

Hamilton Quaker Newsletter

November 2025



Come regularly to meeting for worship, even when you are angry, depressed, tired or spiritually cold. In the silence ask for and accept the prayerful support of others joined with you in worship. Try to find a spiritual wholeness which encompasses suffering as well as thankfulness and joy. Prayer, springing from a deep place in the heart, may bring healing and unity as nothing else can. Let meeting for worship nourish your whole life.

Advices and Queries #10

Upcoming Events and Announcements

On Sunday, November 23, Ministry and Counsel invite everyone to a potluck after Meeting for Worship. Elliot McQuail will lead a presentation and discussion about his travels to different Quaker meetings and Young Canadian Friends. A sign-up sheet for the potluck will be posted closer to November 23rd.

The next meeting of the Reading Group will be on Sunday, November 30 beginning at 7:30 p.m. in our Zoom space. We will be reading the second section from *Richard Wagamese selected: what comes from Spirit*. Please contact Shirla (shirla766@gmail.com) to be added to the participant list.

The next Meeting for Worship for Business will be held in person at the Meeting House on Sunday, December 7 at 12:30 p.m. You can also join us online on our regular Meeting Zoom link.

From my ears to my mind

*by the First Day School,
Beverly Shepard and Ada Bjerling*

Birds talking
Crickets chirping
Wind blowing
Cars roaring
Bee Buzzing
Waterfalls running
Footsteps on gravel
Owl
In my mind, plants growing
In my mind, a cheetah
A train and a plane

Do Quakers Pray?

by Sheldon Clark

When asked, “Do Quakers pray?” I answer, “Yes.” “Do Quakers have prayers in their worship services?” I answer, “No.” Unprogrammed members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) do not follow liturgical practices in their Meetings for Worship, but Friends do offer heartfelt prayer.”

Birthright Friends are a minority in British, Canadian, and American Quaker Meetings for Worship, today. Contemporary visitors find their way to an unprogrammed Quaker Meeting for a variety of personal reasons. Those reasons include seeking a personal religious experience that is inviting without being inauthentic, friendly without being overwhelming. They look for a convenient location and a faith experience quite different from their previous religious experience. Some read or heard about Quakers in a history class, or saw movies such as *High Noon* (1952), and *Friendly Persuasion* (1956). Some know about the Quaker historic peace witness, the social justice work of Friends, and British and American Friends sharing the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947 for humanitarian aid. Modern seekers want to find out more about Quakerism for themselves. “What’s it all about?”

The question is, “How is it that by sitting in silence for an hour can Quakers thrive?” The answer lies in understanding an old story. A person is invited to attend a Quaker Meeting. They settle into the quiet gathering. After several minutes the guest whispers to their friend, “When does the service begin?” The Quaker friend replies, “The service begins after worship, then we go into the world to help others.”

Quakerism may be identified as being a part of the contemplative tradition dating from Christ’s example of praying reverently and quietly, when He broke bread with His Disciples, as at the Passover meal, famously known as the Last Supper, and in His post-Resurrection appearances, such as meeting strangers on the Road to Emmaus.

When Quakerism began in England in the mid-1600s, early Seekers gathered to hear George Fox preach, and ‘to know one another in the things that are Eternal’ in quiet prayerful worship. Their style of worship was in sharp contrast to that of the established liturgical English Church of the time. Quakers were influenced by the Reformation ideal that everyone belonged to ‘the priesthood of all believers’ and the concept that the Bible is not a closed book, rather, it is a historical record of ‘continuing revelation’.

Quakerism in the twenty-first century has survived for 350 years. Quakers fled from seventeenth century persecutions to the new world. They began in the eighteenth century to thrive in re-settlement in Penn’s Holy Experiment. Quakers retreated into nineteenth century isolationism, which Quaker author Howard Brinton called the Age of Quietism. In the twentieth century, Quakers were emancipated from the conventions of their own making, due to societal fracturing and visible human suffering worldwide. Quakers realized that if Quakerism was going to survive, it had to be relevant to the times, but without conceding their testimonies. Quakers dropped their peculiar manner of plain dress and plain speech and strict puritanical rules governing their lives. They became well-known for their adherence to the testimonies of simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and stewardship (S.P.I.C.E.S.) in their personal and public lives.

Quakers knew they had to work with other people of good faith and no faith to help solve the major problems of World War, economic disparity, racial injustice, gender injustice, and issues related to health, education, and welfare. Friends have been outspoken about the systematic exploitation of natural resources, climate change, and the recognition that the globe can no longer support unsustainable expansion.

Unprogrammed Quakers maintain their silent contemplative form of worship, and yet, appropriate singing, recitation of scripture, prayers of thanksgiving, and sincere expressions of concern are offered. This “ministry” is inspired and occasionally inspirational during Meetings for Worship. It is from the corporate worship of the Divine that Friends derive their motivation to be ‘in

the world, but not of the world'. Privately, some Friends follow a practice of contemplative prayer each day.

Prayers, hymns, scripture, and statements of belief are known to people who come to Quakerism from other religions. Quaker worship appeals because it feels fresh and right. Certainly, Friends are not ignorant of other beliefs and practices. Unity among Friends is found in being unafraid of being, non-conformist, inclusive, non-judgmental, and accepting.

I have been inspired by the historical witness of 'the many' who have prayed throughout the ages. I pray because I am led to do so.



Learning to Live (and Love) with Chronic Illness

by Beverly Shepard

It started in the spring of 2019, when I was diagnosed with age-related macular degeneration (AMD). At first that condition was scarcely noticeable, but it wasn't long before I began to feel the effects of the damage to the central part of my retina. AMD can be inherited, and my mother had it; now I do. There is treatment (though not a cure) for the condition, involving periodic injections of a drug into the eyeball, but it isn't permanent, so I have had the treatment every few weeks at first and now every few months. It helps, but my close-up vision is poor, and my distance vision affected enough that I can't drive.

Then came autumn of 2024. Rather suddenly I noticed a distressing worsening of my eyesight: road signs, in particular speed limit signs, were badly distorted, to a degree that bordered on terrifying. And then I began having double vision, a most frightening development.

In October I had an incident of drooping eyelids – short but scary, and then repeated over the next weeks. Through the fall and into the winter the eyesight continued bad, even with the injections. My eye doctor was puzzled. At the same time, I began to develop muscle weakness in my limbs, and I became fatigued more and more easily. Muscle cramps, twitching of muscles in eyelids and hands and elsewhere. Then in late February of 2025 there was a sudden downturn. I found it difficult to swallow, my speech became slurred, and my eyelids were drooping all the time. My doctor told me to go to Emergency, which I did, and I was admitted to hospital (Guelph General).

It took a couple of days and many tests, but I was diagnosed with myasthenia gravis. I was not surprised. I did not know a lot about the disease, but what I knew seemed to fit my symptoms. It's not known why anyone develops M.G. It is not contagious, not heritable, and not curable. However, it is not fatal, and it is treatable. When the doctors at the GGH felt that this was the reason for my symptoms, I was given a drug that treated the symptoms, and I awoke the next morning feeling much, much better. The effectiveness of the drug confirmed the diagnosis.

After a couple of weeks I had an appointment with a neurologist, who started me on a medication that treats the cause of M.G. (failed neuromuscular communication – an autoimmune illness) but can't reverse it, and thus I will need to keep taking it the rest of my life. It is very effective, so that now, months later, I feel close to normal again: I feel like me. I was gradually weaned off the symptom-treating drug, which is no longer necessary.

Of course, any powerful drug has side effects. One is increased risk of bone density loss, so I now take a medication to try to prevent that. Another is increased gastric acidity, so I take something else to counter that. That drug causes a decrease in my sense of taste and smell. The main drug also may cause purpura, which I experience: purplish-red spots on the skin, especially on the forearms. Another side effect I experience is hair loss. So between symptoms and side effects there are differences in my life. The AMD, of course, continues as before – difficult, partially treated, progressive.

So most of the time, most of the day, I feel, as I said before, like myself, just somewhat diminished, not a surprise when one is in one's 80s. But each morning as I reach for that little brown container with my main daily drug in it, my mind says: I'm not well, I never will be well again, I must take this med every day of the rest of my life.

So how do I deal with that, and with the daily and constant fact of chronic illness? First, gratitude. I'm not in pain. I still function pretty much as before. I can walk without pain or assistance, without limping or dragging. I can cook. I can crochet. I can read (with a lot of magnification). I can communicate. I see the faces of those I'm talking with. I can see my surroundings (if a little bit blurred). I live in a beautiful place in a beautiful country. I have family and friends nearby, supportive and loving. I am blessed by modern medicine – the M.G. is at bay. The medication has some side effects I don't much care for, but many of the much more unpleasant effects possible I am not experiencing. My eyesight is a problem but it will never be full blindness. So, yes: Gratitude. Appreciation for all the good things in my life, all the things I can still do. For sunsets, for green grass, for autumn leaves, for chickadees.

Also, persistence. I keep acting like me, as much as possible – sometimes so convincingly that others don't really know how bad my eyes are or how dependent I am on medication! That's all right – I don't mind that bit of misperception. It keeps me feeling more like me, less like a diminished version of myself. I've never thought of doing the laundry as a fun diversion, but I can do it, and I will. Just as I'll make the bed or rake the leaves or take out the compost.

After all, I can still walk in the woods. I can still see the trees.

A Poetry Fragment

by Beverly Shepard

Shadows grow longer through the dwindling days,
reach across the road,
and touch my heart.
So familiar it is,
the texture of this touch,
that it seems this autumn is not merely like
other autumns,
but rather the touch of all autumns is one.
Summer memories stretch back through the years,
winding among the months, crossing other times;
and so spring memories, or winter,
But in this season thoughts leap back
from fall to fall --
sparks across the gaps;
in this season
nostalgia is swift as pain.

(This is one verse from a poem written some years ago. Bev spoke of this feeling in ministry on First Day, October 19, 2025.)

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.

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.