. It is the hard work that we all must do, in every aspect of life, all the time. It is glaringly obvious in this matter because we disagree. Loving one another is simple when a matter arises that we all support. Loving one another is most difficult when we disagree, and when our viewpoints are emotionally charged.

The passage of time alone is not going to lead us to a new place in terms of our interaction with one another. This issue is not akin to a simple physical ailment where rest and time allows our bodies to naturally address a malady. It is more akin to a physical ailment brought on by improper conduct where a major behavioral change must first occur, requiring great courage and discipline to implement, before the natural healing process within us can take over. At the end of the day each one of us must embrace a commitment to speaking with love and listening with love. If we each do that, then adherence to Quaker process will do the rest. Disagreements will then be welcome as containing the potential for a discernment that each individual had not achieved on their own.

Given where we are, how do we start to move to a place where we can embrace speaking with love and listening with love? We must forgive each other, and ourselves, and we must do this completely and unconditionally.

Forgiveness is hard work. It is neither intuitive nor natural. When someone speaks words that offend we tend to hold those words close. At a later time, when the speaker is somewhat vulnerable and needs our help, we may quote back to them their hurtful comments from an earlier time. The original speaker will find this hurtful. We know, in our hearts that we should hold close the words that were spoken in the Light and not hold close hurtful words. But, the latter is neither intuitive nor natural.

Why do I find certain words and comments hurtful? Why do I hold them close and think of ways to “stick it” to the person who offered them? Because during those times it is about “me”, and not about my relationship with God, I am hurt, I am irritated, I am resentful, I expect an apology, I want that person to take responsibility for making me feel bad. But, no one is responsible for how I feel except me. No one. At the time when it happens, it does not seem that I am choosing to hold the hurtful words close. It seems that it happens on some primitive level, as if some objective hurt-meter has just swung to the right. But it is a choice. It is a choice to elevate “me” above my relationship with God.

The teaching of Jesus is to forgive. Part of this is to release all words that are not of the Light. This must be done without judgment. This must be done with love. You are not pressing the

“delete key” with great vigor. Rather, you are just opening your hand, letting the words float away.

This is hard work. No one should expect to do this intuitively. But, we must demand it of ourselves. We must commit to it.

Those who speak in meeting on controversial topics have an obligation to review their words carefully. Although they should be assured that if they speak hurtful words these words will be released, hurtful words will greatly delay our discernment and deliberations. When such words are spoken, the hard work of the meeting shifts to focusing on the release of the hurtful words and away from the topic at hand.

Part of forgiveness, as taught to us by Jesus, concerns listening. Listening does not just mean patiently and tenderly waiting for someone to stop talking. It means something much more. As noted in our second set of advices, it means always admitting the possibility of being mistaken. I have a viewpoint, I have arrived at this viewpoint through careful thought, well reasoned, and I have spent much time in quiet centered discernment on this point. I’m a smart guy, well-read, careful thinker. What could anyone add to that? To bring that state of mind to the meeting for any discussion is to come completely unwilling and unable to listen to anyone. Yes, sounds will come from the mouths of others, and I can hear those sounds, and I can probably even repeat them if asked. But, if I do not arrive at the meeting with the absolute commitment to the possibility of being mistaken then I cannot listen to anyone. I cannot hear the Light in what others say. What does this have to do with forgiveness? When I arrive at the meeting with my viewpoint locked-down it is all about “me” and not about my relationship with God. I am coming prepared to be hurt, to be irritated, to be resentful, to expect an apology, even though I think I am prepared in an intellectually thorough and well-reasoned way. It is absolutely essential that I arrive at the meeting with the heartfelt conviction that I may be mistaken.

Part of forgiveness, as taught to us by Jesus, concerns ourselves. We will say hurtful things at times. We will not listen at times. We will not release the hurtful words of others. These things will happen. Each of us must completely and unconditionally forgive ourselves. Now, as a personal observation, that is very hard work, and I suspect that this is true for many. But this is essential.

Before we meaningfully discuss the same-gender issue again, we must forgive one another and ourselves. Although it may not be sufficient in order to raise the issue within the meeting again, it is necessary.