

An Epistle to New York City Quakers in the time of COVID-19

Dear Members and Attenders of New York Quarterly Meeting,

For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven: . . .

A time to weep, and a time to laugh;

A time to mourn, and a time to dance;. . .

A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing (Ecc 3: 1-5)

We are in an extremely difficult time now. As Friends we have never held ourselves back from being of service when service is needed, and we can see all around us how much service is currently needed. Unemployment is mounting, food pantries are being overwhelmed with requests, and hospitals are fully inundated with patients suffering from COVID-19, which makes caring for all the other illnesses that much more difficult. What can we do to help?

Beth Kelly, Co-Clerk of the New York Quarterly Meeting Ministry & Counsel Committee, is a chaplain in one of those hospitals. She has seen the suffering that is happening, not only because of the painful deaths due to the virus, but because of the pain of families who can't be in the room to comfort their dying loved ones, and because of the pain of not being able to perform acts of religious service to the dead. Overwhelmed doctors, nurses, healthcare staff struggle with their inability to sooth the sick and dying.

What can we as Friends do at a time like this? The first step in deciding how to help is to ask those in need what it is that they need from us. Our desire to be of service must meet the needs of those who need us, not meet our need to serve. Beth and the medical community have one major request of us; Do not get sick. What they need most is space and time to care for those who are already infected.

Our first act of service, then, which is in keeping with our Testimony of Simplicity, is to stay home and not get infected and/or not spread the infection to others. Physically distancing ourselves (“a time to refrain from embracing”) is the best protection against infection. Since we can transmit the virus even without symptoms, physical distancing protects us from getting it, but also protects others from us, should we, unknowingly, already be infected. Visit the [CDC](#) website for information about risk reduction during the pandemic.

Our second act of service is one of the things we do best. Worship. Let us take time in our day to center down and connect with the Divine. Let us hold our healthcare and other vital workers (the grocery clerks, pharmacists, delivery people among many others) in the Light. Allow the Love of God to suffuse us and expand to all the suffering around us. When interacting with them, let them know how much we appreciate all they do for the rest of us. We must hold the world in a loving embrace, while staying safely away from COVID-19.

Our third act of service can be reaching out to other Friends and friends who might need a kind word or a connection to another person. If you are at low risk for complications, you might ask if Friends at higher risk need something from outside their apartments that you could get for them. Keep them safe by leaving what they need outside their doors. Other acts of service can include donating to our Quarterly Relief Committee. Many members will be needing this help from the Quarter. Friends can

also donate money to local groups who are caring for those most in need, from food banks to homeless outreach groups to many other local charities.

Our Testimony of Integrity calls us to be mindful of the interconnectedness of our lives. We must take care of our physical selves (exercising as we are able, eating in a healthy manner), our intellectual selves (keeping our minds stimulated), and our spiritual selves (praying, worshipping, meditating). This will help us weather the chaos that is surrounding us.

Remember, Friends, the world needs both Mary and Martha. Right now, for those of us who are not called to be Mary (tending to the sick and dying) it is important to be Martha, sitting at Jesus's feet, holding those who are suffering in Divine Light, while not adding to their burden by becoming sick ourselves.

If you are in need yourself, spiritual or physical, please reach out to us and we will put you together with your pastoral care committee at info@nycquakers.org

In Light,

Beth Kelly and Steven Monroe Smith
Co-Clerks: NYQM M&C Committee

Nancy Britton
Clerk: New York Quarterly Meeting

At Manhattan
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