At this moment in history, our shared call to ministry includes two active programs and two leadings to develop future program offerings:

**Contemplative Retreats**
First at Powell House in New York, and later at locations in North Carolina, Wisconsin, Michigan and Virginia, the School of the Spirit Ministry has for over 15 years been offering contemplative long-weekends with expectant, active, shared and solitary silence enhanced by readings, indoor and outdoor movement and small groups for reflecting on queries. Participants tell us they come away refreshed in body and soul from this deliberate time of retirement in service of connection with the Divine. Retreat leaders function as a guidance committee clerked by a governance board member; they recruit, select, mentor and recognize new retreat leaders. Current leaders and mentees include Linda Chidsey, Carolyn Moon, Roger Hansen, April Allison, Catherine Cox, Sharon Frame, Rita Wilcox, Thais Carr, Jim Herr and Cindi Herr. The program is conceived of as self-supporting — whether each individual retreat breaks even or not, the year’s calendar of retreat offerings usually does so. Leaders and mentees are considered “ministers” and join other teachers, leaders and governing board members at least annually in a retreat setting where we cultivate a sense of the ministry as a whole and recognize the different parts we each play.

Currently, the retreat leaders have developed and then offered publicly a first virtual one-day e-contemplative retreat, which gathers participants at the beginning and periodically during the day, and spends in-between times in individual “retreat” in people’s homes. More are planned for the duration of the pandemic.

**Participating in God’s Power**
In the fall of 2019, the first cohort of seekers convened for what was expected to be a four-residency, year-long exploration of ways we block faithful obedience to the summonings of Spirit that we find when we sink into contemplative depths. Living into the certainty that the Religious Society of Friends has a part to play in the development of the Kingdom of God, this program invites participants to renew their connection to the Divine and then open themselves more fully to taking up their part in the holy work to which they are called. Themes include: Deepening affirmation of ourselves as God’s Beloved … Opening awareness of the ways we make people “other” and separate ourselves from them … Healing the wounds to body, mind and spirit that have come from othering and being othered … and Practicing sustainable, fluid, resilient disciplines to hold a balanced life and ministry after the program ends. The development/teaching team is Angela York Crane and Christopher Sammond.

The COVID-10 pandemic has prevented scheduled third and fourth residencies from taking place in person, but participants and teachers have adapted robustly to invent on-line ways of
going deep together in order to complete the transformative arc that was begun in good faith nearly a year ago. A combination of half-day check-ins, monthly learning sessions, small group growth support work, and weekend “retreats” have been devised in ways that continue intimacy, commitment, learning and prayer. The program will continue through Martin Luther King and Memorial Day weekends in 2020, in hopes that public health requirements may ease enough to allow a final in-person closure weekend for those who choose to travel.

These two current program offerings fit into a larger set of programs/ministries the governing board feels led to develop. Our current two are represented in the graphic below in green. The programs in yellow (collectively “Faithful Meetings” work) move beyond individual spiritual formation to envision corporate spiritual formation of Quaker Meetings as a whole, and are our next development effort. The two halves of On Being A Spiritual Nurturer -- the program offering which has been the ministry’s mainstay over our thirty years of existence -- are currently on hiatus but expected to return as part of the individual>corporate spectrum.

Faithful Meetings
During a sabbatical year in 2020, undertaken to listen deeply for continuing guidance about the ministry’s future, the board received a clear call to expand the ministry’s focus beyond individual spiritual growth to address as well the growth of Meetings as spiritual communities. Listening
sessions brought us poignant testimony from young adult Quakers who told us their Meetings failed to accompany them as they experienced the Divine. This resonated with our experience over 11 classes of graduates of On Being a Spiritual Nurturer, many of whom struggled to find spiritual community in home Meetings. Reversing the image of seekers travelling to a teacher, the vision that came to us was that of taking teachers to a Meeting’s home site and working with them as a community. Later, as we recognized a Meeting’s need to develop its own ongoing leaders, we shifted to thinking of the teachers as facilitators developing the Meeting’s own core of spiritual leaders/elders.

We are now working to launch what will be essentially a three-part journey with a Meeting:

1) A Discernment process in which the Meeting comes to understand the invitation and to be transparent among themselves about whether their levels of individual commitment aggregate to a critical mass of willingness to grow together.

2) A Year One Rooted Meetings program (opening weekend retreat with a SotS facilitator, followed by monthly half-day virtual learning sessions and small-group formation work) to explore traditional Quaker practices of individual seeking and collective support and accountability.

3) A Year Two Fruitful Meetings program facilitated fully locally with SotS resource guides and materials (opening weekend, monthly half-day learning sessions, small-group formation work, and monthly service “experiments” designed to give the Meeting a collective sense of how its gifts match its community’s needs)

On Being a Spiritual Nurturer
The individual-level work of transformation that has been a hallmark of the ministry’s core offering through eleven cycles is expected to continue after its current hiatus to allow revisioning and restructuring. Its next incarnation will likely conform to the 9-12 month framework that is proving more workable for recruitment, and it may also take advantage of learnings about the potential for virtual gathering that we’re growing into in the current pandemic’s “refiner’s fire.” Our small governing board hasn’t the capacity to re-develop this program in parallel with our work on Participating in God’s Power and Faithful Meetings, but we continue to feel the strong call to supporting this work and expect to return to it.

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And finally, in addition to the outward facing program offerings at individual and corporate levels, this year of reflection has caused the board to recognize more explicitly that our work to sustain and invest in our own contemplative community -- graduates of our programs, emeritus board members and elders, teachers and leaders, the board itself as a spiritual entity -- is itself a ministry worthy of deliberate care and tending. We hold a vision of annual “ministers and elders” retreats where program learnings can cross-fertilize each other. And hold the hope (when in-person gatherings are again possible?) of open invitation to quarterly gatherings for Spiritual Renewal and Retreat.