

# Sing and Rejoice: the Role of Song in Gatherings of Unprogrammed Friends

By Patricia Morrison

*Sing and rejoice, you children of the Day and of the Light. For the Lord is at work in this thick night of darkness that may be felt.*

— George Fox in an epistle, eleventh month, 1663

It's late morning and we're already drooping after approving the report on the previous year's budget and the accountant's approval of that budget, as we look forward to the rest of the morning discussing next year's budget. Our wise clerk suggests a break to sing number 260 in *Worship In Song*, "Here I Am, Lord". With a renewed sense of discipleship, we press on. What in that five minutes of song has so altered our spirits? As Friends who meet for worship in silence, what is the role of song in our gatherings? In our worship?

I was fortunate enough to spend the last school year at Pendle Hill, where we had the opportunity to sit in worship every morning. In only a half-hour each day, those gathered learned to sink into the silence and truly open to the Spirit speaking in themselves and others. Perhaps, as my consultant said, it was because we had so much opportunity to practice. If I made it to meeting five

days a week, that was two and a half weeks of meeting for worship on Sundays packed into a single week. As a result, worship was often rich and deep. And the Spirit seemed to move Friends to sing more frequently than I have ever experienced elsewhere. Songs came not only from the Quaker tradition, but also from Taizé and chant, from Gospel, and from other traditions worshippers had experienced.

During the winter and spring terms, I co-led a Taizé and chant worship one evening a week, which helped me sink down into a worshipful state and to be able to access it more readily throughout the following days. I call myself a spiritually forgetful person, which means that I need to be reminded to give thanks, to be reminded to follow instead of perpetually trying to have control. I even need to be reminded to be loving. This type of meditative song was the perfect reminder and one that showed up again and again when I needed it. A rhythm, rhyme, poetic turn of phrase or lovely melody can bring a message back to mind a dozen times a day. Spirit speaks in many ways.

My home meeting has an intergenerational meeting for wor-

ship once a month called Family Sunday. Recently, members and attenders have been sharing their spiritual journeys and I was invited to do the same. Because music has been such an integral part of my own journey, I punctuated my talk with group singing. Several members of the meeting expressed their appreciation by sharing how much they have been longing for music. One Friend even asked about programmed Quakerism and my experience with it while at Earlham College. Is our love for music a way to bridge our own divide and to build real f/Friendship?

At Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting, I was grateful to participate in a workshop led by Michael Birkel, on reading scripture with early Friends. In it, we discovered how deftly Friends used biblical imagery, especially during the period when they were heavily persecuted, to give one another comfort and strength. During this frightening time in which Friends are again called upon to be witness to the Third Way, the way of nonviolence, I would like to extend that support and encouragement through a song. So, Friends, wherever you are, please join with me in singing George Fox's hopeful epistle. □

"You elect the government and you support it with your taxes,  
a large percentage of which goes on weapons...

Is there any basic difference between me and each of you?"

— Sam Cummings, international arms dealer (as quoted by "Conscience, The Peace Tax Campaign", London, England)