“A BAD CASE OF THE HELPS”
and Other Discernment Class Discoveries

By Stephanie Crumley-Effinger ’81, Director of Supervised Ministry

“What form could public ministry take for a behind-the-scenes person like me?” This question and many others are engaged in ESR’s class Discernment of Calling and Gifts for Ministry. Currently the third course in the spiritual formation sequence1 in the Master of Divinity/Ministry program, Discernment was developed by Ann Miller in the early 90’s. Ann had seen the need for a course preceding the internship year to assist students who were uncertain about their gifts and calling. She realized there were also benefits for those who had a clear sense of direction.

Since beginning to teach Discernment in 2000, I have continued to develop the course by drawing on new resources and student feedback, while keeping the valuable framework which Ann established. This includes written reflection on texts and meeting in small groups. Students consider their gifts gained from experience, paid and volunteer work, their individual personalities, and from the Holy Spirit. They plan and meet with a committee for clearness to test their sense of gifts and calling.

“...They discover that discernment is more of an art than a science and that, rather than having any form of ministry prescribed for them, they will be challenged to increase their tolerance for ambiguity and offered spaciousness to listen for God’s direction.”
Many forms of ministry and gifts are found among ESR students and in the diverse ministries in which alumnae/i are serving. This is reflected in the seven emphases from which those in the residential program choose (and which more informally guide course choices for many students in the Access program): pastoral care, writing as ministry, Quaker public ministry, pastoral ministry, Christian spirituality, peace and justice, and leadership studies. To each of these one can apply the definition of ministry in a book read early in the course:

The core and essence of a sustained calling in the ministry is this: to learn more and more to listen, pray, live, and act on behalf of the life of God where it is at work and where it is imprisoned in your fellow human beings.

My trip to Cuba began with the surprising and unexpected announcement on December 31, 2014 by President Obama that the USA was restoring diplomatic relations that had been cut off for over 50 years. A hopeful sign I thought, and how timely. For the eleven days I was in Cuba I experienced a country that seemed frozen in time, yet a country that would soon be in the process of huge changes—hopefully changes for the better: greater freedom and resources for the Cuban people.

On January 1, 2015, I left Portland Oregon for Cuba to teach in the Cuban Quaker Institute of Peace (Instituto Cuáquero Cubano de Paz). After several hours of waiting in line among the dozens of Cuban strangers, I was thrilled to see a face I recognized, Benigno Sánchez-Eppler of New England Yearly Meeting, who was also coming to teach in the Institute (a course on early Quaker women).

I had no trouble getting through customs. Thankfully, my visa was waiting for me, as well as the Cuban Yearly Meeting van, which had been waiting patiently for hours for Benigno, me, and the dozen or so other Quaker Cubans returning from visiting relatives in Miami. We drove the one hour from Holguín in the darkness and arrived about 1:00am in Gibarra. I was greeted by Ramon Lingoria, the director of the Institute and pastor of the Gibarra Friends Church, and his wife Rosario, who pastors a new church plant in the “poor section” of Gibarra, as well as another North American, Pablo Stanfield, from Seattle, Washington, who was teaching the course in mediation at the Institute.

I had 14 classes of two hours each for six days, teaching on “Holiness: The Soul of Quakerism.” Cuban Quakers had all of the usual misunderstandings of holiness that American Quakers have (e.g., legalism and moralism), but I told them we would be exploring the deeper meaning of holiness as relational, mystical, and transformational.

Since I do not speak Spanish, I taught with an interpreter, named Richard, who was wonderfully competent and tireless. I am so grateful to Ramon and Pablo Stanfield (a linguist), who translated my slide presentations. I had 19 eager and engaged students with a nice gender balance of nine women and ten men, mainly pastors and leaders in the Cuban Friends churches. Some of them were seminary graduates, and several have been involved with FWCC and have travelled widely (rare opportunities for most Cubans).
While the Cuban people live under a communist government with a shortage of many resources and have experienced times of dire scarcity and political oppression, they are a resourceful and optimistic people with an indomitable spirit.

I returned to the United States after an experience even richer than I could have imagined, leaving a piece of my heart in Cuba. I discovered a country, a people, a culture, a church to fall in love with. The Cuban people are warm, affectionate, exuberant, and fun-loving. While they live under a communist government with a shortage of many resources and have experienced times of dire scarcity and political oppression, they are a resourceful and optimistic people with an indomitable spirit. One comment that captures their positive outlook is this response to an unexpected and challenging task: "We have a happy problem."

The students had a rigorous schedule. They began with worship at 7:30am. There were four classes each day from 8:00am to 6:10pm with an hour and a half break for lunch. They had to study each evening.

The Sunday before I left I had the opportunity to preach in the Gibarra Friends Church. A charming, self-confident 15 year-old girl named Danette, who hopes to be a pastor someday, was the worship leader. I was delighted to sense the egalitarianism of the Friends Churches in Cuba. In addition to making up the majority of the congregations, women are strong leaders, and young women have female models for ministry.

Cuban Quakers are evangelical in orientation, but they are not Fundamentalists (they were careful to make sure I understood the distinction), and they are theologially somewhat diverse. One young Quaker pastor told me he was a “Franciscan Quaker!” They emphasize peace and the other Quaker testimonies, but they are not (I was told) comfortable with silence. But they are fascinated with Quaker history and open to new perspectives.

I was expected to focus on peace and justice; in the course a gift to which he responded was that of apostle: drawing people in to establish Christian community.

Vivian Wyatt ’11 is Minister of Care and Business Administration at LifeJourney Church in Indianapolis. She came to seminary with the goal of becoming a chaplain. With her Discernment cleanness committee, Vivian was empowered to overcome her resistance to claiming gifts for congregational ministry.

Leading and accompanying students in the work of the Discernment course is a lively and blessed experience! Each person and story is different, and for each we seek to discern the next steps to take in exploring the calling and gifts which are emerging or deepening.

Notes:
1 FC 339 Discernment of Calling and Gifts for Ministry is preceded by FC 101 Spiritual Formation and Personal Practice, and FC 102 Spiritual Formation and Public Ministry.

“While the Cuban people live under a communist government with a shortage of many resources and have experienced times of dire scarcity and political oppression, they are a resourceful and optimistic people with an indomitable spirit.”
SPRING ’15 EVENT HIGHLIGHTS:

Spirituality Gathering
By Stephanie Crumley-Effinger, Director of Supervised Ministry

A centering and meditative time of worship, prepared and led by students from the class on Spiritual Formation and Public Ministry, opened the 2015 ESR Spirituality Gathering. Prayer, scripture readings interspersed with silence, reflective songs, and a closing responsive reading which began “Always present God, we ask for the breath of Your Spirit to fill us” drew attenders into the meaning and focus for the day.

Moving into the keynote presentation from Sister Mary Margaret Funk, reclaiming and re-appropriating ancient teachings from early Christian monastics was the starting point. Sister Meg, for 50+ years a Benedictine sister with our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove, Indiana, spoke and answered questions for over two hours with depth of knowledge, ready humor and, due to her many years of study and experience, without needing to refer to a single note. Before beginning her talk, Sister Meg played on the recorder the hymn “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent,” a musical call to spend time in silence in order to discern faithfully.

Noting that the word discernment comes from the Greek “diakrisis,” meaning “to sort,” Sister Meg urged her listeners to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, renouncing both harsh ideas about God and impulses against faithfulness. She emphasized the practice of sorting one’s thoughts in silent listening for the Spirit’s guidance and of seeking to distinguish from one another thoughts which come from God, from others, from ego/self, or from evil. Sister Meg affirmed that the Holy Spirit is the individual’s connection to the very breath of God present at creation, and the collective connection is the body of Christ, the Church.

Sister Meg described how her search for the sources behind the Rule of Benedict had led her to the ancient writings on which it was based and offered a whirlwind tour through historical traditions of understanding the Holy Spirit in both the Western and Eastern church. The monastics in late antiquity discovered and taught that one needs to go inside to listen to one’s heart, emphasizing that the person is not his/her thoughts. One needs to keep aware of one’s thoughts so as not to be ruled by them. She described “the anatomy of a thought,” how an unfaithful thought arising and capturing one’s attention can lead to action contrary to God if one does not examine it and let go of it. Differentiating helpful from problematic thoughts is key to discernment.

She outlined five steps for sorting thoughts: 1) asking the Holy Spirit for guidance; 2) trying on in one’s head a “virtual decision” and sorting the thoughts which arise as one considers it to see which are from God, from others, from ego/self, or from evil impulses; 3) asking for a confirming sign as to which direction is the faithful one; 4) making the decision which emerges through this process; 5) guarding against second guessing while continuing to ascertain the fruitfulness of the decision. Those gathered listened with rapt attention, asking questions at several points where Sister Meg paused to invite responses. And afterward much valuable discussion occurred over lunch, at breaks, and as people collected for workshops.

Participants’ experience was enhanced by the five valuable and varied workshops with topics ranging from “Singing the Psalms” to “Declutter with Discernment.” A lasting gift of the gathering is the recording made of the keynote talk, which is available at esr. earlham.edu/video-sg15, allowing people who were unable to attend to hear Sister Meg’s words for themselves and those who were present to listen again and let them sink in more deeply for further reflection and use.
Willson Lectures

By Lonnie Valentine, Trueblood Chair of Christian Thought

Our community was pleased that Diana Butler Bass came to visit us, presenting her work on “Finding the Spirit of God in the Spirit of the World” for the annual Willson lectures. The lectureship, established by Dr. and Mrs. J M. Willson, has sent distinguished scholars to our campus since 1967. Professor Bass connected her previous book, Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening, to her forthcoming work, Grounded: Finding the Spirit of God in the Spirit of the Age.

Her first lecture drew upon Christianity After Religion to describe changes in fundamental ways faith has been expressed in terms of “awakenings” throughout United States history. Awakenings occur when long-established ways of holding and expressing faith are in crisis for both individuals and institutions. The possibility that such awakenings hold is that new ways of being spiritual in church and world emerge. She contrasted awakenings with “revivals” that are seen as attempts to return, to revive, some way of being religious that are crumbling. Thus, where revivals seek to return to a past before the crisis, awakenings seek to work through the crisis by seeking new ways of being. Awakenings are hard in that people and social systems, including the church, must enter into a time of chaos before the way forward is clear.

In the second lecture we had a peek at what she is doing in her new book, Grounded. Here she began with her own story of seeking where her ancestors have been grounded, literally and figuratively, and finding that she has a deep connection to them. Happily for us, part of her heritage is Quaker, but you will have to read the book for that story. Her point is that we have become quite individualistic and disconnected from not only one another but the very earth from which we come and to which we return. Therefore, seeking to be grounded to the past in ways that give us strength and hope for a new awakening is what she sees we need. This means that church must go outdoors, get out of the institutional structures that have come to the end of their usefulness. Since God is creating in and with the whole world, we must seek a spirituality that grounds us to both God and the world.

What the Earlham School of Religion has been doing in recent years aligns very nicely with what Diana Butler Bass was presenting. We train for a variety of ministries, not just for the church; we require that students take courses in spiritual formation and see spirituality as the thread that connects our curriculum together; we have long-standing MDiv programs in spirituality and in peace and justice studies for equipping students for engaging in social change work with spirit; we have developed and now have a full-time faculty for our Ministry of Writing program; and we recently developed our new emphasis in Religious Leadership. ESR and the fine students who invest themselves in the possibility of awakening are embodying the ideas of these lectures.
In November, **Ben Brazil** attended the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in San Diego, CA, where he delivered a paper called “Making Fantasy Real: Youth Travel Culture and Alternative Realities in the 1960s and 1970s.” The paper grew from Ben’s dissertation, which focused on youth travel in the 1960s and 1970s as early practices of contemporary spirituality (in the “spiritual but not religious sense”). In May, Ben is partnering with Christian Peacemakers to lead a team of ESR and Bethany students to Colombia. As the centerpiece of an ESR contextual theology course, the two-week trip will help students think about what peace, justice, and other Christian ideals mean in a country with a long-running conflict. In mid-July, Ben heads to Phoenix, AZ, to plug ESR at Netroots Nation, a conference that brings together technology, communication, and social justice activism.

As Trueblood Chair of Christian Thought, **Lonnie Valentine** continues his work on “Quakers and the War Tax Concern: Unfinished Business?” He has now presented different aspects of his research at the annual Peace and Justice Studies conference, the Friends Association for Higher Education, the American Academy of Religion’s Quaker Studies group, and at the National War Tax Resistance gathering. The War Tax Resistance event was organized by Lonnie and held at ESR as part of the requirements of the Trueblood Chair. This is the first time that this conference has been hosted by a seminary. Lonnie is grateful for the loads of help from colleagues and students for making this conference happen!

In November, **Jay Marshall** visited Cuba as part of “People to People Exchange” with Grand Circle Foundation. In January, he accompanied his spouse, Judi, ESR students Theoneste Sentabire and Sam West, plus 2014 alumna Anna Woofenden to First Friends of Whittier, CA, where they participated in worship and a discussion of preparing ministers in a post-modern, emergent church environment. During April, he traveled to Philadelphia, PA, for conversations with donors and alumni/ae. In May, he will speak at Plainfield and Edward Hill Meetings, both of NCYM (FUM), during their respective Homecoming celebrations. His article, “Quaker Contributions to an Integration of Spirituality and Leadership,” was published in the Spring 2015 edition of the *Journal of Religious Leadership*.

On October 24-25, **Carole Spencer** led a workshop on “Images of God” at the Quaker Hill Conference Center in Richmond, IN. In November, Carole presented a paper at the Quaker Theological Discussion Group at the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature in San Diego, CA. The paper was titled, “James Nayler and Jacob Boehme’s The Way to Christ.” She also presided at the Quaker Studies Group of the AAR in January. From January 1-14, Carole was in Cuba. (See related article on page 2.) In February, while on sabbatical, Carole taught adult “theology” class at The Pearl Church, an “emerging church” in Portland, OR, on the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi. She also was guest lecturer in a Christian history class at George Fox Evangelical Seminary in Portland, OR, teaching on “George Fox, Margaret Fell, and early Quaker history” and preached a sermon at Reedwood Friends Church in Portland, OR. In March, she preached at Camas Friends Church in Camas, WA. She was also in San Pedro, CA, with ESR student, Travis Etling, to conduct interviews with leaders and friends of The Garden Church, an alternative church founded by ESR alumna, Anna Woofenden. This trip is part of a larger study on alternative ministries funded by an ESR Lilly Grant. From April 8-May 13, while on sabbatical, she is the Scholar-in-Residence at Reedwood Friends Church in Portland, OR. She will teach two six-week classes, one on “Images of God” and one on “Loyal Radicals: Quaker Women as Agents of Transformation in Nineteenth-Century North America.”

**Steve Angell** traveled to Berkeley Friends Church in Berkeley, CA, to deliver a workshop for its Quaker Heritage Days on the subject of “Reading Helen Morgan Brooks and Howard Thurman after Ferguson” in February. ESR alumnus Brian Young is pastor of the Berkeley Friends Church. Steve also brought the message on February 22. Along with Abbey Pratt-Harrington (ESR alumna), and Mark Cannon (current ESR student), Steve visited with the
Friends of Jesus Fellowship at their Spring Gathering at the Friends Center in Barnesville, OH, in March.

ESR Supervised Ministry Director Stephanie Crumley-Effinger traveled from cold and snowy Richmond to cold and snowy Santa Fe, NM, in late January for the biennial conference of the Association for Theological Field Educators. She appreciated the opportunity to exchange ideas, learn, discuss, and worship with colleagues at seminaries throughout the US and Canada, and a few from farther afield as well. Especially useful was a workshop with others who, like ESR, use on-line and/or videoconferencing formats to connect with and teach students in distance education programs similar to ESR Access.

Late winter and spring find Stephanie visiting current students to experience, witness, and discuss their internship work. Stephanie’s distance visits this year were with Pam Kittredge in western Massachusetts, whose internship includes writing about nature and spirituality (you can see Pam’s blog at graniteandspruce.com) and leading a group on writing one’s personal history, and Lynn Domina in Delhi, NY, who is both leading groups on writing and spirituality and integrating these in her own writing projects (to subscribe to Lynn’s monthly newsletter on writing and spirituality, contact her at lynnndomina@gmail.com.) Nearby visits are with Jason Griffith in Indianapolis, IN, (interviewing LGBT people and writing their stories), Simon Thiongo (assisting Phil Baisley at Williamsburg Meeting and exploring farming and spirituality with area farmers), and Janie Brewer (serving as a hospital chaplain in a residency in Kettering, OH. The Supervised Ministry Seminar gathers these students and Stephanie weekly via ESR’s use of AdobeConnect videoconferencing technology to discuss ministry incidents written by the students and occasional guest presenters. A recent guest at class was Summer Cushman ’10, who lives in Bellingham, WA, and whose ministry integrates spiritual direction and yoga.

While on the east coast, Stephanie also spent a morning with alumna Jennie Isbell ’06, spiritual director, writer and retreat-leader, whose new book Finding God in the Verbs, was co-written with Brent Bill ’81. Jennie and Stephanie had a lively time catching up and discussing ways to support connections among ESR students and alumni/ae called to “entrepreneurial” ministries (not rooted in traditional settings of churches or other organizations, such as she and Summer are doing).

Nancy Bowen checked in over lunch with ESR alumnus Rob Pierson on a trip to Albuquerque, NM, in February. Through connections with ESR alumnus Tyler Connoley and a former ESR Access student, Rock Fremont, she was invited to be the speaker for the Lay Academy of the Southwest Conference of the United Church of Christ in Phoenix, AZ, on February 20–21. Nancy had a paper proposal accepted for the International SBL meeting this coming July in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The topic is on Jewish Funerary Inscriptions in Greco-Roman Egypt and Wisdom of Solomon.

Earlham School of Religion acknowledges its gratitude to Ruth Esther Durham, a longtime donor of ESR who died in April 2012. Years earlier she established a scholarship in memory of her son, Earl, who died in a plane crash before graduating college. During one visit with Dean Jay Marshall a few years ago, Ruth Esther inquired about the principle value of the Durham Scholarship. The answer caused a brightening of her face and a twinkle in her eyes, along with the response, “I never would have thought my support would amount to so much!”

The truth of the matter is that her support amounted to much, much more! In March of this year, ESR received a bequest gift from her estate worth slightly more than $1,000,000. Such news leads to celebrations, to be sure; but it is also a sobering reminder of how deeply Friends trust in our work that heightens our sense of responsibility to be faithful stewards of that trust.

NEW PUBLICATION

Finding God in the Verbs: Crafting a Fresh Language of Prayer by Jennie Isbell (’07) and J. Brent Bill (’80)

If you have experienced a similar longing, come join the authors on this prayer journey into the deep waters of the Spirit. This book offers companionship and guidance as you begin to notice, consider and deepen your prayer experiences, with refreshing exercises sprinkled through every chapter to offer you a fresh language for prayer. Find God here—in the nouns and the verbs of your conversation.

www.ivpress.com/cgi-ivpress/book.pl/code=9718

COMING UP @ ESR

3rd Annual Quaker College Leadership Gathering
August 13-14, 2015

Leadership Conference
August 14-16, 2015

Transformational Leadership and the Prophetic Witness
Plenary Speakers: Joyce Schroeder and Jay Marshall

Pastors Conference
October 5, 2015
Bivocational Ministry

Ministry of Writing Colloquium
November 6-7, 2015
Words Made Flesh: Creative Writing, Creative Ministry
I never anticipated serving as dean of a graduate school. I laughed when others approached me to ask if I intended to apply for the position at ESR, thinking they were joking. When I daydreamed about a future, neither administration nor committee meetings, both of which are plentiful in this work, played significant roles in my imaginative scenarios. Enough people asked the question that I realized I should give it some consideration. A clearness committee helped me to realize that such a thing was a thinkable thought. Further discernment led to an application. Seventeen years later, while I am still surprised at how life turned out, I am grateful for Friends who helped me be attentive to how ministry was unfolding.

On occasion, I am asked why Friends have a seminary anyway. For many the word seminary evokes the image of a cookie-cutter educational industry that produces uniform ministers fit for service within a church congregation. Friends who do not utilize the services of a pastoral minister would not, rightly, see the need for preparing this type of minister. Pastoral meetings and churches may see the value of a seminary for the purposes of preparing pastors for ministry, but for a variety of reasons Friends have never adopted a seminary degree as a requirement for pastoral ministry. So the question occurs in those contexts as well. For a variety of reasons, the “why” question persists!

One might say that as a seminary, ESR is no less peculiar than the tradition that birthed it. A cookie-cutter mentality is no more feasible for ESR than it is for a local congregation of whatever variety. The fact of the matter is that ESR is a place where preparation for ministry is less about conforming to a preset standard or ideal and more about being transformed by the Holy Spirit. An essential key in the process is discernment followed by surrender. Friends often speak of the first; the second is not mentioned as frequently. Discernment allows us to hear to what it is we are being called. Surrender is our “yes” to God’s beckoning, even when it takes us places we never expected to go. Yet, without it discernment is deprived of its full impact. When both occur, gifts are nurtured. Calling emerges. Ministry unfolds. At ESR we cherish the possibility of ministry unfolding. That is one the best answers to the question, “Why would Friends have a seminary anyway?”