

*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)*



**Lisa Graustein**

Three Rivers Worship Group

New England Yearly Meeting

Age 46

Pronouns: she



**Tags:** Three Rivers Worship Group, community care, pastoral care, white supremacy culture, antiracism, willingness, listening, attunement, supporting ministry, accompaniment, conflict aversion, humility, victim mindset, co-creation mindset, empowerment, agency, consent, healthy conflict resolution, gatekeeping, discernment, preparation, eldership, direct speech, interrupting patterns of oppression, liberation, power



*Lisa Graustein is a founding host of Three Rivers Meeting in New England Yearly Meeting (NEYM). She carries a concern for equity. Lisa's call to ministry among Friends is noticing, interrupting, and transforming patterns of oppression as we enact them in order to build a more faithful and just Religious Society of Friends. She is also a mom and artist. Lisa lives on the homeland of the Neponset Band of the Massachusetts, an area also known as Boston.*

*I first met Lisa at NEYM annual sessions in 2017. Our paths continued to cross, and later, we were both drawn to Quaker worship with Three Rivers. Interactions in this small online community are likely what prompted Lisa's name when Johanna and I were thinking about listening sessions.*

*In our time together, we discuss healthy conflict transformation, good eldership, preparation for and reflection on vocal ministry, and pastoral care. We even took some time for pastoral care for each other during the session. We opened by naming some of the common bonds of trust we have in one another, and by setting norms for our time together. Our conversation moved smoothly and swiftly, surprising us when our time ran out. I hope you feel the same richness in this transcript that I felt in the conversation.*

*- J.T. Dorr-Bremme*



[We began the listening session by settling into worship. JT brought us out of the silence, speaking gently about Lisa's ability to make things happen, about her passion and her fire.]

@JT

It's been my impression that you've been on the periphery of the community in some ways. You've been – you've said that you have been sort of put there against your will?

@Lisa

Well, when I started attending the Young Friends program in New England Yearly Meeting,<sup>1</sup> I was impressed with what I saw. I was like, "Oh, this. This is like the power and dynamism of Quakerism, and that this is what unconditional love and community looks and feels like. Here is an intense, open-armed embracing kind of inclusion. We can step into and deal with conflict, this is what it means to really make space for everyone." I went to a high school that was not interested in making space for everyone and a social scene that was not about everyone.

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<sup>1</sup> New England Yearly Meeting, or NEYM, is a collection of 90 Quaker organizations in New England. Together, they provide programs and services to liberate ministry and to strengthen the Quaker movement. NEYM, like many yearly meetings, runs a Young Friends program. This is a community of high school age youth who explore the Quaker way. (Source: [neym.org/who](http://neym.org/who).)



That, to me, is what Quakerism is, that if we believe there is that of God or Spirit or Light or Divine or whatever word were using in everyone, I can't deny you. Right? And I can't separate out just the pieces I like or want to be with. And because I'm white, because I didn't come out till I was in my early 20s, because I'm cisgender,<sup>2</sup> because I came from a wealthy home, because my parents were academics, I fit enough of the norms of New England Quakerism that I didn't see as much of the othering<sup>3</sup> that happens until I got a little bit older, and was astounded by it, and continue to be astounded by it.

And I've been a part of it too. I'm not acting like I'm some pure person here who has not othered people or harmed people. But the moments when that happens – and I can understand it happened because all of us have our own ways that we don't see or understand things, but when it's named and there seems to be collusion with that othering or acceptance of it, that's what I still find unbelievable. That's what I find inconsistent with who I understand us to be as a people. Right? We're going to make mistakes because we're human. But if our commitment is to that of the divine in each other and that mistake is lifted up, then we should lean into it as hard as we can, because it's an opportunity for enrichment and growth, and for healing.

And what I struggle with is when an othering moment is lifted up, particularly when it's lifted up because I'm experiencing it, and what I don't get back is people leaning in. That's what I find so confusing and hard. The initial marginalization or othering is painful but, to me, what's always more painful is when that concern is named and not tended to. And I don't think that's unique to my experience or my identities at all.

@JT

We were talking about Three Rivers<sup>4</sup> earlier. How is that experiment related to these experiences you're talking about?

@Lisa

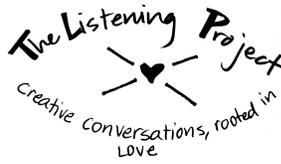
Incredibly directly, like a straight line. So Three Rivers grew out of a leading that Kristina Keefe-Perry had around founding a new Quaker church. And she invited a bunch of others of us to step in, in the holding of that. And I think that some of our shared vision is, how do we create a Quaker space that meets some needs that other Quaker spaces in our area might not be meeting? How do we create a space that really acknowledges, seeks, affirms, supports, and lays down ministry? One of the things that we value at Three Rivers about

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2 Being cisgender means that a person's identity and gender correspond with their birth sex. (Source: Oxford Languages)

3 Othering means to "view or treat (a person or group of people) as intrinsically different from and alien to oneself." (Source: Oxford Languages)

4 Three Rivers Worship Group is a spiritual home for deepening faithful service. It is a group that is "reclaiming and reinventing Quaker practices for current times." (Source: [www.threeriversmeeting.org/](http://www.threeriversmeeting.org/))



early Friends' traditions and practices is the care for ministry. One of the questions we have to be constantly asking is: "Who's bringing the ministry right now and how do we support that?" This month, it might be you, Johanna, and next year, it might be you, JT, and in six years, it might be me, or maybe never me. But when I support, name, affirm, hold to account, challenge, and engage with your ministry, that's a spiritually enriching experience not just for you and me but for the whole community. And that's important, particularly in a branch that doesn't have formal clergy. That's how we grow and deepen.

And there are a few people who I think are ministers for life. And for many of the rest of us, there are pieces we're given for a period of time and then we lay them down. Right? This project is a form of ministry. Maybe you'll do it your whole lives. Maybe you'll do it for three more years. I have no idea. And it doesn't matter, because I sense in it, in how you talk about it, a kind of faithfulness. You will carry it for the time that it has life or that you're clear to carry it, and then either lay it down or pass it on to someone else who's ready to pick it up.

One thing that happens is, the more institutionalized something gets, the less nimble and creative it gets. This is not specific to Quakers. But starting a new gathering or a new meeting is a chance to really intentionally be creative and be experimental. And I think – I won't speak for the other hosts in definitive way – but I think that all of us experienced some boundaries that we've bumped up against in our other Friends communities where our desire to be creative and try and experiment is met with a little bit of resistance. Or our threshold for let's-get-messy-with-it is much higher than other people's, which is fine.

That's one of the reasons we have a commitment at Three Rivers for now to not meet on Sunday mornings. So no one feels like they would have to make a choice between their home meeting and Three Rivers. But here's a both-and. How do we move into a space where you can be an experimental, different space and have the continuity and regular expectations met that a more consistent place offers? Because both are valuable and humans need both.

And different people fall along that spectrum of predictability and experimentation. Some people want the exact same thing, like "I'm going to sit in the exact same place in the room." Versus like, "Hey. What's happening this week? It's the Old Testament? Great. A 10-year-old's drawing with us? Awesome. Someone's quoting scripture? Cool. We're bringing in a Jewish practice? Great." Some people have a higher tolerance for that. We could practice interrupting worship and see if that deepens our experience. Does it let us live into our desire to embrace decolonizing or antiracism or racial justice or anti-oppression work?

@Johanna

I appreciate that. You make a spread between consistency and experimentation and show that different people fall at different places. Hearing that helps me break out of an old belief I have, which is that our tendencies are age-based. But wherever I fit on that line might be a



reflection of my personality. It might be consistent throughout my life, or it might change. That's helpful to hear.

@Lisa

Right. And I think we all go through phases. Like I know when I was a new mom teaching high school and in grad school, I wanted places that were consistent, because newborn babies are different every two to three months. And I wanted to know that, when I showed up, I was going to get the experience I wanted to have, because it was so hard to do everything I had to do.

And now I'm in a different place, like, "Cool. My kid can make his own choices and decisions. Let's really experiment." I'm really ready to try some things out. And particularly, I think, after this last year that forced so much change on so many of us in really unexpected ways, it brought change in ways that I was unprepared for. I crave some normalcy again and also, there was so much of the normal that was so broken. So why would we possibly go back to it when we've been given this global reset?

Some people are, I think, coming out of pandemic saying, "Let me just get back to normal. Because I miss it so, so much, and I want that and that structure and stability." And there's nothing wrong with wanting that sense of stability. But we can do both.

[We moved into worship for a short time to take this in. That brought a shift in conversation, as we began to talk about willingness.]

@JT

I'm remembering an old – well, a joke I heard a while back, a Quaker saying that a newcomer came in and really upset an older Friend by sitting in their seat for worship. Thinking about that kind of consistency, the same place every week, I found myself thinking the other day that I need to do something that I'm scared of. That's because if there's not a little bit of fear involved in doing something, it's in my comfort zone. And that's something I think you presented about when you were speaking on that stage [for the Challenging White Supremacy working group<sup>5</sup>]. You can't really grow in your comfort zone.

@Lisa

Right. Right. And sitting in the same chair, that could be like "that's the center of my comfort zone," or it could be "meeting for worship is challenging for me, and having some of the physical anchors is what helps me get into it." Right? And I can't know that for another person. I know when those things are true for me. When am I unwilling to shift my

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5 "The ad hoc Challenging White Supremacy (CWS) working group of Permanent Board resulted from a minute approved at Annual Sessions in 2016 (Minute 2016-64). It [is] a resource for the Yearly Meeting to offer encouragement, inspiration and practical support for Friends to engage in this work of loving concern and right relationship." (Source: <https://neym.org/challenging-white-supremacy-working-group>)



perspective? When am I unwilling to be in a dynamic community where somebody else might sit in my seat? When am I resistant to taking a different viewpoint? Versus when do I need some constancy because other things in my life are feeling out of control? When is centering down so challenging that I know I need this mix of light, shadow, viewpoint, or this specific spot to help me? Maybe I'm intentionally turned away from the other person I'm in conflict with, who sits somewhere else in the room. Maybe it's easier for me to pray for them if I don't have to look at them. Or maybe this seat puts me directly across from them, for instance.

I feel like so often, among Friends, we don't talk about what is challenging about meeting for worship. We don't talk about how we can help each other at the times when meeting for worship is especially challenging. And, at least in the context I've been in, we definitely don't tell our kids, "Here are all the things that are going on." A bunch of us who host Three Rivers did a program with our junior high kids in the Yearly Meeting<sup>6</sup> the other day. We said, "What are some of the components of worship?" And we generated ideas as a group. You get still, which doesn't have to mean physically still, but you stop some of the distractions from the outer world. You listen, and you do it with other people. Because my ability to listen to Spirit is amplified by your ability to listen to Spirit, and the sum of all of us listening together is a stronger signal, radar dish, whatever metaphor you want to use, than individually.

And so once we talked about those components, we then asked the kids, "What are all the ways that help you do that? That help you get grounded, that help you move from distractions to being present, and help you listen?" And we created a worship space the next day that had all those elements. So we had motion and movement and drawing. And for a bunch of the kids, the sense of smell was an important thing. And so we invited everyone to find a calming scent in their house and bring it with them to worship. Right? I had a jar of vanilla. Someone else had a candle. Someone else had their blanky. Someone else had a flower they had picked, food their mom had made, whatever it was. But we engaged all five senses. And that helped us all. Because for me to get really grounded in my body, I can't deny one piece of it. We don't talk about that often enough with our young people. We don't talk about often enough that with each other.

So for me the question is *why*. Why do you want to sit in that same seat? How much of that is support and an accessibility component? And what of that is passivity and stuck-ness? Where and how do we engage each other in our spiritual lives? How do we talk about what our corporate worship is and the rest of our lives, like how we're living in relationship with each other? What is needed for structure and accessibility? And what is passivity and comfort that keeps us from growing?

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<sup>6</sup> A yearly meeting is a regional body of Quakers that gathers for fellowship, discernment, worship, and to make decisions. In the United States, these groups often span across one or more states, although that is not always the case. Here, the Three Rivers group offered programming to youth inside of New England Yearly Meeting.



@Johanna

That's really helpful. All of those are big, open questions. Also, I need shift gears for a minute and name something here. I was planning to hold space for our group, and usually JT or I will do that during a session, but I'm not really able to do that today. I had a really rough day. So I – I'm showing up, but what I can bring today is a little different. If you notice that something is missing, some grounding or some prayerfulness, that's probably normal for today.

@Lisa

Thank you. Do you want space to check in or talk at all about what's going on for you?

@Johanna

Sure. I'm in a conflict that's very difficult to weather through. It affected me again today. It's an ongoing conflict, and a difficult one. There are lots of people walking with me as I make decisions, but really the learning is mine to do. So I feel really weary from that today.

That question you asked earlier, Lisa, I wrote it down. "When am I unwilling to shift my perspective?" That really hit me in the middle. I may be unwilling to see beauty in this other person right now. I know that I am, right now, given the experiences I've had with them.

*[At this point, we paused the conversation we were having before in order to explore the needs of the present moment. Lisa offered some of her care and accompaniment in the process.]*

@Lisa

Johanna, one of the practices I learned from one of my teachers is when someone's speaking from the heart and the others of us are listening then, if they want, we can reflect back what we hear. We can say how their words landed in us as a way of just affirming listening without valuing or judging it.

@Johanna

That would be good. I'd like that.

@Lisa

So when you first started talking about being unable to hold space, I just had tears come to my eyes, like I just felt for you. And when you spoke about it affecting you, that particular line just felt like a gong in you was resonating at the same frequency as the gong in me. And when you talked about being unable to see beauty in the other person, I just felt deep compassion for both of you, a sense of holding and being invited into vulnerability.

@Johanna

Thank you. Yeah, it helps to hear that.

[Silence]



As I think about this more, it feels like there's a real purity in asking for help. It also feels like there's a link between the pain I feel and the broader topics, the broader reach of our words. Something is connecting beyond this moment in my life.

[Silence]

@JT

In the quiet just now, I recalled that, over the course of these interviews, a number of Friends have told stories of themselves or others they know, laboring with their community to make changes. They have shared about being unable or unwilling to continue in that realm, and eventually going a different path. I sense how conflict-averse Friends are as a group. I've seen that, in my personal life, working through conflict takes a lot of self-knowledge and a lot of work, but if it is done well, it builds bonds stronger than they were before.

[Silence]

And there's a question here for you, Lisa, but it's not phrasing itself.

@Lisa

Well, a few things come to mind. I can start from what you said, if you'd like.

@JT

Please do.

*[At this point in the conversation, we shifted to a more conversational pace. The act of pausing to tend the pain in the room deepened our conversation in subtle ways. We moved on to consider the next topic that came to mind, which was the communal labor happening in Lisa's community.]*

@Lisa

A big piece of the work I'm involved in within the Yearly Meeting right now is the practice of noticing patterns of oppression and faithfulness. That means noticing, naming, and lifting up moments when harm is being done. The harm could be unconscious or unintentional, or it could be intentional but happening in a way where others are actively colluding and may not realize it. So for example, that could be an offhand comment I make that assumes a particular class background of all Friends. That could be saying "we" and assuming that I mean all Quakers are white. The harm is something that is exclusionary in some way or that denies a group of people.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness: This is a working group formed by Quakers in New England. It helps the wider Quaker community to observe, name, and reflect upon their own patterns of oppression. Lisa wrote a report of this group's work at Annual Sessions, defining patterns of oppression as "learned behaviors and ways of being that seek to diminish the humanity of different groups of people." Her article, "Noticing Patterns of Oppression and



In our work, we've moved from not just "How do we notice these moments?" but "How do we interrupt in a way that invites the possibility of healing and growth?" And what comes up over and over and over again, in every single workshop – and I've done many of these – is Friends' reluctance to say something. This is mostly white Friends. There's a reluctance to speak up because of not wanting to be seen as a bad Quaker for engaging in conflict. If I don't say anything, we can just do that white-polite thing and pretend like it didn't happen and keep moving.

When people talk about that resistance, sometimes I hear a fear of "I'm going to say it wrong and do more harm. I want my words to be right." And, that is a very different energy than "Let me not create conflict." And sometimes both are very present. And what I always say in response to that is, "The harm's already in the room. If I have said or done something that denies the inclusion, the person, or limits the full humanity of somebody or a whole group of people, then the harm's already in the room." And if we don't talk about it, the harm just continues untended. And if we talk about it, we at least create the possibility that the harm could be acknowledged and healed.

My understanding, again, of early Friends is that we were not afraid of ruffling feathers back in the day. I don't have a clear sense of how we handled internal conflict. You know, there were periods of time when we were like, "All right. We're reading you out of meeting. You're done. The elders are coming to meet at your house." That was often – that was not the first group of Friends, responding like that. That response was after we'd gotten pretty institutionalized as a group. And so I just really wonder about those early Friends who were saying, "Yes, I will get naked on a horse through town. Yes, I will go and interrupt this church service. Yes, I will stand and preach for two hours." We were a conflict-driven people. We were engaged in conflict. We saw conflict and creating conflict or lifting up conflict as a sign of faithfulness.

And so what happened to us that we've gone so far the other end of that spectrum? One thing that I have been learning a lot about in the last few months is, when I have named what I'm experiencing as marginalization or oppression, people want to talk to me about the pain I'm in and expressing. But they do not want to talk about the harm that they or the broader institution is doing.

@Johanna  
Whoa.

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Faithfulness," is posted on the New England Yearly Meeting website. (Source: [neym.org/news/noticing-patterns-oppression-faithfulness](https://neym.org/news/noticing-patterns-oppression-faithfulness))



@Lisa

And that, to me, is a big part of where I see what I'm going to call "mainstream Friends" in the US being in a stuck place. Because if we just talk about my pain, I'm a victim. I'm an individual. You get to be empathetic in that moment and keep it there. But if we have to talk about harm, the harm is – I mean unless it's self-inflicted, it involves relationship. It involves interaction. It has a potential to be about a system and not just individuals. And the focus, then, is on what is causing the pain versus just the pain.

And I'm still figuring this all out, but the last few months have given me a lot to work with around what our obsession with pain is versus our unwillingness to acknowledge harm, and how different it feels when someone acknowledges harm they have done to me and people like me versus when someone wants to acknowledge my pain. Because I can't actually know what your pain is. I can witness it, I can seek to empathize with it, but if I'm present when the harm is happening, I'm a part of the harm, and that's a piece I can take responsibility for and fully engage with.

And I think there's a piece, too, in here, where, when challenge or conflict comes up, I see a lot of Quakers move very quickly to a victim mindset. That's opposed to "how am I co-creating our shared reality and a piece of it?" That doesn't mean that power dynamics and oppression aren't a part of things at all, and I'm not denying that, but where I see us wanting to hang out so much more is in a victim mindset rather than a "I'm part of this with my faith community" mindset. And here I'm, again, mostly talking about people who hold identities that are privileged by society, whether it's men or white people or cisgender people or straight people. But I see that a lot. And I've seen it in myself, too. Again, nothing I'm saying isn't stuff I haven't done too or been a part of.

@Johanna

Can you say more about the difference between those two modes?

@Lisa

You mean between pain and harm? Or –

@Johanna

Between co-creation and victimization.



@Lisa

Oh. Yeah. So this is an understanding that I learned from Niyonu Spann,<sup>8</sup> who got it from the work of Dr. Darya Funches,<sup>9</sup> both of whom are friends of mine and teachers of mine, and I want to acknowledge both of them. Niyonu's a Quaker. Dr. Darya is not. They're both Black women; both powerful women from whom I have learned so much.

And so, Dr. Darya Funches lays out four mindsets that often we are responding from. So one is the tyrant. That mindset is, "I have to have the power and control. And so I will act from a place where, to get what I need, I have to have power and control." So I act as if I have to have power and control to get what I need.

The victim mindset is, "To get what I need, I act as if I have to get those with power to give it to me. And the only way I can get what I need is with those with power to give it to me."

The reactor mindset is, "Stuff just happens. It doesn't matter what you do. Shit happens."

And then there's co-creation, which is: "I act as if I am a part of creating the reality I'm in. That doesn't mean an equal part necessarily, and it doesn't deny different power dynamics. But I am helping to create reality."

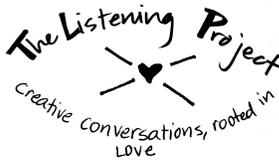
But on this call, the three of us, we are creating this reality. You two walked in with a process and a structure and a format you use, and for the most part I'm completely going along with it. But that's not me being a passive agent. That's me consciously and unconsciously choosing, for variety of reasons, to respect your format. It also meant, Johanna, when you paused us to share personally, I knew that because you had told me that any of us could speak, that this was a freeform place. And because I believe in, to the extent I possibly can, fully inhabiting myself, that's why I asked if you wanted some space. I don't have an investment in the end product here. I have an investment in being human with you. In that moment, if someone's saying, "I'm having a hard time" to me, I want the reaction to be like, "Well, do you need more space? Do you need some support?" You know?

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8 Niyonu Spann is a Quaker activist, musician, consultant, and teacher. Formerly the Dean of Pendle Hill, Niyonu Spann now helps groups and individuals to transform blocked energy into passion that aligns with a mission. (Source: Niyonu Spann Associates, [niyonuspann.com/credentials/niyonu-my-personal-story/](http://niyonuspann.com/credentials/niyonu-my-personal-story/) )

As part of her work, Niyonu Spann created Beyond Diversity 101, an intensive workshop that stimulates change. Lisa Graustein attended several Beyond Diversity 101 workshops as an intern and as an assistant facilitator, later becoming the first co-facilitator to the program. (Source: Beyond Diversity 101, [www.bd101.org/](http://www.bd101.org/))

9 Dr. Darya Funches is a consultant, leader, scholar, and coach. She founded REAP Unlimited, a consulting firm for transformation. Dr. Darya Funches is a faculty member at American University. (Source: Pacific Northwest Organization Development Network, [www.pnodn.org/event-3850247](http://www.pnodn.org/event-3850247). and American University, [www.american.edu/spa/faculty/funches.cfm](http://www.american.edu/spa/faculty/funches.cfm).)



And that's also why I asked you if I could do some reflective listening. And I believe in practicing consent, which is why I asked you before doing it. And if you'd said no, I would have kept my mouth shut. Right? And so we co-created that moment. At any point, any one of us could have said, "Stop. This is not what we're doing."

And so it's not about right or wrong, good or bad. It's acknowledging that whatever this time is together, I have as much agency in this case as both of you in creating it. Right? The interview is your thing, and I have respect for that. So if you said, "Lisa, we really want to go in this other direction or talk about this," I'd be like, "Cool. Yes. You invited me into your living room. Sure."

And it means if you ask me something that I really disagree with or think is fundamentally flawed, I'm fully empowered to say that. I'd say, "Oh, I'm not going to answer that question." Or, "I actually find that framing really problematic. Let's dig into that for a minute." Or, "I find that framing really problematic, and now I'm getting off the call because it's not my job to do that today." And that's so different than, "Gosh, I got on this call, and they made me talk about this thing I didn't want to talk about." Right?

@Johanna

Yeah. That's so much more empowering!

@Lisa

Or thinking, "I'd better control this conversation because I want to make sure that people reading later see it the way I want them to read it." Or, "Doesn't matter what the eff I say. They're going to do what they're going to do." I could bring any one of those mindsets to this moment. Right?

@Johanna

Mm-hmm.

@Lisa

And the thing about co-creation is we're all always doing it, whether or not we're conscious we're doing it, whether or not we're choiceful about doing it. So it's not about which one is happening. It's about which one am I holding in this space and in this moment.

And I think, for me, co-creation and Quakerism are so aligned because my consciousness of how I am co-creating something with you and Spirit makes more space for continuing revelation. That's being open to Spirit. That's saying, "I will claim my agency, my gifts, my faults, my challenges, my traumas, my power in this moment and be a whole person and be present with you and be present with Spirit."

@Johanna

That's beautiful. There's more, it looks like.



@Lisa

Well, I mean, that goes back to what we were talking about before, about conflict. If I'm not engaging in conflict, then I'm denying that co-creation. You know, a week and a half ago, I got into a big conflict with someone that I'm very close to. We have very, very different personality types. I'm extroverted. They're introverted. We have very different ways of processing stuff. And I'm like, "Well, let's get on the phone and keep working it out." And they're like, "I will talk to you in a few weeks."

And some of that is our personality types. Some of that, I think, is how we feel about conflict. I'm like, "All right. This is hard and messed up, but we've got to work through it." And I'm not always like that. Sometimes, I'm like, "I do not want to deal with that person." And that's it. I'm gonna deflect it. But I think – well, that's what you were saying, JT. I don't think we actually get to stronger, more authentic, realer places if we're constantly denying the harm that's happening, the conflict that we have, the different expectations, the boundaries, when they get violated, how we respond to that, and how we step in with each other.

And that's part of what I appreciate about Three Rivers. I mean we're new, so we don't have baggage, and we haven't had a lot of conflict yet. But we, those of us who are our founding it, are really committed to working through conflict. When we have conflict, let's actually really engage in it. And let's check in, like, "Do we have conflict yet?" Not as in "Let's create some so we can practice," fake stuff. But like, "Yeah, what will that actually be like? And what are we building now that will give us a foundation to really step in with each other?" And that's about knowing each other, knowing where the really tender points are with each other, knowing what each other's strengths are, going back to what are we committed to. Right? I fully expect someone in Three Rivers at some point to say, "Yeah, Lisa, we know you got 72 ideas in the last 12 minutes, but we only have time for one, and you're not going to get to do all of them." And that's fine.

@Johanna

Ha! That sounds a little familiar to me. I think I'm known for that, too!

@Lisa

Right. But that's still different than, "Uh, can you just be quiet?"

@Johanna

Right.

@Lisa

Like name the actual thing. Or, "I can't take any more ideas right now. That's too much. We just need to follow through on something." That's great. I can roll with that. But tell me the real thing.



@Johanna

Mm-hmm. Yeah. Can I tell a story that relates to that? I can't see your faces right now, since I'm calling in on the phone.

@JT

Yes. Please.

@Lisa

Sure.

@Johanna

When I talk to Quakers locally, I often hear a blockade or maybe a "no" without a clear reason why. And sometimes I wonder what the real reason is. I would just like to know what it is. If it's fear, it's not that I'll press you to address your fear or transform it, but it helps me to know that that's the root.

@Lisa

Yeah.

@Johanna

I can move more tenderly with the person, or I can set it aside, or whatever. It gives me peace to know the truth. So one pattern I see in my Quaker experience is, if I'm one of those people who has 72 ideas and I bring like five of them to the local meeting, that's five ideas too many. "We are overloaded. We don't have room for that. We don't have the bandwidth. It's threatening a little bit that you name that. I'm not able to name that it's threatening." Those are the kinds of things that I see.

So last week, I found myself in the interesting place of being on the other side of that interaction. Last week, I coordinated outdoor worship. We had indoor worship and outdoor worship. And someone in our meeting said, "You could bring everyone from outdoor worship in at the end for announcements so we could do them together with everybody. Remote, indoor, outdoor, everybody in the same room." And my first instinct was just like "I can't do that. We can't do that." But those are two different limits. Because I couldn't do it because I was overloaded that day. But that doesn't mean we can't.

I think I learned something in that experience. I learned that if I feel overloaded, I can name that and step aside and see if anyone else wants to do it instead. But what I see happening, in a lot of Quaker communities, is "I can't do that" shuts the door to anyone else doing that idea. Yeah.

I was really thinking about that experience. Like maybe the root of the "no" is, "I'm overloaded. I'm the clerk of this committee. I know if you bring that idea forward, it's going to



fall in my lap. I can't do that." But what would our communities look like if we said, "I can't. Go ahead." Wouldn't that be interesting?

@Lisa

Yeah. I think that's it. Right? Someone says "I can't do that" – and too often I hear it as, "We can't do that."

@Johanna

Right.

@Lisa

And then I'm like, "Well, who's the we?" But in that, if you can't bring people in because you're not vaccinated or you have some other medical issue, and you're fine with other people taking the lead instead, then that's really clear. Or, if you say, "I can't do that for my own health and safety, and I'm concerned other people will feel excluded who also can't do that," that's really different, because now we're addressing what the issue is.

@Johanna

Right. And then I can step aside, which could be good and healthy for me.

@Lisa

Right. Or if it's, "I can't do that because as soon as the meeting ends, I've got to drive across town and pick up my kid from soccer practice," that's totally different because that's not about emotional investment at all. That's a logistical issue, and that's just a problem to be solved. Right?

But we don't always say what the thing is, and I think we mostly don't say it when the reason is, "I'm afraid this is going to happen. I'm afraid I'm going to be excluded. I'm afraid other people are going to be excluded. I'm afraid whatever peace we've just come to after a time of conflict is going to be ruptured. I'm afraid the thing that is familiar to me, that I cherish, will become unfamiliar. I'm afraid I won't know where I fit in, in this space. I'm afraid I'm going to have feelings I'm not prepared to feel." Right? And, man, if somebody can say to me, "That's an interesting idea, Lisa, but I'm afraid I'm going to have feelings I'm unprepared to feel," I can step right in there with you. I don't want to make you have feelings you're unprepared to feel. I'm okay with feelings you're ready to feel, but not unprepared. That's a crappy spot for any of us to be in. Right?

But what I often experience is "no," which doesn't give me a lot to work with.

@Johanna

Yeah. This is helpful. So, what about the culture at Three Rivers?



@Lisa

So we actually explicitly talk about starting from a "culture of Yes" which is so different. And, like I said, we don't have much history or shared baggage. We've just been meeting for a year. We're not even a preparative meeting, so we haven't been doing business meetings. There are so many things that we don't have to deal with yet that will show up later. I mean we're like a cohousing group where everyone's got their own kitchen and bathrooms, so none of the disagreements over how clean things are have happened yet. Or it's just the living room carpet, which is never the source of conflict.

But we talk about a "culture of Yes" as in, if you come up with something that you're really excited about, how about if you're met with yes. And then we have a process for how we do discernment. So the initial yes is not the final yes, but if somebody wants to do something that is sponsored by Three Rivers or part of Three Rivers, we now have a process where you get to bring the idea forward, and meet with a group of Friends about it.<sup>10</sup> There's discernment about the clarity of your leading and your capacity, because sometimes we're given a leading that we don't have the capacity for.

It's a complete setup if my community says to me, "Yes, go teach Japanese." I don't speak Japanese. I might have a leading to go do that, but I don't have the capacity. So then my elders need to say, "You've got to go learn Japanese first. That's what you need to go do. And then will support your leading to teach it." I use that example as a silly one, but I have seen people show up with leadings that we know the people don't have the capacity to do, and then it's a setup for failure. But often we're afraid of hurting somebody's feelings by saying, "Actually, I'm really concerned about some skills that I think you're missing to carry this thing through." And it is so much more supportive to say, "Yes that leading. Yes, let's help you get the skills, so that when you fully realize that leading, you are successful in a way that you feel good about and everyone else feels good about."

@Johanna  
Wow.

@Lisa

Wouldn't that be different? And so then we also do the discernment process that is about leading, about capacity, and if that's clear and it's consistent with what we've said our values are, then we say yes. But there is a process. You're met with an initial Yes, because when you feel that excitement when you have some enthusiasm, that's how we want to receive what might be ministry. Right?

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<sup>10</sup> For more information about a culture of Yes, see the Three Rivers Circles Document at [www.threeriversmeeting.org/circles](http://www.threeriversmeeting.org/circles). This provides an overview of the values, purpose, and practices at Three Rivers, all of which center around building faithfulness.



@Lisa

And so we have – we're a semi-programmed meeting, and so somebody usually brings a prepared message. And anyone can do that. But even if you, JT, brought an idea forward, as someone I've known for several years to be a grounded and solid Friend, someone I know to be thoughtful in your language in terms of including people, someone who I would happily receive a message from, even if you bring an idea forward, we say, "Yes. Great. Now you're going to meet with two folks and talk about why you want to bring a message and to talk about what you might bring. We're going to talk about what that experience might be like for you." And then after you bring the message, we're going to talk with you about what that experience was like for you. If there's any part of the message you feel like you're still carrying, or if there's part of that experience you want to process, then how does it fit into your broader spiritual life? Because that's what care for ministry is. It's the yes-and, it's being *with*, from start to finish. It's not saying, "Great. Cool. You do the 15th. We don't have anyone on the calendar that day."

And we were aware that we had someone bring a message which, it was an awesome message, an awesome person, but it came from a very cis, male, white, academic kind of vibe, and someone else was interested in bringing a message who carried the same identity and vibe. We were like, "We've got to put some other people in between them," not because there's anything wrong with having two cis, white, male men bring a message, but because of bigger things that we all live in. We need some other identities in between. So that's a yes-and. That's a both-and. That's how we hold the whole and the individual.

And nobody is hurt by that, because the message is clear. We're being honest about why we're doing it. And when a 65-year-old brought the message, they had the same process as when a 10-year-old brought the message. So when the 10-year-old brought the message, I met with her twice. She had a 12-year-old elder as well as me, so she had a peer elder. We talked about it. We practiced. We talked about the experience. She brought the message, and then we had a follow-up conversation of how she felt about it and what the experience was like for her, because our kids are people. They don't need anything more or less than our grownups need. Right?

@Johanna

Wow.

@Lisa

And then a 12-year-old can be an elder. They're buddies. They know each other. That 12-year-old is not particularly interested in sitting for all of meeting for worship, so he stayed for the message, and then did the follow-up part and the prep part. And that's what worked for him. Right? So we're also aligning with each person's capacity.

@Johanna

That's really neat. Wow. That opens up some new opportunities.



@Lisa

And I told the grownups, two weeks before the 10-year-old gave the message, that we weren't going to participate in ageist compliments, which is a thing I see in Quakers a lot. Such as: "You're so wise for your age," or, "I wish I had been like you when I was your age." And so we're actually just going to give compliments. And I invited people if they wanted to practice with me. And some people practiced with me, and then after the 10-year-old spoke, and it was a powerful message, there was powerful ministry directly connected to her message, and people were able to say, "When you said this, it opened up this thing in me." Or, "You really spoke to my condition," because her age was not what she was talking about, so we didn't need to share that in acknowledging her ministry.

@Johanna

Wow. There is so much life in this.

@Lisa

Right? Right? So that's a culture of Yes. That is holding care for ministry. That is acknowledging gifts. And that is practicing equality. And obviously, the conversation with the 65-year-old was different. I mean in the conversation I had with the 10-year-old, at one point we were just walking around the block, because walking and talking was easier. And then we were building fairy houses while we were doing it. I don't think the 65-year-old got down on his knees in the backyard during the conversation. But, great, let's prepare in a way that's accessible for both of them.

@Johanna

Yeah. That's pretty cool.

@Lisa

Right? And we can – we as the holding body, as the elders, we are the ones that need to be adapting. We don't need to expect the 10-year-old to act like a grownup. She can be a 10-year-old, where she is, because her ministry is as powerful as a 65-year-old's ministry, and it's our job to set the space so we can all receive it and so that she can receive the positive feedback in a way that is not also harmful. That's the elders' job, and that's what we did.

@Johanna

Wow. I feel invigorated just hearing it.

@Lisa

Because it's difficult to be a young person. And we're new, we didn't have to ask anybody's permission. I didn't have to present at a committee or business meeting. I didn't have to justify why we had invited a 10-year-old to offer ministry. I didn't have to justify why a 12-year-old was acting as an elder. We just acted as if that was normal because it should be.



@Johanna  
Wow.

@Lisa  
Right. And how is she going to grow up with her sense of herself as a Quaker, if that's how she's treated? And if all of us who are older engage our sense of ourselves if that's how we're expected to act?

@Johanna  
And when we make equality real that way, we demonstrate that the preparation and the reflection are not punishment.

@Lisa  
No. They're gifts.

@Johanna  
They're awesome. They're support. They're enlivening. Right?

@Lisa  
Yes. Yes.

@Johanna  
But when we make a culture where reflection only happens after a *bad* thing, then it's punishment.

@Lisa  
Right. Or even when you're powerful, you're othered. Like saying, no, no.

@Johanna  
We need some open lines of communication in order to step into that reflection. Right now, we don't have the set-up for that in a lot of spaces. I heard from a Quaker in my quarter, who was born Quaker, and when they asked for a clearness committee for membership, it really came up shy. The person told me, "We talked about my college the whole time." The process really did some harm. And this person is in their sixties now, and they still remember that. Because people assumed that they would just grow up in the meeting and everything was gravy. "You're gonna be Quaker. You said you wanted to be." There was no investigation, because there wasn't a culture of preparation and reflection for all.

@Lisa  
Yeah. And challenge.



@Johanna

Yeah. Think about how much they could've grown in that moment if someone had really challenged them to step forward with integrity?

@Lisa

If you're going to bring a message, I actually want to challenge you about it. Not to undersell you, but to actually lift up the best of what you have. I'm a better person when people challenge me. Right? And it goes back to that passivity thing we were talking about. If you just threw softball questions at me in this interview, this would be a totally nicey-nice conversation, but it wouldn't get to the real stuff.

@Johanna

Yes. Are you a teacher by any chance, Lisa?

@Lisa

Yes.

@Johanna

That makes sense. We talked to somebody a month or two ago who said, "I think that the best allies in my meeting and yearly meeting are teachers or former teachers." Those were the people they saw lifting up voices in the community.

@Lisa

Well, I think teachers, nurses, physical therapists, and many other professions – I think that for people whose job it is to pay attention to someone else's process, there's an orientation going on. The orientation is looking at someone else's process for growth and how I can support it. That's what the practice is – being invested in what's the growth needed and how do we help facilitate that. But again, I think that's what Quakers as a body are supposed to do. Right? We're not supposed to stay physically, spiritually stagnant.

@JT

Yeah. When you said that, I thought, "Well, we all need to learn that."

@Lisa

Right.

@JT

Even those of us who aren't really inclined to that orientation to begin with. Maybe especially those. But that sensitivity to the fact that there is someone else's process going on. And, like you said in response to my recalling that joke about sitting in someone else's chair – there are a lot of different possible meanings to that behavior.



@Lisa  
Right.

@JT

And I don't always – it's like we need to be – we need to have practice into asking those questions of ourselves and each other and being trusting that we can hear the answers and work with them.

@Lisa

Right. Right.

@JT

And how do we –

@Lisa

Yeah. Because then maybe my job, if I have care of meeting, is I make sure your seat is available for you because I know that helps you stay present.

Like I think about people who are on the autism spectrum where routine is really important. I think about people with limited mobility or vision where being able to get to a particular seat is what's accessible. There are so many, many reasons. And how do we then hold that as community care?

I was part of a group with someone who was diabetic and was giving an announcement to the group. They were speaking differently than they usually did. It was clear to me that their insulin or sugar levels were way off, because they were having trouble forming words. And nobody was doing anything. And I just got up, and I went to the person, and I said, "I think you need to eat something or check your levels." And they looked at me, and I said it again, and then they sat down and did their test strip and immediately put food in their mouth and, five minutes later, they were fine.

And that requires knowing each other well enough to know what the thing is. This was somebody who often did test strips in our group meetings, so I knew that inviting that in public was going to be okay. I wasn't disclosing private medical information. And nobody else in the group ever moved. And I was like – there were many other longtime members of this group, and this is awkward, but again, maybe that kind of white-polite quiet was happening? Versus saying, "Oh. Somebody's actually having a medical need. And for this person, making a longer announcement is not going to be healthy. Let's interrupt here." And the results of it is, for everybody else who didn't know what was going on, intervening made a very awkward and potentially distressing situation be like: "Oh, that makes total sense. Cool, there's care happening. And now none of us have to worry."



And I've seen that several times when somebody in meeting has had a seizure or is someone who is neurodivergent and interacts with the world differently than whatever the mainstream norm is, and when there's not context and when people don't engage to make things accessible, it's awkward for everybody. And then what it communicates to other people who have some aspect of that reality in themselves or their family, be like "Oh. There's not space for me here."

There was a man in the meeting I grew up in who was on the Autism spectrum and had worked really hard to figure out how to socialize, and at one point my dad had thrown his back out and came to meeting. And the way that he could do meeting for worship that day was to lie on the floor. And this guy walked in, in the middle of meeting for worship, and he goes, "Why does he get to lie down?!?"

And because we all had context, I was like, "Oh, my dad hurt his back, and this is going to help him worship." I said, "You can lie down too if you want." And he goes, "Really?" I was like, "Yeah. Do you want me to lie down with you?" And he's like, "Yeah. Sure." So the three of us were lying on the floor for meeting for worship. Right? And it was public, like "Oh. This is how we normalize difference. Ask, explain, be with, move, like this. Just do it."

@Johanna

Wow. "Ask, explain, be with, do." So simple. And yet it's so hard for us to explain why we're doing things sometimes.

@Lisa

Right. Right.

@Johanna

Ask. "Do you have a need?" Really hard for us to admit someone else might have a need when we'd all like to pretend they don't.

@Lisa

Right. Right. And I lose nothing by lying on the floor on meeting for a Sunday. You know what I mean? That's not a big step for me to take.

@Johanna

It's sometimes where I'd rather be than in my chair!

@Lisa

Right. Right. And why can't you be? That's my question because, to me, there's nothing wrong with lying on the floor or standing during meeting for worship. I appreciate that we don't have a lot of comings and goings and physical movements that I think could be a distraction to the way we worship, but if you're more centered on the floor, that already improves the quality of my meeting for worship. Right? It doesn't take away from it.



But that's, again, that investment that your spiritual experience and my reality are linked. Your reality is somehow linked to mine when we're in corporate worship together, which I feel like sometimes we forget.

@JT

Hmm. Why do you feel like we forget that?

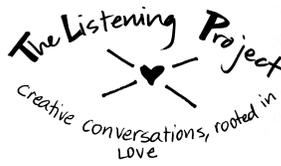
@Lisa

I think for some of the reasons we've been talking about, because maybe something in your reality is challenging for me, so it's easier for me to not pay attention to it. Or if we'd have to engage in some conflict about it, and I'm overwhelmed and exhausted with my own reality and don't have a lot of space for someone else's right now. Or, I know times in my life I've been like, "Let me just go –" particularly when my son was young, as a single parent, I was like "I actually get 45 minutes in my week to just be still and to be quiet." I don't even know how to explain, when you constantly have a body on you and your day job is teaching teenagers in a high-intensity space, what it is to have 45 minutes. That wasn't always meeting for worship for me. That was literally like "I can actually breathe fully."

And so there were moments there where I wasn't invested in anyone else's spiritual reality because I was in such a state of, "All right, can I make it through tomorrow?" My list was this long, and I only ever got a portion of it done on a given day. Or like when both my parents were super sick, I wanted to have care for other people in my meeting, but I was pushed so past my capacity to take care of other people around intense stuff that I don't even – I think I didn't even hear some of the messages that were given from someone standing next to me because I so just needed a space of respite.

And I think that's okay. Right? We can't all be in that space, but in a functional community, we get to be in those spaces when we need to be in those spaces. Or I experienced a really intense trauma at my job and I think for the next month, all I needed to do was sit in meeting for worship and cry. And people knew what was going on. And I said, "You can put your arm around me or just let me be, but I just need a space to process the trauma that I experienced that isn't about talking and isn't about rationalizing but is just sitting with the grief of what happened." And I want our spiritual communities to be places where people can show up and do that and we also know how to say, "Do you want us to just let you cry? Do you want us to physically embrace you? Do you want two people to leave with you and process with you? Whatever you need."

That, to me, is what a really functioning community can hold. It can hold all those things, because there's enough of it at any one time that people can get what they need. And not everybody is in a needy space so some people can offer some of the time. Or maybe what I can give is what you need, and what you can give us what he needs, and it moves that way.



@Johanna

That is true. All of those are powerful examples. They remind me of a question that I have. It is – well, it might be just for me personally. But do you think meeting for worship is an okay place to sob openly? As in, like, deeply? Because I'm really not sure myself.

@Lisa

I think about that question in a bunch of different ways. My first answer is, "Of course. Yes." Anytime we're denying our feelings or our lived reality, we can't be fully open to Spirit, because Spirit wants to be with us in our full reality. When we cut pieces of ourselves off, we're denying aspects of that. And when I think of like full-on sobbing, the other piece I think of is, in a room full of people, people need some context to hold that. It can be triggering for some people, because sobbing might mean that somebody has been hit or somebody is unsafe and I will be unsafe soon. And so, that's like saying what I did at my meeting. "I'm just gonna cry in meeting for worship. You can come put your arm around me –" I mean I wasn't doing the full-on sobbing, but the tears were streaming down. I was like, "You can put your arm around me, but this is what I need."

So I let people know what I need. I told people what was happening with me, and they knew what had happened at my job. I let them know how they could offer care for me in a way that I could receive. I told them they could also pray for me.

And I think the other piece that is, when we have big expressions of emotions, the extent to which we can invite people to be with us in that, it makes the emotion okay. Because if you're sobbing uncontrollably across the room and I have no context and I don't see anybody doing anything, that, to me, feels very scary.

@Johanna

Yeah. That would be scary. Yeah.

@Lisa

But if you start sobbing and a Friend stands up and said, "We're going to hold Friend Johanna today, and a bunch of us are talking with her about what's going on, and you're welcome to pray for her, or do your worship as you want," then I know it's okay.

@Johanna

Yeah. That makes sense. That feels right.

@Lisa

Right. Because then I know that I don't have to take on your stuff. And if it was going to be a lot to let out, maybe that person also says, "If you need a quiet worship space, we've opened the fellowship room for Friends who want that too."



@Johanna

Right. Or they've opened a separate space and invited me into it. That's cool. That sounds like leadership to me.

@Lisa

In our group, Three Rivers has only met virtually, because we've only been meeting since the pandemic. But there are two ways – well, actually three ways that I think we do that kind of care. One is, we always have someone who can move into a breakout room for pastoral care during worship if somebody needs that. And one time when that happened, I met with the person, and they were clear they just needed to cry in meeting for worship. And so when we came back into the big room, first of all, everybody knew I had gone to pastoral care with them because we were a small enough group. And I said, "I'm going to invite us to pray for our Friend while they just process some of their feelings." And then everyone's like, "Yes. Praying for you."

And so instead of this weird awkward experience, the person received one-on-one care and then the whole meeting was praying for them. And they could be witnessed in the way they wanted to be. Right?

@Johanna

Yeah!

@Lisa

And another time, the prepared message – often, we have a prepared message, and then we move to breakout rooms for a few minutes where people can share prayer requests so we have a point of connection before we go into waiting worship. And the message that day, it felt so big and, I think, it felt like it landed large not just with me, but for other people, too. So I said, "If you want to go into breakout rooms to share prayer requests, you can do that. And if you just want to sit here and just hold this Message, you can do that too." And I hadn't cleared that with anybody else who had care of worship with me, but because we start from a culture of Yes, because we trust each other, because we're into experimenting, I could change up the worship service from what we had agreed to in the moment and know that that would be okay.

And then the third time I think about it is there were two messages in worship that used the light-good, dark-bad metaphor in a way that I noticed. They weren't talking about race explicitly, but it felt like it was falling into that sort of racist trope where anything dark or black is bad. And because we're really committed to not perpetuating patterns of oppression, the person who had care of meeting interrupted meeting for worship and lifted this up. Then they invited friends to use different metaphors. And the next two or three messages continued on the same theme as the first messages, but shifted away from this light-good, dark-bad metaphor.



And at the rise of meeting the two people who had given the original messages expressed their gratitude for that reframing. So instead of anybody feeling shamed, instead of people being angry that meeting for worship had been interrupted, instead of people being upset that the rule of "you don't ever respond to specific ministry" had been put on pause, instead we had community healing. We have some shared values as a community, and the person who had care of meeting was very skillful. They could name what they were doing and why they were doing it, and all of us could hold it as that being ministry too. That was how we step into ministry together, and that is how we step into our values together. Nobody is wrong for saying something, but sometimes we need to course-correct in how we are talking as a group.

That experience, to me, was so powerful, because I had never seen that in Quaker meeting for worship before, except when I had done it and then been kicked out of the space for doing so. Yeah. At that time, I was in a worship-sharing group, in a workshop around racism and meetings. And the person who spoke before me was a white person who shared about being unable to tell two people of a different race apart from each other. And I invited them to consider those two people as individual people as opposed to a representative a whole racial group. And I was told, "You can't talk back in worship sharing," and was asked to leave.

Then I said, "But wait, wait, wait. I thought we were supposed to be addressing racism. And I heard somebody struggling with something that I have some insight into." And I got booted out. That was what happened. And so here, to have the opposite experience of being committed to each other, it's very different. The thing that we're committed to is bigger than our individual egos or our need to be seen a certain way. That, to me, is Quakerism.

@Johanna  
Mm-hmm.

@Lisa  
But not what I can find a lot in other spaces to practice.

@JT  
It's helpful for me to hear you describe the work at Three Rivers. I feel like I'm seeing behind the scenes a little bit. I was, I think, at two out of the three instances that you mentioned. And I've told Johanna and some other people how consistently powerful the Three Rivers worship is for me, but I haven't seen clearly all the reasons why, which you've now been able to lay out much more clearly for me.

There's a very clear set of core guiding principles and a predictable set of practices at Three Rivers, but we are always open to what is present and responding to that with a lot of trust and love. I trust the way we come together as a community for this kind of event.



@Lisa

Right. And very little of that is structure. A lot of that is culture and intentionality. And I see, in a lot of Quaker spaces, we hold up structure or practice as the thing that will help us get "there" without always examining what the culture is that's been overlaid. Like one activity I have done in workshops for decades now with Friends that are – with groups that are interested in looking at white supremacy and racism is I say, on a flip chart, "What are all the Quaker things we do? We sit in circles. We don't use titles. Like boom, boom, boom. Potlucks, you know, people will tell you what's vegan, what's gluten free, you know." So all the things. And then I say, "Which of these – we avoid conflict. We're polite. We don't show big emotions. Which of these come from our theology? And which of these come from mainstream or white supremacy culture?"

And then we tear apart that list into those two groups, and it is – every time I've done it, it's been a profound moment. Again, this is mostly for white Friends, because I think BIPOC Friends live with a much deeper awareness of how pervasive white supremacy is among Quakers in general. But it's a profound moment for white Friends to see how much of what we do that is not based in our theology. Instead, those actions are often about mainstream or white supremacist culture, or the middle class culture, or the academic culture, or whatever the dominant group culture is that has infiltrated us. And in those activities, in the workshop, I've had people just say, "But I don't want to give that up." And I'm like, "Okay. That's really important to recognize. And that, we've got to deal with."

And very often I'm like, "Why are we doing these things? They don't represent what we're about." And yet we do them over and over and over again. We say that that's Quaker. And that, to me, is part of that noticing what the patterns are. What have we assumed is Quaker that is not actually Quaker? There is nothing in our theology that says that we should avoid conflict. If anything, our theology says, 'Get right in there. Engage with people in a loving way, in a compassionate way, in a way that seeks to repair.: But there is nothing in our theology that says to avoid conflict or act from a place of fear or to avoid speaking up.

@Johanna

Or cover, cover your need.

@Lisa

Or don't say why you're worried about being excluded. Nothing in our theology says, "Don't express your need as something that could actually get accommodated in an appropriate way. Don't hear somebody else's need as something you need to work to meet as a body," even if it means introducing microphones to your otherwise technology-free meeting room so everyone can hear.

This talk about reopening, we could talk about how virtual meeting for worship made meeting for worship accessible to many, many people for whom it was not previously accessible. Let's hold the both-and of that reality. Some people need to be back in person,



and some people need virtual space. And we are a smart enough, creative enough, Spirit-led group of people that we can figure out how to address these different needs. Or if not, any three of our middle school students can. The adults might get stuck, but the kids will be like, "All right. Here's how you do it. This is not such a big deal."

@JT

Speaking of kids –

@Lisa

Yeah, I need to –

@JT

– I peeked at the time, and I was rather shocked to see how late it was. I feel like we could go on for a good while longer. But I want to be sure that we attend to the other needs that might be out there.

@Lisa

Yeah. I gotta walk out the door in three minutes.

@Johanna

Okay. Do you want to take your silence on the run? We can hold you when you go.

*[We agree to hold Lisa in prayer, while she heads out to pick up kids. We plan to meet again, continuing the conversation on another day.]*

@Lisa

I so appreciate this. I love talking with both of you. Thank you.

@JT

Thank you, too.



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*For more information on Lisa's ministry, see either of her articles in Friends Journal: "[Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness](#)" (April 2020) or "[Gender, Sexuality, and Our Bodies](#)" (May 2016). Lisa was a plenary speaker at Friends General Conference in 2021. A slide deck on her speech, "[Sacred Vessels: Quaker Practices for Holding Us All](#)," is available online.*