

# Hamilton Quaker Newsletter

## May 2024



***How are we doing our own work to decolonize and honour the rights of Indigenous people as a faith community? How are we actively challenging the direct personal, structural and cultural violence of settler colonialism where we encounter it? What does reconciliation require of us as Friends?***

*Reconciliation Queries #8*

## Upcoming Events and Announcements

On Saturday, May 11, from 10:00 to 1:00, Action 13 Events is presenting the Dundas Repair Cafe at the Dundas Town Hall, second floor. This community fix-it hub will help you learn to fix your small items. This session is focusing on small wooden furniture, simple clothing repairs, electronics, and straight edge tool sharpening. One item per person, please.

The next Quaker Education Session will be on Sunday, May 19, beginning at noon. Participants are welcome to bring a lunch.

A guest from Food Share will be coming to chat with our Meeting after worship on Sunday, May 26. Those interested in hearing the discussion are welcome to bring along a lunch.

The next meeting of the Reading group will be on Sunday, May 26, at our new time from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. in our Zoom space. We will be starting a new book -- Thomas King's *The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative*, from the [CBC 2003 Massey Lecture Series](#). Even if you cannot attend every month, you can drop in as your schedule permits. Please contact Shirla (shirla766@gmail.com) to be added to the participant list.

PSAC will meet online at 7:00 p.m. on Monday, May 27. Please use the regular Meeting for Worship Zoom link.

The next Meeting for Worship for Business will be held in person at the Meeting House on Sunday, June 2 at 12:30 p.m. You can also join us online on our regular Meeting Zoom link.

Our celebration of the lives of George Fox and Margaret Fell will take place on Sunday, June 23 after Meeting for Worship. Further details will be provided in the June newsletter. We are still seeing reflections on Fox and Fell to be published in the June newsletter in advance of the party.

# Salt Marsh

*by Beverly Shepard*

Green to gold to yellow  
Parading to the water's edge  
Feet wet as they stop short  
Like a stand of wheat  
Curtailed by reaper  
Then blue stretch of water  
Saturated with stillness  
And God comes close  
In a silver fish.



# Quakers and the Fellowship of Reconciliation: Part Two

by Paul Dekar

Continuing my introduction to the Fellowship of Reconciliation, I highlight the contribution of one of its most prominent members, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King was inspired by the Social Gospel movement that in Canada was led by Tommy Douglas and others as well as by literature of early FOR leaders in the US, including A.J. Muste, a Quaker and FOR's executive director in the 40s and 50s.

In 1956, Dr. King emerged as leader of the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott. FOR sent one of its staff, Glenn E. Smiley, a Methodist preacher, to assess the effort. Having closely studied the writings of Gandhi, Smiley was convinced that racism and segregation were most likely to be overcome without the use of violence. Dr. King welcomed Smiley as an advisor and developed nonviolence as a way to address racial tension. Together with Bayard Rustin and others, Smiley helped convince Dr. King and his associates that complete nonviolence and nonviolent direct action were the most effective methods and tools to use during protest. After this role in Montgomery, Smiley continued to employ nonviolence and worked for several organizations promoting peace in South American countries.

Another way by which FOR supported the bus boycott was publication of a comic book, *The Montgomery Story*. Subsequently translated into Spanish, Arabic and Farsi, it has inspired the Arab Spring and campaigns in other countries in the principles of nonviolence and nonviolent resistance.

In the 60s and early 70s, FOR helped organize resistance to US participation in the Vietnam conflict. In 1965, in response to growing US military buildup there, FOR sent a delegation to Vietnam and to support peace efforts by Vietnamese leaders such as Thich Nhat Hahn. Similarly in the 70s and 80s, up to 1989 and the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. FOR organized friendship delegations to Russia and other Communist-led countries.

In 1999, FOR adopted a statement by which it underscored the inter-relationship of war, economic injustice and racism. Recalling the appeal of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for a restructuring of the whole of United States society, a FOR statement emphasized that humanity faced a dire global situation and called on nonviolent activists to propose changes addressing the roots of the problems, helping to dismantle oppressive systems and moving closer to realizing Dr. King's beloved community ideal. Looking at hunger, homelessness, poverty and an ever-growing gap between social and military spending, FOR members committed themselves to economic justice by:

- recognizing and celebrating values that give meaning, such as compassion and service;
- promoting an "Economic Bill of Rights;"
- supporting living wage campaigns that, here in Canada and elsewhere, have sought to raise salaries pay to meet the actual cost of living;
- taxing extremes of individual wealth;
- promoting a national dialogue on economic democracy;
- heightening awareness of corporate welfare;
- supporting labor in its efforts to organize;
- empowering people of color and other marginalized groups;
- defending immigrants from scapegoating by nativists and racists;
- advocating for youth empowerment
- supporting Peace Jam, a mid-South youth group that met often in Memphis, Tennessee in conjunction with an annual Gandhi-King conference;
- working to reduce imprisonment rates in the US; and, also in the US, to oppose the death penalty;

- supporting cancellation or reduction of crushing international debt that prevented countries from meeting basic human needs.<sup>1</sup>

In his essay *Pacifism in the Atomic Age*, A.J. Muste penned words that still resonate today:

At this crucial moment in human history, in the presence of responsibility [to lessen the gulf between the Ideal and Real] ... we pray for power to take upon ourselves the guilt of human action, though still as ready to confess the imperfection of what can and must be built, the wish and power to act, forgive and bless ... to accomplish the work of God in whose will is peace in the stricken, war-ravished world.<sup>2</sup>

What of Canada? Before World War II, FOR chapters were active in southern Ontario, Saskatoon, Vancouver, Montreal and possibly elsewhere. During the war, a vigorous group of ministers, especially in the United Church of Canada, published a statement under the title “A Witness against War.” This expressed their aversion to all wars and commitment to pacifism. Andrew Brink, a McMaster professor and member of Hamilton Monthly Meeting, was its last chairperson.

Among struggles that the Canadian organization faced was whether or not to expand its vision beyond its Christian origins. Sadly, when the Canadian FOR took what now seems to have been an enlightened position, that FOR was not “Christian,” IFOR rejected the Canadian chapter and remained much longer a Christian group. In 1976, Canadian FOR joined Project Ploughshares in Waterloo.

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<sup>1</sup> *Toward the Beloved Community*. The Fellowship of Reconciliation’s Statement on Racial and Economic Justice (pamphlet, Nyack, 1999); for the entire text of the quote, from Dr. King’s last address as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, “Where Do We Go from Here?” in *A Testament of Hope*, 245-52 and *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston, 1967).

<sup>2</sup> A. J. Muste, *Not By Might. Christianity: The Way to Human Decency* (New York, 1947) 219.

Early in the emerging environmental movement, FOR members revised its statement of purpose to address the ecological crisis. Working to demilitarize life and attempting to convince political leaders to use peaceful methods, FOR members have continued to work to prevent war and to use diverse strategies to arouse public attention to economic, ecological and social justice issues. They have adopted nonviolent strategies to restrain those using military power, police, conscription or war to enforce inequality, racism and gender inequality.

There are vigorous debates today about the relationship between so-called principled or spiritual nonviolent activism in the style of Gandhi and Dr. King, and so-called strategic nonviolent action of peace scholars, community organizers and such movements as Occupy Wall Street and the World Social Forum.

From the start of my involvement in FOR as a university student, I have followed the lead of Dr. King. Speaking on April 4, 1967 at Riverside Church in New York City, he urged, “I would encourage all ministers of draft age to give up their ministerial exemptions and seek status as conscientious objectors.” In response, I signed the FOR statement of purpose, gave up my student deferment, sought re-classification with the Selective Service System as a conscientious objector and did alternative service.

In his speech, Dr. King challenged United States citizens, and people everywhere to fulfill his dream of a beloved community and to work to eliminate what he characterized as the “giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism.” This was, in effect, the agenda of the FOR, to work constructively for peace and reconciliation, to practice the principle of love and the inviolable law of personal relationships by transforming human life and not to spend energy on protests.

At this time of tragic conflicts in Ukraine/Russia, Israel/Palestine, Sudan and elsewhere, FOR and IFOR chapters are active in over forty countries. Members work on issues specific to their own contexts consistent with a deep spirituality. In my experience with active chapters in the US and Britain, I have found members balance both the journey inward of prayer and worship, and the

journey outward through principled activism. A small organization, FOR has helped create a little space for peaceful social change grounded in a deep spirituality. In words of the Dalai Lama, “inner disarmament and external disarmament must go together. Peace is not just absence of violence. Genuine peace must start in every individual heart.”<sup>3</sup>



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<sup>3</sup> Quoted in the February/March entry, *Housmans Peace Diary*, 2024.

# Quakers Then and Now

*by Dick Preston*

In the mid 1600s, the fate of our souls was a very immediate and preoccupying issue. It was believed that the “end of times” was immanent, and we would soon be answering before God for the conduct of our daily lives.

In the 2000s, we find it a bit amusing to read Quaker Charles Bayly’s letter to King Charles II, sent from his prison cell as a public document, or broadsheet. He is saying, for any to hear who will,

Take heed, O King, for the whirlwind of the Lord is coming, and you shall naked face your Maker and answer for the excesses of your court...

The Quaker was dead serious, and in prison for failing to swear allegiance to the king, or to swear at all, having his principle of absolute honesty in all dealings as a part of his preparation for answering to God for his life’s conduct.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we set up committees, and small groups of us dedicated their lives to service. And through these dedicated few, who let their lives speak, we made a difference in the world. How do 21<sup>st</sup> century Quakers stand, in comparison? We uphold early Friends’ principle of honesty. But in our life’s conduct, overall, we look a bit feeble. We have continued to witness, occasionally to the point of arrest and incarceration.

But in comparison with the principled actions of the majority of Friends of Bayly’s generation, were mostly farmers; more often we are comfortably middle class professionals. We maintain Quaker principles, but risk little of our security or fortune.

The end of times has yet to arrive, and so we could relax a little. Or perhaps not. The future is not at all certain; we may yet wind up as radioactive cinders or as unable to survive in the distorted climate we are creating. The source of our contemporary End of Times is impersonal. And the issue seems less a matter of our individual souls and more a matter of humanity as a whole.

And so, What can’st thou say? Or do?

# A Story of the Sower

(based on Mark 4:1-9)

by Sheldon Clark

## “Listen!”

The cold late January Galilean dawn beckoned.  
Jude’s head scarf offered necessary warmth.  
His calloused fingers readied wheat grain to broadcast measured portions  
from his shoulder sling through his funnelled fingers.

## “Watch!”

The tiny field had been prepared after the late rains with ox and plough.  
On this New Year’s Day, Jude cast the seeds in repetitive arcs  
as he walked along the furrows. Wind drifts helped disperse the grain,  
falling where it may through the humid air.

## “Smell!”

The pungent temptation of ploughed earth and scattered seeds  
arose from the hard-packed borders, the exposed limestone rocks,  
the thorny brushes, and most assuredly from the readied field.  
A multitude of Tiberian sparrows celebrated instinctively.

## “Feel!”

Jude felt the weight of obligation to feed his family,  
have enough left over to share, and bask in the joy of effort.  
He felt light-hearted performing this invigorating work  
knowing in several months the fruit of his labour would be rewarded.

## “Taste!”

The rising sun warmed the well-trodden paths.  
Jude, imagined freshly baked loaves, as he methodically  
crisscrossed the fertile field of *being and becoming*  
in anticipation of a bountiful harvest.  
“Thanks be to God.”

# About this Newsletter / Submission Guidelines

This Newsletter is a monthly publication of news and announcements relevant to Hamilton Quakers.

It is also a venue for members and attenders to share creative works or articles they have written on subjects that may be of interest to our Quaker community. As a general guideline we are looking for submissions that are inspirational and related to Quaker concerns, as well as announcements and news. Members and Attenders are encouraged to submit works for the newsletter.

Requests for newsletter items are announced after Meeting for Worship and/or via email during the week before Meeting for Worship for Business. They are due by the Friday before Business Meeting. Submission of materials implies permission to publish. Copyright for original material resides with the author.

If the person submitting the article is unknown to the editor or if there are questions as to whether the article will be appropriate for the Quaker newsletter, the editor will consult with the clerk(s) who will together discern what will be included. Written permission to publish must be obtained from the copyright holder if a submission is not the original work of the submitter, unless the works are in the public domain, or are covered under the creative commons license.

Hamilton Meeting reserves the right to edit submissions for length or content in consultation with the authors. Please limit submissions to a maximum of 750 words. When opinion pieces are included a line will be added indicating "Submissions reflect the opinions of their authors, and not necessarily of Hamilton Monthly Meeting".

Submissions should be directed to the current editor, Síân Reid, [daywitch@gmail.com](mailto:daywitch@gmail.com).

*We acknowledge the land upon which Hamilton Friends Meeting House is located as the shared traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg, protected by the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt covenant. This historic peace agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy, the Ojibwe, and allied nations represents a commitment to share and protect the land, water, plants, and animals, with respect. It is the privilege of Hamilton Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) to share in the tradition of stewardship of this land, which has been the environment of human beings in this territory for thousands of years. We honour the original Peoples of this land and express a commitment to and gratitude for the opportunity to work together toward restorative justice and reconciliation.*