

This week I came across an article that organizes what I felt Led to talk about this morning

Quaker Saying 5: Proceed As the Way Opens by Philip Gulley¹

In Sacred Compass, Brent Bill defines it this way...

To proceed as way opens means to wait for guidance, to avoid hasty judgment or action, to wait for future circumstances to help solve a problem. The spiritual guidance may come in a time of seeking or entirely unexpectedly, bringing a suggestion for previously unforeseen action.

Gulley suggests that we not force our way through life—determined to reach our goals

Sometime we fail to wait for our Guide in that determination to do what seems right

When way doesn't open soon enough, we bulldoze our way through acting hastily

And before all the pieces are in place to ensure a good outcome

It is a reminder that life has a rhythm, a cadence

Proceeding as way opens is not a call to be passive, but to be patient and let it season

To let something season is to wait and not take action until we feel clear

When there is an internal stop or barrier or the way has closed, we wait

To proceed as way opens is to believe God has a hope for our lives—a longing for us

And that we can know what it is and be obedient to it

It is to trust that when we're obedient, we can find way forward

To proceed as way opens is a call to patient discernment

NWYM couldn't wait for way to open—they took matters into their own hands and split the YM

NWYM lost hope that a way would open so they took it by force

The result has been a painful birth of a new YM

There has been loss/grief, anger, a sense of injustice

The forced birth created a vacuum—an empty hole without clear next steps

Within the vacuum there was lots of caution, pain, emotion, and fear—and hope

But no identified leadership—just a series of open gatherings

This is where we were when I left 2 weeks ago for pastor's conference and a meeting in Eugene

I felt a sense of urgency to get things moving

Felt Led to meet with other pastors leaving NWYM during pastor's conference—4 of us met

We agreed and set an agenda—welcome, worship, organizational issues, identity question

We decided to ask Jan to clerk, given that she led the Institute on Group Discernment

Jan reacted and said it was too much and could we talk

Before we could talk by phone, God gave her way forward and how to lead the group

I networked and all 4 of us said yes

We asked Tom Stave to be recording clerk

At Eugene 77 people from 17 Meetings registered their attendance—the count was 90 people

Included some from North Pacific YM, unaffiliated, and Worship Groups

Jan, Cecilie and I were present—Jan as clerk of the meeting

It was an excellent meeting—lots of energy for this new thing—good clerking helped us move

Began with significant worship—in the end we named an interim committee as a first step

But first, I want to take us back to centering in worship

¹ <http://www.philipgulley.com/quaker-sayings-5-proceed-as-the-way-opens/>

From the minutes... *We began a meeting for worship for the conduct of business. Jan invited us into a period of waiting worship. Jan described this worship experience as both spacious and disciplined—spacious to give room for learning, and disciplined on the basis of a covenant relationship with one another. When we enter the door we lay down our preconceptions, convictions, planned speeches—and take on a neutral space in the spirit of Christ, to align with the heart of Jesus. It's like shedding the garments that need to be shed, that encumber us, and take on the garment of Christ, that frees us. Whenever an organism experiences pain, the natural reaction is to resort to coping mechanisms, to change our behavior to protect itself, to protect itself from that pain ever happening again. We are being birthed out of woundedness and pain, and are vulnerable to resorting to these defenses. We need to release those we are angry at, hold in judgment, have wounded us—release them into the hands of Jesus.*

We so need this healing as we don't want to carry the DNA of our past to the future
We may have been birthed in trauma—but God is the great Healer
We can shed the past and take on Christ, who sets us free!

The meeting was good and excellent—there were lots of ideas and oodles of energy
We agreed to form an interim committee

2 persons from each of the 5 churches will meet together until YM this summer
Plan for parallel business sessions for the new YM plus other agenda as they discern
At that point, we will assess next steps in our process

I stepped down as a representative from here as we only can have 2—Jan and Cecilie

Won't begin work until May 21 when West Hills names their people on the committee
Folks volunteered for a Communication team, which has been hard at work
I am also on the NWYM Transition Team, which cares for legal and financial aspects

Afterwards—one person commented on the lack of understanding Quaker ways
...the large group tries to do Quaker process, only to feel that too many Friends speak "unseasoned" words that don't help the discernment.

Jan responded...

I understand where you are coming from—but I think Saturday's meeting was totally understandable.... Saturday was the very first time that folks had any opportunity to share in the gathered group about concrete action. I knew it would be messy and all over the place. Folks have been thinking, praying, creating, dreaming without any way for that to be channeled usefully. [Let's] see how this plays out after we have the consolidated mailing with total transparency to everyone and we get some basic systems in place.

I knew that we would be able to only accomplish one or two things given that we were corporately starting from a vacuum. ... it seemed to me that what was happening was a healthy--and messy--response to the first step of harnessing the Life and energy that in bursting out of the group. There were many subtexts in the room--and I think it was important to hear and feel them as a whole group--not just a small group. If I had been worried about things being "unseasoned" I could have put the brakes on and changed gears to fix that. I chose not to...

Then as the Communications team stumbled, Eric Muhr made this comment...

I think this is part of the fun, though. A little bit of chaos can be creative. It's also a decent sign that we have good engagement. Lots of cooks in the kitchen might mess up the meal from time to time. But it's good to be working together. Good to be in community.

I was reminded that part of our work in the creation of this new thing will be comfort with creativity
Creativity and ambiguity will be with us as we begin and sometimes it feels chaotic
A friend once told me that a leader, particularly as a Quaker, must create space and allow chaos

I love this creative energy that is flowing and the excitement people are bringing to it

As I was thinking about the new YM and all that is happening there, I was also drawn to our church
When I think of the call to “proceed as way opens” I am so reminded of North Seattle Friends Church
From the first question if we would ever sell to closing on property purchased for us
It has been a wild ride—but one of simply proceeding as way opens
In that I’ve been so aware of how God has cared for us
At every point where I was tempted to step in and force something, God was there!
Building—followed openings—and now we are closing on the new property tomorrow
Finances—next steps came as they were needed
Help, this is not sustainable! Followed by a loan from the Friends Church Extension Fund
Sale of the storefront building
NEST request to rent space for 2 years
We are a healthy gathering of folks, Listening to Christ our present teacher, finding way forward

God is weaving our unfolding!
We trust in God’s care and provision!
We proceed as way opens!