

When I was growing up, my father would occasionally gather our family into the front parlor for a talk. It was never done casually, and was usually precipitated by some significant event or development. **One time, in the early 1970's, he'd been offered a major promotion which would have required a move to Ohio.** But he was reluctant to unilaterally impose that on the rest of us, so he let my four siblings and me vote on whether or not he should take the job. We voted 5-0 to stay. It's funny how things work out. **A few years later, the Comers moved in next door and I became a Quaker.** If we had moved to Ohio, we might have lived next door to Episcopalians. One never knows.

So we would have these family talks. Not often, but at important crossroads in our family life. Joan and I have done this with our sons. **We don't give them a vote, but we do listen carefully to what they have to say and weigh it in the equation.** Sometimes we just want to warn of a potential bump in the road up ahead—the death of someone we love, a job loss, a serious illness, a problem in our extended family.

In that same spirit, I wanted to take time this morning, while we are assembled together, to depart from my usual sermonizing and have a family talk.

It has been a sad week for our Fairfield family. Dick Givan, a member of our meeting for nearly 60 years, passed away on Tuesday morning, July 21st. **It is nearly impossible to overstate Dick's importance to our meeting.** Even though his poor health had precluded full involvement these past few years, his spirit was in full evidence. He was the best kind of church leader—cheerful, wise, thoughtful, and optimistic. **He led with a light touch, always sensitive to the feelings of others.** He was the best kind of church leader. And he was the best kind of friend—faithful, good-hearted, dependable, and generous.

Though they never claimed those titles, and would have mightily resisted if we had crowned them thus, Dick and Pauline Givan were our meeting's patriarch and matriarch. **They, perhaps more than any other couple in this meeting in the past fifty years, provided a tone and spirit so true and loving it transformed all who encountered them.** We were better humans, and better Quakers, because of them. We'll be honoring their lives tomorrow and Tuesday and invite you to join us.

I selfishly wish Dick Givan, as he was at the peak of his ability and skill, could be with us this Saturday at yearly meeting, when we meet to decide whether my recording as a Friend's pastor should be rescinded.

Since that can't happen, it will fall to us to emulate Dick's spirit and inject some kindness and wisdom into a process that has not always been kind and wise.

A woman from Indianapolis First Friends was speaking with me this week, and said, "I bet you're dreading having to go to yearly meeting." I said something, I can't remember what, but her remark caused me to reflect a bit more deeply about yearly meeting and the situation in which we find ourselves. **If I thought this ecclesial tempest were about me, I would be dreading it.** But I don't believe it's about me. I believe it is simply an extension of the same battle Christians have been struggling with since our earliest days. Can belief be compelled? Can a person be obligated to believe something about God and punished if he or she does not? What kind of church shall we be?

It is tempting, and would be easy, to condemn those with whom we disagree, but they are as sincerely Christian as we believe ourselves to be. **While I neither understand nor share the motivations and priorities of their religious faith, they just as likely neither understand nor share the motivation and priorities of my religious faith.** That is to say, each of us sincerely believe we are absolutely right and the other absolutely mistaken.

Now we are gathering in that venerable building, which has seen much good over the decades and also much sorrow, to determine, in no small measure, what kind of church Western Yearly Meeting will be.

I know many of you will be there. Many of you are passionate about this matter. **Because we are friends and because we love one another, your defense of me will be strong and vigorous.** Just as those who disagree with us will be similarly passionate. So threats will be met with more threats. **And so on and so on until words are spoken which will make compromise and reconciliation, at least in our generation, nearly impossible.**

Saturday will be a good day to remember what it means to be a Quaker. What it means to be a Quaker is this: that we listen carefully, to God and others; that we love deeply; and that we, as my friend Ray Stewart used to say, entertain the possibility we might be mistaken.

Frankly, my chief concern is not whether I will lose my recording. **That will in no way lessen my passion for or commitment to ministry.** Western Yearly Meeting did not give me gifts for ministry; Western Yearly Meeting can not take them away.

I am concerned however, that our conduct that day might establish a pattern for our own meeting, that if we meet force with force and are successful and our viewpoints carry the day, we will subconsciously learn that raising our voices and taking up verbal arms is the best way to resolve any differences we might one day have here.

I am also concerned that those of you who are newer to Quakerism might go and be discouraged, might come to believe that the more strident voices you hear are representative of all Quakers, and you will want nothing to do with Quakerism, either here or there. **I urge you to remember that while some Quakers are angry and bitter and reactionary, it has been my experience that many more are joyful and kind and thoughtful.** There are folks just like Dick Givan. They are in every Quaker meeting, they are well-represented in our yearly meeting, but because they are not loud, we tend to forget they too populate our Quaker family.

It's hard to know what Jesus would do in circumstances such as this one. **At times, the Bible indicates Jesus could be scathing when confronting the chief priests and Pharisees.** We don't know whether he was or not, only that the Bible tells he was. Though perhaps that was the bias of the writer showing through the text. So it's hard to know how Jesus would have acted.

But it isn't hard to know how Dick Givan would have acted. Dick would have listened. Dick would have been kind to all involved. **Dick would have spoken clearly and succinctly, but with charity toward all and malice toward none, to quote another wise Hoosier.** Whether I lose my recording is secondary to me. How we conduct ourselves in this struggle is paramount.

If I lose my recording on Saturday, I will still be your pastor on Sunday. Indeed, we will still gather on Sunday, in that same room, and worship with the very people who believe there should be no place for people like me among Friends. **But if we are kind, and if we are loving, they might win the battle, but we shall win the struggle.** For love always wins. Faith, hope, and love abide, these three...but the greatest of these is love. So let us love.

You know, the other day I was thinking how so much of Dick Givan's life as a judge was spent listening to contention and strong disagreement. **But it never seemed to embitter him, nor did it cause him to lose his confidence in the general goodness of humanity.** It did however, make him wise and gracious and willing to see both sides. So whether good or bad comes from this is our choice. Whether we leave ignorant or educated is our choice. Whether we leave angry or peaceful, or hateful or loving. It's all our choice. I pray we choose wisely.