

MEET THE Friends

by Paul Anderson

FRIENDS AND MINISTRY

Wherever men are true
ministers of Jesus Christ
it is from the operation of
the Spirit upon their
hearts, first purifying
them and thus giving
them a feeling sense for
the condition of others.

John Woolman

All we do is for the sake of worship, and all we do is for the sake of ministry. A gospel that is concerned only with the heavenly or the earthly needs of people is incomplete. The cross of Jesus Christ is both vertical and horizontal, and we are called to meet at the center of the two.

The astounding growth of the early Friends movement was due to its powerful ministry, and the source of its impact was then and is now the fact that vital ministry grows out of vital worship.

If life-transforming worship is the root of spiritual life, its fruit can be nothing short of a world-changing ministry. When one's life is touched by the "fire" of Jesus Christ, it cannot be contained. It must be shared with others or it grows cold. If you are a Christian, you are a minister. As followers of Jesus Christ, the question is not *if* we will minister, but *how*.

To this question Friends respond that true ministry is *universal* in its involvement, *inspired* in its empowerment, and *compassionate* in its character.

• To say that ministry is *universal* is to say that everyone is included in Christ's calling to serve. Friends believe that the distinction between laity and clergy is a false one, and that because Christ himself is our High Priest we have no need of an earthly intermediary. All are equal before God, and if we are indwelt by Christ, we become priests to one another. The universal ministry involves the priesthood of *all* believers, not just a few.

For this reason Friends regard women as ministers as well as men. History leaves no doubt that God has used women in powerful ways. In the seventeenth century a young woman by the name of Mary Fisher felt called of the Lord to witness to the Sultan of Turkey. Upon completing the long, dangerous trip she shared with bold clarity the news that Christ is come to teach His people himself.

Among the first of Quaker martyrs was Mary Dyer, who felt called of the Lord to witness against a policy that banned Quakers and others from Boston. She was sent away but returned on the next ship, only to be hanged in Boston Commons.

MEET THE FRIENDS SERIES

- ① Quaker Beginnings, ② Quaker Testimonies & Distinctives, ③ Friends and Worship, ④ Friends and Ministry, ⑤ Friends and Sacraments, ⑥ Friends as Peacemakers, ⑦ Friends and the Kingdom of God

Ministry and service are synonymous. Both involve the lifting of some human burden. The ministry to be done is too great to be limited to a handful, and the universal ministry involves us all.

• To say that ministry is *inspired* is to say that its power does not come from an office, position, or seminary degree. True ministry is empowered by the Holy Spirit. George Fox became disappointed with the clergy of his day because he felt they valued the prestige, security, and profit of their occupation more than a burning sense of God's calling in their lives. The Lord opened to him that "to be bred at Oxford and Cambridge" was not enough to make one a minister of Christ.

While Friends do recognize public ministry, ministers are not considered "clergy" with others regarded as "laity." The New Testament makes no such distinction, and neither do Friends. Christ alone is our priest, and while humans do not ordain (only God can) Friends do recognize that God uses some people in obvious ways; then, we record that God has given them certain gifts and abilities for ministering. This does not mean that "recorded" ministers have special access to God. It does mean their ordained gifts for public ministry are recognized and recorded by the community of faith.

Recording policies vary between yearly meetings, and some groups hold to the testimony that ministry must never be confused with a service done for hire. Although ministers from some unprogrammed meetings may be recorded, their subsistence comes from secular employment (as did the apostles). Other Friends feel that ones who are gifted and prepared for ministry should be released from having to be gainfully employed so that they can devote themselves entirely to serving human needs, unencumbered by lack of finances. This is very different from the idea of receiving payment for ministry, and the critical factor is whether or not it is done in the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Ministerial training may enhance inspired ministry, but it can never replace it. Nonetheless, a call to serve is a call also to prepare for service, and Friends have been instrumental in the founding of Bible colleges, liberal arts colleges, universities, and seminaries across America and around the world. Preparation and inspiration go hand-in-hand.

• To say that ministry is *compassionate* is to connect our service with the love of the one we serve. We serve because of the example of our Lord, who didn't just say "serve one another," but who embodied His command by washing the feet of His disciples.

In the nineteenth century Elizabeth Fry was moved with the compassion of Christ concerning the deplorable condition of prisoners. She began a prison ministry that brought hope and comfort to numerous inmates who had been forgotten by society. When Christ's Spirit is at work within our hearts we develop a "feeling sense" for the condition of others. Like Elizabeth Fry, we minister because we love, and because Jesus Christ first loved us.