

Bev Shepard Talks Dirty

YES, YOU READ THAT TITLE RIGHT, FRIENDS. I'm going to talk about the F-word. I know how we Quakers avoid that sort of unpleasantness, but all the same, I'm going to talk about it. What? No, no, no! Not THAT F-word! I know Faith is something much of the world feels really uncomfortable discussing in public, but Friends are actually pretty good at it. Oh, then you mean THAT F-word! No, not that one either. The truth is, Quakers are lots more comfortable talking about sex than about the word I mean. In fact, we avoid the word I'm talking about so gingerly that probably most of you may stop reading this article as soon as I tell you that the F-word I mean is "Finances".

Now, for those of you who are still reading, let me say that I don't like finances either. It's not just that money seems to have a rather soiled reputation (consider "filthy lucre", "money-grubbing", etc.), so that we feel somewhat — oh, I don't know — contaminated, maybe, if we talk about it very much. In addition, I just don't relate to finances very well. The world economy baffles me utterly and, as one brings it down to a more and more personal level, it just seems to get scarier without being any less confusing. So it's particularly ironic that I am now in two Friendly jobs (Clerk of Representative Meeting, and Administrative Director of Camp NeeKauNis) that require me to spend a lot of time thinking about finances. But there you are. Or there I am.

And since I'm there, I'd like to try to share with you some of the insights I've had about money and finances that help me relate both concepts more cleanly and faithfully to the things we believe and the work we do. Because frankly, Friends, unless we become a whole lot happier about thinking about these things and the place they can and do authentically hold in our corporate life, Canadian Yearly Meeting (CYM) is in deep trouble.

First of all, let me say that if I can write about this stuff, you can read it — because you can't like it any

less than I do. Yes, I still dislike dealing with finances. I'm getting used to it, but I still dislike it. However, I love the Religious Society of Friends, my spiritual home. And a home needs loving care and upkeep.

I like the metaphor of "spiritual home", but I think that if I proceed with it, I will become too involved in making it work and being clever. That's not how I need to spend my time and energy. What I need is to be direct and informative (not to mention pleading!) and do my best to make some very important points. This is critical for the life of Canadian Yearly Meeting.

Now, I know that there are many Friends who give scarcely a thought to Yearly Meeting. That's okay; the roots and strength and substance of Friends are in the Monthly Meetings, which deserve our primary attention.

You could get through your whole life without ever attending Yearly Meeting and be just fine (though I think you'd miss a lot of joy and excitement and spiritual depth and opportunities for learning and growth), but CYM is not just the annual sessions. One of the things about Friends that has

drawn many of us to Quakerism is the work that Quakers do in the world. Monthly Meetings do some of this work, but at the national and international levels most of it is done by our Yearly Meeting. I recently heard a Friend speak about the "ministry of money" — that is, letting the way you spend your money exemplify your beliefs and ideals. We believe that Quakers are doing God's work. And that costs money - our money.

If you're one of the Friends who aren't particularly interested in Yearly Meeting, then you're someone who needs to keep reading, because CYM is doing things for you that you're probably not even aware of, as well as some of which you are aware.

There's *The Canadian Friend*. It's our way of keeping in touch with each other across the country, expressing ourselves as Friends, and telling others what we're about. It's an excellent publication which can help our understanding and appreciation of our faith, and it

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goes to every Friendly household in CYM. It costs a lot more to produce than Meetings pay for their members' and attenders' subscriptions, but CYM makes up the difference because it's such a good thing for all of us to have. It's the same with the Quaker Pamphlet Series — thoughtful, well-written, carefully selected and lovingly edited, small books of Canadian Quaker thought on a wide range of subjects, from social activism to prayer to raising children. A wonderful resource, available to all of us, and requiring funds to keep happening. The Quaker Book Service is another valuable service to which we all have access and which requires money to maintain.

Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC) works in a multitude of ways — check out their quarterly *Quaker Concern* — to make our testimonies manifest in the world. CFSC does humanitarian and social justice work on our behalf, across the country and around the world. The Quaker International Affairs Programme in Ottawa gives Friends a voice on world issues in the capital, where Friends are respected despite our small numbers.

Each year, the Home Missions and Advancement Committee (HMAC) offers a scholarship for a Canadian Friend to attend a short course or conference at Pendle Hill, the Quaker study centre located near Philadelphia. It's a wonderful place — beautiful, peaceful, healing, and full of human and other resources for learning and growing — and it belongs to Quakers.

Our connections to other Quaker bodies and events are enabled by the Yearly Meeting. Delegates from CYM attended a peace conference arranged by Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) last January, where they were encouraged and empowered in their own peace work and gave a much-appreciated Canadian perspective to American Friends who struggle in an increasingly militaristic society. Every two years Young Friends (YFs) from 16 to 18 have the opportunity to participate in the Quaker Youth Pilgrimage — meeting YFs from other parts of the world and experiencing Quaker process, historical roots, and present work. This, too, is a project of FWCC.

Friends General Conference (FGC), another wider Quaker body, offers travelling ministers with programmes such as couple enrichment, ideas for First Day

School, prayer and simply meeting with Friends from many places. FGC also provides the annual Gathering, a week of incredible riches: art, music, dance, yoga, meditation, Quaker history, centering prayer, healing touch, etc., and in formats for all ages. FGC operates a bookstore, too, and sponsors mini-conferences on a wide range of topics.

Friends United Meeting (FUM) provides First Day curricula, sponsors meetings, publishes a Christian

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magazine and books, and helps us broaden our understanding of Quaker beliefs and practices.

Friends Committee on Unity with Nature (FCUN) speaks for Friends in many forums to uphold our testimony of the sacredness of Creation and our responsibility to live harmoniously with the rest of the beings on earth.

All these outside bodies which, make no mistake, provide substantial benefits to Canadian Friends, are supported by CYM in two ways: with representatives and with cash donations. Both have been reduced in the latest budget: fewer representatives, smaller donations. All our internal activities and committees have had to cut their spending as well.

The above is not meant to be a complete list of the ways in which CYM speaks for us, does our work in the world, and directly helps Friends in Canada. There's also Camp NeeKauNis, a treasure of natural beauty, community, and Quaker values, which offers bursaries to help Friends with fees or with travel from the east or west coast. There's other work in the world, such as the Quaker United Nations Offices in New York and Geneva, and now in Ottawa. There are Yearly Meeting committees whose work concerns our spiritual health, Quaker education, preserving our history, supervising employees, stewarding our resources, and finding the people to do all these tasks, and more. Of course, there are the Yearly Meeting sessions themselves: a rich and wondrous week (or more, if

you include the pre-CYM workshops) of worship, Bible study, special interest groups, singing, children's programmes, films, business meetings, good food, walks and swimming, dancing, meeting Friends from across the country, informal discussions... If you haven't attended CYM sessions, you're missing a lot!

What all Friends in Canada need to understand is that CYM is not a separate being from us — it is us. All the committees are made up of Friends from our own Monthly Meetings. Virtually all the work is done by Quakers — almost entirely as volunteers — who are part of Meetings across the country. All of us are welcome to take part in the Yearly Meeting sessions, and it would be truly nifty if more of us did!

The money that is necessary to support the work that is done for us and by us comes from us. This seems logical and right. The only trouble is that expenses keep going up, and YM income doesn't. We do our best to cut costs. Sometimes our best turns out to be painful, as when we cut representation and support to FGC and other bodies. But the truth is that expenses have been rising for centuries. That's the trend. In my lifetime the prices of most things have increased approximately ten-fold. So no matter how much we scrimp and curtail and do without, on the whole, expenses go up. Income, on the other hand, has been just about flat for years. This, Friends, does not work; with an arrangement like this, CYM is doomed.

I realise that not everyone's personal income keeps going up. In fact, at about the time many of us become most knowledgeable about and committed to our Quaker faith, we retire and our income may take a dive or go flat. Yet many of us are still on the upward part of the income curve and, on the whole, as a national or worldwide trend, people make more money all the time, just as things cost more all the time. (I think it's called inflation, but I told you I wasn't much good at this.) Unfortunately, that correspondence isn't true for Yearly Meeting. Both donations from individuals and support by Monthly Meetings (which depend on donations from individuals) stay pretty much the

same from year to year, and that's what has to change.

Only a small portion of Quakers in Canada give anything at all to Yearly Meeting. You can think of it as a very Quakerly fee for service. Or you can think of it as an investment in your own life. Or — to return to the metaphor I abandoned at the beginning — you can think of it as home maintenance, our spiritual home, that is.

However you think of it, I hope you think of starting to donate to CYM, or, if you already do, of donating more. If you think you don't have more to give, I invite us to compare our "return on investment" in our faith community to that for other things we may spend our money on: cable TV? a second car? potato chips? We all need relaxation, transportation, the occasional treat — I know that; I just mean we need to take a clear look at where our money goes and what it does for us. CYM should be in that picture!

It's extremely difficult, as those who attended YM this summer learned, for our Finance Committee and Treasurer to prepare a budget when there seems to be,

among Canadian Friends in general, no long-term view. It's hard for them to plan for future years when most Friends don't seem to be thinking of the future of Yearly Meeting. Let's do it! Let's look to

our own future as caring Friends in a world that needs the Quaker approach. Let's support the work that we believe needs doing. Let's care for our own home. And let's do it now. As soon as you put down this issue, go get your chequebook and write a cheque to CYM. Better yet, fill out the form on the inside back cover and send it in to establish Pre-Authorized Chequing so that a little bit comes out of your account for CYM every month!

Yearly Meeting this year approved with *grief* (yes, that word is in the minutes) a budget that made unwelcome cuts, and we also minuted that we would do our best to increase donations so that some of the things that were cut could be reinstated. Whether that happens, and whether CYM has a future, depends on each one of us. ✨

Beverly Shepard is a member of Hamilton Monthly Meeting.

**Let's do it now! As soon as you
put down this issue...**
