



# FORWARD IN FAITHFULNESS

*Creative conversations, rooted in love.*

*This transcript is part of the Listening Project, a series of qualitative interviews that focus on healthy spiritual communities. What makes a strong, welcoming faith community? How are people finding spiritual nourishment in the Quaker world? We have no scripted questions for a listening session; however, a variety of themes might show up.*

*The Listening Project is an ongoing endeavor by J.T. Dorr-Bremme and Johanna Jackson. We rely entirely on grants and personal donations to fund this work. To learn more, or to support creative conversations like this one, visit [forwardinfaithfulness.org](http://forwardinfaithfulness.org)*

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## **Kaitlyn Pawlukojc**

Westbury Quaker Meeting  
New York Yearly Meeting

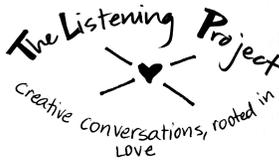
Age 35

Pronouns: she



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**Tags:** racial justice, sexism, immigration, spiritual nourishment, calls to ministry, healing, yoga, intergenerational friendship, inclusion, sharing gifts, willingness, service learning, connection, warmth, caring conflict resolution, conflict avoidance, forgiveness, healthy communities, resistance, mistakes, culture shift, allyhood, persistence, determination, vibrance, sluggishness, renewal, joy.



We met with **Kaitlyn Pawlukojc** in December 2020. It was an incredible winter day, with a snowstorm spanning the mid-Atlantic. In our conversation, we began and ended with laughter. You may be able to tell from Kaitlyn's smile in the photo below just how easy it would be to laugh with her.

Kaitlyn is a yoga teacher, social work student, and a heartfelt seeker. She spoke highly of her local meeting. In fact, she offered such hopeful stories of inclusion throughout the conversation, that the word I used most frequently was simply: "wow!"

JT, Kaitlyn, and I explored the kind of culture we seek – one that allows for "curiosity, growth, and learning." We talk about the resilience of people who show up to her local meeting, diligently and joyfully bringing their whole selves with them. We marveled at a man who distrusted germs like a fiend, but showed up to every single potluck. Enjoy!

- Johanna Jackso

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[We begin with JT describing some of the project we had begun, which was just beginning to take shape.]

JT:

We've been talking to people who, more or less, identify themselves as Quaker and manifest that in different ways. They may find Spirit elsewhere, outside of the Quaker world. And then if there is a relationship to community, or structures, in the Quaker world, it would be some of that.

We don't know exactly where this is going. Right now we are recording the conversations for our reference I think we're just in a learning stage. Learning, actually, by doing what it is that we are doing.

Johanna:

Yeah. Whatever the 'it' is!

Also, we are beginning to learn some of the questions we're chasing. We might ask you some questions that we've asked other people. But it's mostly unscripted. Sometimes JT or I will pray or elder or hold space, and the other will be with their eyes open. Sometimes all three of us will fall into worship – it's like worship-sharing.

For me these listening sessions have been a time for connecting to people when my world's kind of boxed in. I get to meet someone new and reach outside the box. So that's been good for me.



[We move to opening worship, and remain there for awhile.]

JT:

I have a question. Would you tell us about a time when you felt Spirit powerfully present in your life?

[pause]

Kaitlyn:

Hmm. Well, the one that comes to mind –and I was pausing to think, to see if another one would sort of bubble up – but it was really strong, and I think actually I'm glad to be revisiting that experience. So I was in the process for Holy Orders in the Episcopal Church. And there were many steps in that process to become ordained. I was just in the beginning of them, essentially. And I'd passed three out of the four initial steps, and the fourth step I didn't 'pass.' And somebody called and gave me the news – a man, a priest, called and gave me the news – I was about to get on a plane and travel to the Navajo Land for service with a bunch of Episcopal youth. So I was about to get on the plane, and I received this really awful, awful news.

And I felt my. . . my essence, I guess, a piece of my essence, I don't know if it was my spirit or my sense of Self, but certainly something deep in there shattered into a million pieces. And yet beneath that sort of crisis, internally, there was – I don't know, the way I envisioned it was like hands, holding me. I felt like I was also being cradled through that shock of that separating.

I mean at the time, looking back, how lovely to have been in community for that week. Right? I mean, we got on a plane and flew to a different part of the country, and it was a group of people who, most of us knew each other in some capacity, right, but a lot of times, in some youth trips, you really get to know people on those adventures, as they were, as the youth sort of develop a sense of themselves, separate from their family, and so it was hard. I mean, it was really a tough week, but it was really quite a gift, to continue to be of service throughout that – both and, right, this total disjuncture, of who I was and where I thought I was going, and yet having that experience and being so physically and mentally and emotionally and spiritually *held* specifically along the plane ride, and then living in community for a week. I mean, I was sleeping on the living room floor, right, because we were in a big house together, and that was the only extra place to sleep, and so, you know, living with other people's rhythms for a week.

Yeah. So. I know – I'm sure there have been moments since then, but that's, one of the biggest, that's one of the most profound experiences I've had. . . and it's still hard to know exactly what it means, right? Like, why did that happen then? What does it mean now? So I'm grateful for the reminder to sort of continue to sit with that, these many years later.



Johanna:

Mmm. That's a very sweet story.

[The group moves back to worship]

Johanna:

How long did the sense of the Presence and the hands last, or stay with you?

Kaitlyn:

In my memory, it was the plane ride from New York to New Mexico. We flew into Albuquerque. Because it was a quiet time, right, planes are liminal spaces, in a way, where you're flying up above the world, you're out of your normal routine. And so it's physically, I think, a liminal space.

And once we hit the ground, there were a lot of logistics, right. Like, go and get the car rental, you know, and the kids in this car, and the kids in that car, like, did everyone get their luggage. And then the trip just happened. I was probably held the whole time in different ways, right, but I remember physically feeling a sense of fullness as well, on the plane ride, despite the shattering. There was this sense that I had just split myself open, and didn't know how I was going to put the pieces back together. And yet, I was *full*—

Johanna:

Wow!—

Kaitlyn:

— I wasn't *whole*, inside, but I was full.

Johanna:

That's cool. That's really neat.

[We pause again and wait for the next question.]

JT:

Well, how did you come to be with the Quakers? You mentioned being Episcopalian.

Kaitlyn:

Sure. So, I didn't grow up Episcopalian. But I went to this particular church. I have felt a call to ministry since I was in high school, though, so over twenty years ago, I guess, it first started. I attended this Episcopal church — they were doing a book group, starting amidst all of this, I think it was right before my taking these steps for acceptance into ordination, or the process of it, and they were reading a book by Parker Palmer, called *Hidden Wholeness*. And I just was really struck by his sense of the soul, and silence, and stillness. And the underbelly



of the Episcopal system that I was experiencing, after this profound rejection. And that's what it was. I was rejected from pursuing Holy Orders in the Episcopal Church – indefinitely, in this diocese. They said I would have to move to a different diocese; I couldn't reapply. When I asked for feedback, there wasn't a lot of it, but there just was this sense that I didn't have what it took.

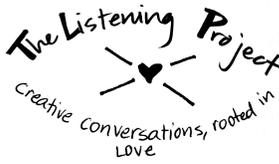
But as I learned more, very few women in Long Island have been ordained in the Episcopal church, even though the Episcopal church was one of the few churches nationwide that ordains – that was the first to ordain women – our diocese just *doesn't*, for whatever reason. That was a piece of it. And there were some sort of political machinations that were happening behind the scenes with the particular church I was involved in, and their relationship with the diocese. Again, not a church I grew up in. I had been part of it for two or three years as an adult, and didn't quite understand the dynamics of what was happening. So, whether it's just me making peace with it or whether it's the reality – and I guess both can be true – it wasn't just about me. It wasn't just about the skills that I did or didn't have. There were other factors.

But it all just felt really ugly. There wasn't – my spiritual director at the time was a woman I grew up with from the Lutheran church that I'd been part of since my childhood, and she helps people on that path of ordination for the Lutheran church. And she said, 'We've never just *rejected* somebody. We've always asked them to think about something and come back to us, or do a service project, or – you know, we mentor them *through* that, we hold space for that.' And I literally got a letter from someone in the Episcopal diocese – I don't know who it was. A community service counsel, I don't know – that said like, 'Just keep doing what you are doing. You're doing great work.' And at that point I was volunteering, fifteen hours a week, at my church. And I was like, well, I can't just keep volunteering my time endlessly! And you've told me I'm not cut out for this. So, like, why would I keep doing what I'm doing?

Johanna:  
Huh!

Kaitlyn:  
The priest at my church, who really supported me at the time, left within a year – he moved to Baltimore. There was an assistant priest that was only meant to be there for three years, and his term ended, also, shortly thereafter. And so the church leadership just disbanded, essentially. So all of this to be said – I ended up in the Quaker context, because I was sick to my *stomach* of hierarchy, of hypocrisy, of people determining who had the gift and who didn't have the gift of ministry.

I met many other men in the Episcopal church, in the process, or post the process, who were ordained as priest, who – were not nice people, who I would go to for counsel and they would sit on their *phone*. Right? I mean, just not present *people*.



Johanna:  
Oh my gosh!

Kaitlyn:

Yes. My husband currently works for the same church that all of this happened in, and there's been movement of leadership in the years since I've left, and again it's just not grounded, whole, people of service that have been coming through the priesthood. And so, yeah, I just couldn't – it makes my skin crawl. And my heart weep. And so, for me I needed to be in unprogrammed spaces and non-hierarchical spaces, but I also really needed the silence. I mean, I think, originally that's what drew me to Quaker meetings: I just needed to sit still. Right? I mean, here I was in a billion pieces. I didn't feel like singing, I didn't feel like praying, I just couldn't go through the motions. And sitting in silence, and feeling the history of space around me in a Quaker Meeting, and the people present there – just the smell, and – it just felt holy, in a way that church wasn't anymore. So. A long-winded answer, but.

Johanna:  
The long answers are always better! Wow. That's neat.

[pause]

Johanna:  
That was some time ago. What keeps you Quaker now?

Kaitlyn:

I feel nourished by the silence. It just suits me better, in the scheme of how I encounter the Spirit.

And some of the people I've met out here in Westbury<sup>1</sup> are just lovely. They feel very grounded, and really committed to living their faith, their beliefs, in a way. . . like, I mean – the church I was at, I really just stumbled into it, for various reasons. But – they were literally the 1%, as far as socio-economic status. They belonged to multiple yacht clubs or country clubs, or golf clubs, right, that cost to, I don't know, \$40,000 a year just to *belong* to. And they belonged to multiple. They had summer homes on islands. Anywhere – whatever island you wanted to name!

Johanna:  
[laughter]

Kaitlyn:

Right, they just weren't my people, right? I mean the Episcopal church is much more diverse than that. But, coming to meet the folks at the Quaker meeting – I mean, I don't really know

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<sup>1</sup> Westbury Friends Meeting is a Quaker community in Westbury, New York. It is part of New York Yearly Meeting.



their socio-economic status, per se, but you know, they dress simply, they bring lentil soup to potluck, they [laughter] – they volunteer!

I don't know, there's just something very *different* about them, and that felt important as well. I felt that I could be more 'me.'

And then I would say the last two years I've gotten more involved with AFSC,<sup>2</sup> and certainly with the larger young adult community in New York Yearly Meeting<sup>3</sup>. . . So, continuing to learn and grow and meet people, like you were saying at the beginning. And this pandemic actually has been a great opportunity to *attend* things that I couldn't before. A lot of New York Yearly Meeting things happen upstate, and I live on Long Island. To get anywhere is a minimum of two hours just to get past the city–

Johanna:  
Wow.

Kaitlyn:  
–And then it's another two, or four, or six hours after that. And so, there would be weekend things, and I just – I can't. I can't drive six hours, Friday night, and come back Sunday afternoon to be with Quaker right now. So. The pandemic has opened up opportunities to just sit on zoom with people, and get to meet Quakers from across the state. And – certainly you guys are now in a different state, so – meeting people even in the general region! So, that has been such a gift. To continue to find people who are grounded. Yeah. That I just don't think I was finding previously. So. It is the community that keeps me, in addition to the need for silence.

[Here we pause for worship]

Johanna:  
You mentioned that you felt a call to ministry since you were in high school. Now that you are not an Episcopal priest, how are you living out that call?

Whoah, the snow is coming out behind you, isn't it!

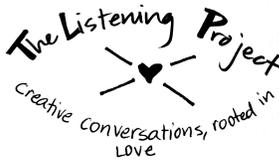
Kaitlyn:  
I know, I know!

Johanna:  
Whoah, same for here!

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<sup>2</sup> AFSC is the American Friends Service Committee that "promotes lasting peace with justice." It was founded in 1917.

<sup>3</sup> New York Yearly Meeting (NYYM) is a Quaker body that provides programs inside of New York state. It is made up of 64 local meetings, and defines itself as a community, an organization, as well as a set of gatherings



Kaitlyn:

[laughing hard] There's a lot of it!

Hmm. So I would say I'm still seeking. I was drawn to the process of yoga, and so I've been teaching also for the last four or five years. And it's a gift that I have that I give often.<sup>4</sup> So sometimes it's wearisome to be teaching, but mostly I feel filled by it. There are times most clearly when it feels like the Spirit is moving through me. I must say it's been a little bit less, recently. I wasn't teaching at the beginning of the pandemic, and I was grateful to have that time to not be teaching. And I'm teaching again now, but there's a lot more logistics. Like, having to wear a mask – some people are on zoom, some are in a room, and there's just a lot more to manage. So I don't always feel like I quite get in the flow.

But when I was in the flow, right, people would come up to me afterwards and say, 'Oh my gosh, you said this amazing thing and it just hit me – it just touched my heart,' and I have no recollection of saying it. Like none. And that just felt amazing. Like there was a power moving through me, sharing what people needed to hear.

So that's a piece of it. You know, that's a bit shifting, now, and I am curious what that might look like moving forward. . .

I am attending a graduate school for social work, and that feels like *part* of my path, and I'm – you know, I've come to it with an intent to serve. And I wonder what that will look like. Right now it feels very separate from my life of faith. It's a lot of homework, and exams, and papers, and it's very analytical. And even the internship I have – a lot of the work is done over the phone, so I'm not even really seeing people. So I'm finding that – I think I *am* being of service, but sometimes it's really hard to connect. So I know it will be – it will be a big piece of my ministry, of what it means to be in the world, and create peace. But it isn't, it isn't quite there yet. It's a little. . . disjunctured [laughter], so we'll see.

Johanna:

[laughter] Yeah. Yeah.

So I don't know what's giving me this sense, but I feel that it would be good for me or JT to say something about either what we're hearing. . . oh, I don't know what it is. Like what we've been hearing from others, that relates to what you said.

[pause]

JT:

I think you're right. Because in my mind I had ideas about silence and community. And ministry, and gifts. And I think the question is around, how does Quaker community support your ministry or the faithfulness that allows you to continue trying to give of your gifts?

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4 Kaitlyn teaches at Oyster Bay Yoga near Long Island Sound.



Kaitlyn:

I have felt invited. Invited into things, invited to share. Never having previously attended yearly meeting, Marissa Badgley, the Young Adult Field Secretary for New York, connected me with Callie Janoff, who is a coordinator with the aging and the elderly in the Quaker community.<sup>5</sup> Callie and I created a workshop for yearly meeting. It was based on an 'On Being podcast' with Krista Tippett, about a man who's a young adult author, speaking about the need to cultivate young people. Specifically, I recall their fortitude. So our workshop was about creating space for new Quakers, and experienced Quakers, to share how they experience Quaker spaces, and what could be more inclusive – what already *is* inclusive, and what could be more inclusive.<sup>6</sup>

And it was beautiful. I mean, it was lovely to connect with Callie; we had a couple of phone calls, and a zoom meeting or two. Then we met during yearly meeting, to hold this space – this time slot we were given, and to facilitate together. To invite people to share, to reflect and learn from one another.

It was such a gift – it was such a gift. Yeah. I felt like I made a good friend – little F and big F Friend – and got a chance to be in the larger community.

The Quaker Meeting where I'm attending supports a school, too. So a couple of years back I asked if I could teach yoga with the kids. And I did that for awhile, which was lovely. And then two summers ago I did summer camp with them, too.

Johanna:  
Wow!

Kaitlyn:

I had the kindergartners for the whole summer. This summer, there wasn't really camp that much because of the pandemic, so I did some gardening with the kids instead. I just came two days a week and offered food. And so having – no one at the school, none of the staff are Quaker, and the children aren't Quaker. But having that opportunity to have that buy-in, because I attend Quaker Meeting, I have these gifts to offer like yoga, or childcare, or farming – gardening, really – how can I be useful to you at this school? And so that's been a really lovely gift and connection.

Yeah. And our Quaker community also does these once-a-month meetings called Dialogue Across Differences, where we discuss – I think originally we discussed controversial issues, although I wasn't able to make the original meetings. Lately we've been discussing just how

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5 Callie Janoff is the Director of the Aging Resources Consultation and Help (ARCH) program at New York Yearly Meeting. For more info, visit [www.nyym.org/content/arch](http://www.nyym.org/content/arch).

6 Their workshop was called "Young, Old, and In-Between: Companionship Toward Fortitude." <https://nyym.org/interest-groups>



to get along with people who voted differently from you, per se, with the contentiousness of this year. And again, I've – you know, I've listened to a podcast, and just shared it with the leaders of the group a couple of months ago. I thought oh, this might be an interesting way to structure the conversation, rather than red and blue. It was a conversation around 'tight and loose' value systems and adherences.

And they were like, 'Great! You can lead it!' And I was like, Oh. Okay! [laughter] I was just passing this on to you! And so, there have been lovely invitations to participate. . . that are delightful.

I had gone on pilgrimage last November to the borderlands of El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, to witness what was happening with the recent changes in our immigration system. Specifically, the 'Remain in Mexico' program. So when I came back, the Quaker community I'm part of created a potluck for me to present what I saw, what did!

Johanna:  
Oh, neat!

Kaitlyn:  
And people got to ask questions. So again there have been a lot of invitations to participate and share. Again, back to sort of the first question, there's not – well I'm sure there's a hierarchy in some way, in terms of like yearly meeting, where there's groups and leaders and clerks and all that, but – it's loose. Like, for somebody who considers herself a new Quaker, there have have just been all of these lovely opportunities to continue engaging and growing.

Johanna:  
Sweet! [laughter] That's so refreshing to hear! I often vent to people my age about different experiences I've had that have *not* been inviting or inclusive. And, yeah. So I'm hearing you say when you stepped forward with "this much" of an offering [small space between hands], they said, how about you bring *this*? [space between hands widens] And when you took a brave step of witnessing, the community pulled together for their collective witness. Like, they wanted to be part of that experience. And it sounds like they didn't leave it to you to wrangle them, but they gathered and let you share.

Kaitlyn:  
Yeah. They did.

Johanna:  
Wow. There's that's different than my experience! [laughter] Wow.

What's your Quaker Meeting like? You described examples of it already, but. . .



Kaitlyn:  
In terms of. . . ?

Johanna:  
I don't know, let's see.

[worship and pause]

Johanna:  
What do you like about your Meeting, and is there anything you would change?

[We move to quiet worship. JT continues holding space.]

Kaitlyn:  
I like that there's a sense of caring, in my meeting. You know, it's not just one person who cares. When we were gathering, pre-pandemic, we would gather after for hospitality, and some people cared by giving hugs. Some people cared by bringing food that was gluten-free and dairy free and meat free! You know, just being considerate. And some people cared by really asking *how* I was doing, or *what* I was doing. Not just, you know, 'Isn't this hummus really good?' They asked deeper questions. People just really *cared*.

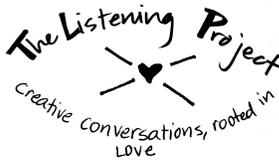
And occasionally – I guess mostly, at the beginning of the pandemic, people would call, and leave a message if they didn't get me. And they're interested in learning about each other, and the world, and sharing the things they're doing and inviting people into them, and using their gifts. There's one woman who loves to sing, so she volunteers to come two mornings early, before Meeting, to sing for an hour with people who come. There's caring; people are supported; people are invited to use their gifts or offer their gifts. The other question was what would change?

Johanna:  
If anything.

Kaitlyn:  
[smiling] If anything. . . I feel like I need – and this is only in terms of business meeting, and I haven't gone very often – but sometimes I feel like I need a primer to the strong personalities present.

Johanna:  
[laughter] Yes.

Kaitlyn:  
Right? And that's probably not an appropriate thing to pass out – [laughter from JT and Johanna] – but there was a business meeting that I was sitting in, and I added information



because I was working at the school at the time, and one person at the meeting just got very – just spoke very strongly. And I wasn't sure if I was being reprimanded for – not speaking out of *turn*, per se, but kind of speaking out of turn. So I didn't really touch it. But people came up to me afterwards and were like, 'You know that wasn't really about you. That was about this one thing, and that other thing, and this history.' And I was like 'Oh, okay. Okay.'

It was nice that they came up afterwards and explained a little of it. Yeah. I think that – well, it's just the – strong personalities that. . . are caring. Right? They really care, this particular person really cares about tradition, and doing things by the book, and is very adherent to that.

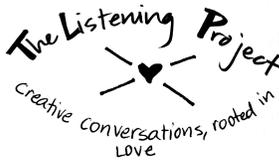
Johanna:  
Wow.

Kaitlyn:  
So there's space for that, and it can also get in the way. But yeah. So knowing some of that before putting myself out there. I mean it hasn't stopped me, but. . . yeah. It's been interesting. Like I kind of wish I knew that before I said something, but, maybe I wouldn't have said anything then, so maybe it's better I didn't know!

Johanna:  
Hmm. That's something that hierarchy can shield us from. If we bring an idea first to someone in a hierarchy, they can say, 'Oh, let's do it this way,' and that spares us from learning by error. But, I guess it's a small price to pay, for having the freedom to act and speak and move.

Kaitlyn:  
But sometimes it's just nice to *know* where folks are coming from, like who your audience is. Like I wasn't proposing anything in this business meeting– I think I was reporting something, again, to do with the school. But there used to be a *process* for that, and a particular person, and that person didn't *do* it well in the past, and so all this history was coming up that I didn't know about, and it was agitating people. So, again. Not that I needed to know it before I shared my piece, but, for the health of a meeting, if people are still holding on to a situation that happened, let's say, over five years ago. . . Where does the healing come in? Where does the forgiveness come in? Yeah. How do they process it? Obviously, people get stuck. You can't make everybody process everything at the same rate. Maybe it was especially trying for this one person. But, yeah. Maybe the solution is having more open dialogue. I don't know. But if people don't want to heal – if they're willing to hold that grudge, then what? And so it's like, I don't know what I would be *changing*, per se, but there are some very strong personalities in my meeting, that either I rub up against, or I've heard that other people have rubbed up against.

You know? So how do we create a small community that's healthy, that listens to



everybody's voices? To not have that hierarchy, to not have people *funneled* places, but if we're wanting to create something, it would be good to know like, this is the opposition. And how do I speak in a way, or offer something in a way, that the opposition can hear it, or also feel heard? Those are times when it's nice to know the audience

Johanna: Yeah.

Kaitlyn: Not to *avoid* it, but to step into it.

Johanna: Yup. I think that's reminding me of something that's happening in my meeting. A couple of months ago, in business meeting, I spoke, and what I said really ruffled some people's feathers in a way that was – it was difficult, for all of us. I didn't know that naming this truth would mean disagreeing with people I loved. The context was a little different, because in my meeting I've been part of the community for nine years. So I already know where the rough edges are, generally. Or I know which people I tend to disagree with and might need to look a little more for their strengths.

Sometimes I'm afraid to speak in business meeting, though, because I don't like the feeling of encountering resistance where I didn't expect it to be. I think that's what it is. I have found that, as a result, I tend to create my own buffer by running an idea by several people, before I share it at business meeting. And that's my choice. I don't have to do it, but it protects me a bit more from the surprise-resistance feeling.

But I do think that there are other options that I haven't even looked at. Like, one is just having a thicker skin! [laughter] But. . . the more gentleness we have, populated throughout the community, the more people can kind of step into that gentleness when we get into conflict, or resistance, or opposition. Somehow, I really think that benefits new people more than anyone else – because we don't know where the historical bumps are. And, I find it *really* uncomfortable to run into them. It's a fact of life, but it's uncomfortable. And then it's compiled with my other experiences as a young person. I still think of myself as a new person at the meeting, because I don't know the rules of how to do things. Or I frequently make a misstep, and then people say, 'Oh, you *really* should've done it *this* way!' Or, 'The right word to use is *this*.' Or maybe they will tell me, 'You should've CC-d this person or gone to this committee with this idea first.' Yeah. JT's shaking his head, because we've talked about this a lot. We've each felt frustrated with the blockages we've found! Maybe you want to say something, JT.

JT:

I wanted to say, I'm shaking my head because, yes. It's not because I – it's because that's all too common.

Johanna:

Yeah. [pause] Sure, I've got a little *fire* in me about that pattern! Even hearing from you,



Kaitlyn, that your meeting has supported you in all these ways, I still see that cultural pattern falling in. I mean, they have supported your voice, and invited you in, and brought you into the middle. They have lifted up your experience for others to hear. I *do* hear that, and then the piece I'm bringing to the conversation is that my meeting hasn't always done that. And what you're describing about business meeting is happening to a lot of people. An I have some strong feelings about that.

JT:

Just yesterday, I was talking to a Friend who talked about conflict avoidance in the Quaker world. And as you were speaking, I heard some more of that. Now she had her own opinion about the roots of that avoidance, at least in her particular case, but I've also had experiences like both of you have described. I'm trying to phrase the question, frame it around the idea – the. . . well . . .

[The group moves into worship.]

JT:

It seems that these unresolved conflicts hurt us all. Those involved with them, certainly. But there are ripple effects out into the business of the meeting and into the community of the meeting. Even for those people who've walked through the door for the first time, they may still encounter it.

At the same time, I think Johanna is right in saying that gentleness or a sort of kind-heartedness in one's approach to people can create a *culture* in which it's easier to approach and, perhaps, to resolve, a conflict.

Johanna:

Mmm.

JT:

Kaitlyn, you've described your meeting as supportive of you in your endeavors. How do you see them supporting each other in growing, too? Or, do you see it?

Kaitlyn:

Hmm. My initial sense is that I don't see it. And yet, I'm not inside everybody's various relationships, so maybe there are pairs of people or groups of people that feel supported by one another in terms of growth. I wonder if this is just something that happens when we become adults? Where it's easy for us to stay in our 'lane,' and just keep doing what we're doing, especially if we feel like we have a sense that we know what our gifts are, or the things that we offer the world.

And then my experience of the very strong personalities in my meeting. Even when they're strong and they're caring, is that they are fully "in their lane." And I don't know that that



allows space for curiosity, and growth, and learning.

I see, when other young people come to my meeting, that folks really want to welcome them and hear about them and nurture them. I think that's great in terms of growing the meeting. I don't feel talked *down to*, per se, but I feel like the interaction is generally really going one way. They have something they want to give me, or tell me, or teach me, or act in me, or lift up in me. It doesn't have to be a negative, but they take on the role, almost, of the mentor. And I get that that's just ageism and someone having more experience, of course. But I think there's a downfall to that. The person who believes they're the mentor, that they have all the 'information' or the experience or the wisdom to share – which is lovely, they want to share it – but I think it can get in the way of them seeing one another fully as other adults, or seeing themselves, to continue growing and changing.

So it's interesting – again, I think it's a positive thing that the meeting I'm in supports young people. But I wonder if they put that effort and energy into their relationships with each other. With that intent of healing and resolving conflict, especially, instead of saying, 'Oh, so-and-so's always that way, and she's always going to *be* that way, so just tiptoe around her.' Really? That's the answer? Really?

Johanna:  
[laughter]

Kaitlyn:  
Okay! Okay. So, yeah. Good question.

[pause]

Johanna:  
Hmm. I guess we're talking about the inward work of maintaining, verses the easier, historically more neutral work of welcoming.

[pause]

[weird sound in the background]

Johanna:  
What was that?

[laughter]

Kaitlyn:  
[laughing] Adam was in the kitchen, and that's our refrigerator! It just makes a very squeaky sound!



Adam:

[in the background] I'm so sorry! I'm so sorry!

Johanna:

[laughing] Ha! It sounds like a parka zipper.

JT:

I thought it sounded like a power tool!

[more laughter]

Kaitlyn:

[nodding] It's a very high-pitched noise.

Johanna:

That's awesome.

[settling back into worship]

Johanna:

There's something I can't quite set down. So, I don't know that it's worship led, but. . . I keep coming back to the question of, *Whose work is it to identify the sticking points?* Is it the newcomers' work, or the work of long-term members, or both? My judgment is that new people are running into the briars and burrs left unattended by the longer-term members. That may not be true, but that's my assumption right now.

Sometimes I see people who are well-established in the community who "clear the way" for a new voice to step in. Sort of like John the Baptist. They clear the way, and then they guard the sides of the path, away from people who might shout and say, 'You're not using your voice right' or 'It's the wrong time' or whatever. I see those allies come in. And that is such a beautiful gifts.

I also see people helping in a quieter way. As insiders in the community, they move themselves to the place they need to be. They step out of the places they don't need to be. For example, I asked a couple of people to be on a Care Committee for me. And one person asked, 'Who else is on the committee? Because I've noticed I don't work well with some people in the meeting.' And I listed two names and she said, 'Nope.'

So that's a form of conflict-avoidance, but it has a helpful side, too. Because it insulated me from their ongoing style differences, and it was made with some self awareness. As if she said, 'I'm not ready to work with that person in a way we can both find to be productive, so I'm not going to step into that role.' And I think that's cool.



Sometimes – I don't know if this is a question for our group, or just a wondering – but sometimes I wonder, what else could the long-term members be doing that could clear the air and clear the way? Because – and this makes me sad – the way is not clear right now. In my experience. The way is not *clear* for new people – and for me, if I have fear of speaking, too. If I feel like I keep messing up the rules. Then the way is not clear! And that's not all for me to work on. So where does the responsibility lie?

In my meeting, business meeting's pretty well attended right now. We have about twenty people at business meeting, which is about what we had before the pandemic, too. But the median age, if I had to guess, is 60. It's around there. And so the way is not *clear* if we've got about ten 60-year-olds saying, 'I'm really tired!' and they're not connected to the 20-year-olds who are saying, 'What Quaker Meeting? I wasn't on the listserv after the pandemic happened. I didn't know you've still been meeting!' Right?

I just talked to somebody a couple of weeks ago who had no idea we had Outdoor Meeting going. Before the pandemic, they'd been attending for six months. But they weren't on any of the listservs. So they wouldn't be part of any decisions made since March!

[Here we pause and worship. In the pause, the energy settles a little bit.]

Johanna:

Mmm. Kaitlyn, what is feeding your meeting, so that you have people ready to feed and nurture new people, and young people?

[pause]

Kaitlyn:

I don't know, exactly. What is feeding my meeting, so it can feed and nurture young people?' Hmm. There are a few current teachers, and some retired teachers who are all good at reaching out. And so I think, that type of person, who chose to work their career to work with young people, whatever age that is, they are the ones who light up when they see young people at meeting. And they want to figure out how to put them on that listserv, or figure out how to have them volunteer in some way. So there are a few folks who seem to guide that particularly. And again, they seem to be former teachers. Yeah. There are three, particular. I would say out of like 20 adults. The adults over 50. And they cultivate that. But the other people are really interested, too. They just – there's a sense that people in my community want to *know*. I mean, the man who set up the potluck for me to talk about my pilgrimage – he's going to be 75!

Johanna:

Wow!



Kaitlyn:

I'm not sure what his career was. Interestingly enough, I found out that he's a returned Peace Corps Volunteer, and I'm a returned Peace Corps Volunteer, and that didn't come out until we were planning the potluck. There are people who – there are just good people, who have curiosity with doing things a different way! I mean, even with this pandemic, they are reaching out. I am so heartsore to hear that there are folks in your community who didn't know you were meeting outdoors, or you were meeting in a different way,<sup>7</sup> because – I mean, we had people sending out surveys all the time to people. They would say, 'Are you comfortable coming to meeting? Would you not want to come? If you came, what did you enjoy?' Then they'd ask: 'We're doing a hybrid meeting. Could you hear everybody? If you couldn't, what could we do differently?' The woman who put the survey together, I would consider her a young adult. She's around my age. I'm 35. She teaches at a college here, so she's a professor. She's the one who does our New and Notes, and sends out the reminders once a week week. She tells people: 'This is our zoom meeting, and here's the survey.' So people have the information. She's really good at reaching out when we are at in-person meeting. She'll say, 'Please reach out to me and give me your email address; I'll get you on the list.' So there are some – there are just some really proactive people, who want the input.

There's another woman who's older, probably her late 40s. She has a child, and so she offered, 'Let me do the facebook thing. I see that my kid's on facebook all the time. I will create a facebook page for our Meetinghouse. I will take pictures of our Meeting events – please let me know if you don't want to be in the picture, and I won't post it.'

Johanna:  
Wow!

Kaitlyn:

And so now everybody who's doing something, whether it's a potluck or a Bible study, even if they're 72, they will post it on facebook. They'll be like, 'Come join this Bible study!' Yeah! So in my community, it isn't just the young people who are reaching out. Once someone starts something, the people in my community are more than happy to participate! Even if it's newfangled. Facebook is sort of newfangled!

And even the zoom stuff! People are into it, and they come! There's this one man who is older, who can never figure out how to make his microphone work. Ever. But he comes! All the time. And he'll just talk, even though none of us can hear him. Right? And he's just not deterred!

Johanna:  
[laughter] Wow! Someone needs to get him some tech support, though.

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<sup>7</sup> Johanna adds: "I think it was one or two people who missed the information at my meeting, not a large group. Still, this shows an area of improvement that may take time to address."



Kaitlyn:

Yes. But there's something about the people in my community that are just determined to connect. They really are, you know? One man is kind of freaked out about other people's germs in general. So when we have potlucks, he would always bring his own utensils. He wouldn't ever – even though the other utensils go through the washer machine, that made him uncomfortable. So he wouldn't use them. But he would still come. He will still come to Hospitality, with his own utensils. He just wouldn't be stopped!

Johanna:

Wow! [laughter]

Kaitlyn:

So, I'm sorry that your elder people are not as determined! And, I don't know what it is in particular that makes this community so outgoing and ready for change, but they seem very open to it.

Johanna:

Yeah. It sounds very vibrant! 'Outgoing' is the right word!

Kaitlyn:

It is! It really is.

Johanna:

I have to tell you that, when you were talking about Facebook, I was just laughing. Because I was at the business meeting where someone said, 'We need a Facebook page.' And we have a different group. So we didn't have a 40 year old who stepped up to the plate right at once. Instead, some people asked, 'Are you sure we need that?' So someone else started by describing what Facebook is. And what a post is. We needed to do some education first. And then, everyone looked around the room and said, 'Who's gonna do it?' We just have a different group. It's not everyone's favorite thing to do, myself included! Begrudgingly, the person who said that we needed a page was like, 'Fine, I'll start it.' It's not always fun work. You know?

On the other hand, though – I have told you a lot of 'room for improvement areas' for my meeting, so don't get the – I guess it's important to balance those. So on the positive side, I stood up in business meeting one day and shared about some ideas for our website. We had some updated stuff up there at the time. I mean, we were on the forefront of LGBT activism throughout town, but our website still said something old, like, 'We support the lesbian and gay community in State College.' So it was time for a change.

And I said, 'Here's my list of suggestions for the web page.' And it was met with hearty support. A woman came up to me after the meeting – she was around 89 at the time – and she said: 'Yeah! We need a better web page.' She said it with some fire. She's got quite a



grip. 'We need to work on this,' she said, 'I'll support you.'

So, we've got some powerhouses in our group. They show up. And that's cool, that counts for something. But what I hear in your meeting is there's something that's just. . . *running with abandon* in your meeting. There's some energy. There's a vibrance. . . there's not a sense of tiredness and wilt. Instead, there's a can-do attitude. Yeah! That's it! Tiredness doesn't get in the way of doing something interesting and fun.

[Johanna tells a story of someone offering to bring their gifts, and how tiredness got in the way of receiving those gifts.]

And it took an ally, an older person who got wind of this and said, 'That will not fly. Let's make it happen.' And she – that's the person I was talking about, she just barricades the doors *open!* And *holds* them there! She clears the way so other people to step in! And I love it. I have overheard one or two other people in our meeting referring to her and saying, 'Well, so-and-so is kind of pushy to get things done. She doesn't always follow Quaker Process.' But I *love* it, because of how it opes up new room to contribute inside the group. And my sense is that some of us could stand to be stirred up a little more, anyway.

So what I'm hearing from you, Kaitlyn, is that your meeting broke free of that sluggishness, and there's some daring going on.

[We settle back into quiet worship]

Johanna:

Um, this is kind of a weird question, but Kaitlyn, I'm wondering what you want to talk about next. Like, 'Do you have one in mind?' – that's the question.

[Kaitlyn shares that she has Hanukkah Candle Lighting coming up ver soon on zoom.]

Kaitlin:

. . . So I have about ten more minutes. I think Adam's putting the candles in the menorah. So if there's anything, any sort of closing happening that you typically do, I wanted to give space for that.

[We draw back into a brief worship]

Johanna:

Hmm. Well to tell you the truth, there's not a specific closing!

Kaitlyn:

[laughter]



Johanna:

Sometimes, after listening for a long time, JT might say something, though...

JT:

Well, I *might* say something. That's true. It doesn't always happen!

Johanna:

Well, Kaitlyn – thank you for this time!

JT:

Thank you.

Kaitlyn:

Thank you, both. This is such a treat, to sit with you. I was running a bunch of errands today before the snow, and I was feeling a little tired. Thank you for building me up, and lifting me up. For giving me a second wind.

[We reflected on how the time together had bolstered us, giving us energy to move on with the day. We felt energized and happy. On the screen, everyone was beaming. We moved into silence, briefly, to close.]

Kaitlyn:

It's so nice to feel full.



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## **Discussion Questions**

- 1. What, if anything, do you see inside Kaitlyn's local community that inspires you?*
- 2. What do you think about the statement that briars and burrs left by long-term members affect new people coming in? How does that relate to your experience?*
- 3. What kinds of groups in your life help you to be more of yourself?*