

Worship Guidelines Intro Annual Session 2022 Pacific Yearly Meeting

Dear Friends:

As we prepare to gather in person and on zoom for the annual session of Pacific Yearly Meeting, 2022, with the theme of Beloved Community, Ministry Committee, working with the Racial Justice Subcommittee, is presenting augmented guidelines for worship - and other spaces where two or more are gathered. We know that harm has been done to people of color in our meetings for worship and other spaces. What can we do to stop harm being done amongst us? *Faith and Practice* tells us:

Meeting for Worship is different from solitary prayer. In the embrace of the Meeting, an individual may be more willing to be searched by the Light that exposes weaknesses and shortcomings, and challenges the worshiper to transformation. Together, we can more clearly see Truth; we can better receive and understand continuing revelation.

Our entire gathering is intended to be an experiment in discovering truth together. The Ministry Committee will devote its plenary session on Sunday morning to consideration of our central practice of meeting for worship, to see where we are led and how we might live into new ways of being the beloved community. Do we leave room for prophetic speech? Are we willing to be shaken? What kind of speech do our cultural norms forbid? Are we choking off the voice of Spirit?

Please read the guidelines carefully, as often as you can, between now and our gathering, to help insure that our discernment is deep and Spirit-led. A copy is attached here and also available on the website in both written and audio versions.

We look forward to learning and growing with you.

Gail Eastwood, Clerk, Ministry Committee

Laura Magnani, Presiding Clerk

7/8/2022

Worship Guidelines

Excerpts from Pacific Yearly Meeting (PacYM) Faith & Practice's section on Meeting for Worship

Meeting for Worship is at the core of Quaker practice. There, Friends gather together in expectant silence, waiting upon God.

Friends come to worship to receive and to give, to speak when led, to be silent when that is what obedience requires. Vocal ministry is a vital part of the Meeting for Worship. It is a form of service in which a person (stands to) share a message from God delivered through the individual.

During worship, all share responsibility for vocal ministry. No one is excluded from the possibility of such service just as no one is appointed in advance to preach or pray at a particular Meeting for Worship. When someone does offer vocal ministry, Friends seek to be open, notwithstanding any hesitations or imperfection in the speaker's words.

The quality of each person's participation affects the entire community. Regular and punctual attendance is helpful, as are attentive listening to the vocal ministry of others and the exercise of careful discernment in offering vocal ministry.

As one sits in silence, a message may arise out of the depth of the soul that seems intended not simply for the worshiper, but for the gathering as a whole. Some Friends feel burdened with a sense of omission if a message is not expressed, but once it is faithfully uttered, a sense of inward peace may follow. Experience in Meeting helps to discriminate between private words and those that arise as true leadings of the Spirit that should not be silenced.

Some worshipers called to speak feel an internal or external quaking, deep emotion, tears, an increased heart rate, or other agitation. Some have felt grabbed by the hand of God and held until after delivering the message. One person feels a profound stillness accompanied by a clear voice that is not her own.

Friends hope that all spoken messages during worship are in fact vocal ministry. The responsibility rests on each member of the group to be ready and willing to offer such ministry when called to do so.

Meeting for Worship is different from solitary prayer. In the embrace of the Meeting, an individual may be more willing to be searched by the Light that exposes weaknesses and shortcomings, and challenges the worshiper to transformation. Together, we can more clearly see Truth; we can better receive and understand continuing revelation.

Guidelines for Meeting for Worship (and other PacYM Meeting spaces where two or more are gathered):¹

As Friends, we believe that Spirit calls us to love one another and to help "one another up with a tender hand". The spirit we seek is inclusive, not divisive. If we are divided, we are in a process that has not yet come to its spiritually inclusive conclusion. The unity we seek is a radical inclusivity that embraces all of us.

We recognize that none of us has the whole Truth at any given time, only part of it at best. We understand that ***together we can more clearly see Truth and its continuing revelation***. This is our vision of the Beloved Community, and we will get there if we don't let go of each other's hands. If we remain open and are ***willing to be searched by the Light***, we will discover our disorderly walking and learn how our assimilation into the dominant society affects our ministry, including in Meeting for Worship.

¹ Words in ***Bold*** and ***Italic*** are quoted from PacYM's Faith and Practice

Worship Guidelines

In Quaker worship, we center on the Spirit, trusting it to wake us up by lifting the veil to our blindspots and behaviors that are out of integrity with Truth, so that Truth can be revealed. However, we need to acknowledge that ministries delivered during Meeting for Worship are not immune from inflicting harm on those present, even as we strive to be faithful vessels of God's messages. Therefore, to deepen our worship and create an environment conducive to becoming a Beloved Community, we propose that Friends use these guidelines during the 2022 Pacific Yearly Meetings' Annual Session:

1. We treat all our meeting spaces as places of worship, where we are led by the Spirit to come together as a Beloved Community. We gather **to receive and to give, to speak when led, to be silent when that is what obedience requires.**
2. When we feel led to speak, we hold the message close to our heart and **discern** whether we have a **true leading of the Spirit** by asking these questions:
 - a. Did this message **arise out of the depth of the soul?**
 - b. What am I feeling in my body? Am I feeling a fight, flight, freeze or appease response? **Do I feel grabbed by the hand of God and held? Do I feel a profound stillness accompanied by a clear voice that is not my own? Do I feel burdened with a sense of omission when this message is not expressed?**
 - c. **Is this message intended not simply for me, but for the gathering as a whole?**
 - d. The ways of Truth may reveal to us our attachments to our own ideas, inspirations and leadings that keep us from the emergent Truth. Am I open to learning from our Gathered discernment of Truth?
 - e. Have I considered the language that I would use to express the meaning of my message? Are there words or phrases in my head that come from dominant culture norms that I have internalized? Examples of cultural dominance include: being white in a racist culture, being strong and healthy in an able-body culture, being male in a sexist culture, being heterosexual in a homophobic culture, being young in an agist culture, being of settler ancestry in a colonising culture, and being the species with dominion over the earth.
 - f. Each one of us has implicit biases and blind spots accumulated from our own lived experiences and assimilation into the dominant society. So we ask ourselves: will hearing the words that I intend to use in sharing my message bring harm to someone who is oppressed by the dominant culture?
3. Even after we have done this careful discernment, we know our words coming from the implicit biases that we have internalized from the dominant culture may still cause harm. For this reason, we seek the guidance of "ouch" and "whoa" spoken in love by anyone in our gathered community to help lift the veil and heighten our awareness of a greater Truth. We are willing to risk the discomfort of having our blind spots revealed in public both for our own edification and to understand what the Spirit is asking of us at this moment as we seek to learn and grow together as we practice the radical inclusion of the Beloved Community.
4. **When we hear vocal ministry, we seek to be open**, to listen to Truth revealed. If we believe that a spoken message has delivered harm from cultural dominance, internalized assimilation, and/or implicit biases, then we speak up, with love, in order to let Truth be revealed. Through "ouch" and "whoa", we are not creating shame, we are calling each other in with loving kindness.
5. When we hear a vocal ministry alerting us of harm being done, we treat it as any other vocal ministry, i.e, it is **a message from God delivered through the individual**. We receive it with an open heart and with gratitude, seeking to follow the Spirit's emergent agenda, to understand what just happened.

We call on Friends to embrace these guidelines for ministry that **challenge us to transformation**, so that the emergent Truth may be revealed.