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Seventh-day Quaker: A spiritual memoir

Kim L. Ranger

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Seventh-day Quaker:  
A Spiritual Memoir

Kim L. Ranger
Seventh-day Quaker: A Spiritual Memoir

Key features:

- There is no other book or article comparing the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and the Seventh-day Adventists. The book is accessible to the general layperson and has also been well-received by faculty in Anthropology, Communications, Philosophy, and Religious Studies.
- This book will help readers who seek to understand Quaker and Adventist denominations across conservative, liberal, and evangelical lines.
- This book will help readers who wish to develop ecumenical relationships, appreciating a variety of faith practices while deepening their own practice.
- This book will help readers who are interested in deepening their individual faith journeys.

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Readership:

Main audiences:

- Adult or young-adult readers who seek to understand aspects of Christianity, specifically either Quakers or Seventh-day Adventists.
- Readers who are interested in conservative, liberal, or evangelical denominations, who wish to develop ecumenical relationships, who appreciate a variety of Christian faith practices, or who wish to deepen their own faith journey.
- Readers who are interested in first-hand accounts (memoirs, diaries, or autobiographies).

Subsidiary audiences: students and scholars of religion, anthropology, English or writing (memoir as rhetoric, faith or spiritual writing, diaries), women and gender studies, gay and lesbian studies.

Academic courses:

Anthropology of Religion
Rhetoric
English
Women’s Studies
Gay and/or Lesbian Studies
Communications (e.g., Interpersonal Communications)
Courses from Seminaries/Schools of Religion
Seventh-day Quaker
A Spiritual Memoir

Kim L. Ranger
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Notes

All denominations are not “equal” yet each one has some understanding, pieces of the truth, and all are united as one body in Christ. Each has equal access to the presence of God, and is a sanctuary for the indwelling Holy Spirit.

This memoir is offered in the spirit of education; any mistakes in understanding are my own.

The following abbreviations are used throughout the text:
- Seventh-day Adventist (SDA)
- Seventh-day Adventists (SDAs)
- Ellen G. White (EGW)
- Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Thanks

I am grateful to my wife Amy for her love and work on formatting the book, to the Grand Rapids Friends Meeting for their grounding me in a spiritual life, and to the Seventh-day Adventists who welcomed me into their midst. I am indebted to the early readers of this manuscript for their affirmation and helpful critiques: Karen Payson, Ruth Breyfogle, Dr. Erika Friedl Loeffler, and Dr. Stephen Rowe.

I would like to express my thanks to Grand Valley State University for supporting a sabbatical, the University Libraries for providing many items through Document Delivery, and the Religious Studies faculty for sponsoring the entry of this book into ScholarWorks. Especial thanks go to Dr. Shel Kopperl for his encouragement and leadership.
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INTRODUCTION

I have always been interested in religion in general, although I grew up unchurched and did not feel the need for a faith community until I reached my thirties. I studied the world’s major religions and attended churches in several Christian denominations, but none appealed to me. In fact, organized religion seemed to be a focus for much of the evil done in the world; during graduate school I read Freethought (anti-religion, especially anti-Christian) publications, which supported this outlook. As a child and young adult, I felt most strongly connected to the spiritual when I spent time alone, roaming the meadows and forests. Naturalistic pantheism came closest to my spiritual views: I believed in a non-sentient and impersonal Universe as being synonymous with God, represented most strongly by Nature.

When I first began attending the Religious Society of Friends’ Meeting in 1997, I also spent time in an Episcopal church as part of a women’s spirituality group, and played music for mass several times. I learned a lot about spirituality in general through the women’s group, and I realized then that the quietness of Friends’ Meeting didn’t meet all of my needs. Nor did the already-established Friends book-study group. Friends, also known as Quakers, often refer to themselves as seekers—experiencing leadings to seek God in different ways and places—and these leadings can draw us away for awhile but usually draw us back to the Meeting too. Sometimes I felt the pull of formal ritual and at other times the beauty of spiritual music lured me to the Episcopal mass. Neither of those is found as a programmed part of my Meeting for Worship. Yet my connection to and interest in the Episcopal church waned over time.

I began to feel curious about the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church when I met two Seventh-day Adventists (SDAs), though by then I had been a confirmed and recorded member
of the Religious Society of Friends for several years. While curiosity initially drew me to attend each of their churches, it was something much deeper which led me to continue seeking to understand their beliefs and way of life. Looking back, I can’t explain the draw I felt as anything other than a call from God—it was not rational but it was insistent, persistent, and wouldn’t let me go about my daily life. Over several months, curiosity evolved into a deep need to be present to the Adventists. I was drawn to religious devotion in the worship services and to studying the Bible in Sabbath School, not just to reading about their religious practices on my own. Thus, despite my many reservations about their beliefs and my discomfort in their presence, I began to study and worship with them.

I sought to have this leading or calling formally recognized as ministry within my Friends meeting. Thus, I requested to be recorded (officially recognized) as a Minister of Ecumenism in order to feel grounded in the Grand Rapids Friends Meeting and to give a clear signal to the Adventists that I wasn’t seeking to be converted. This ministry led me to study the Friends’ religious tradition much more deeply than previously, though I have just begun to scratch the surface.

During this time, I did experience a profound conversion, leading me away from my view of myself as a non-theist, believing in god as synonymous with universe, to my experience of God as a Being, capable of asking me directly why I continued to doubt and resist. At first acutely resistant to a Christocentric standpoint, I also came to understand its place in the history and present expression within the Religious Society of Friends. I seek to follow the radical example of Jesus, the epitome of living out “that of God within,” while acknowledging the powerful examplars from other faiths as well.
In documenting the living out of my calling, I began to examine what it means to reach out to another faith community and to be welcomed in by them, with the permission and blessing of my primary community. I pondered what ecumenism can mean for the world’s peoples who are trying to get along without warring over religion, what it means to welcome people who are not going to convert into the community—what it looks like to meet individuals exactly where they are. I wondered if there is a line beyond which either party is not willing to go, how relationships develop, and what it means to love thy neighbor as thyself.

This, then, is a description of a personal journey between Christian denominations. It is also one depiction of how we might live into love, meeting each other within Christianity and also across religions. It is my attempt to grapple with others’ beliefs and move into love and acceptance despite and even because of our differences and uniquenesses. After this period spent with the SDAs, I better understand theologically conservative and evangelical Christianity, including the variety of Friends’ thought, practice, and history.
A COMPARISON OF THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS*

(*Friends General Conference, Hicksite branch)

WITH SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

The comparison below applies strictly to the particular branch of Quakers known as “liberal Friends” or “Hicksites” (named after Elias Hicks), the group which falls under the aegis of the Friends General Conference. While there are some common beliefs among this branch and the Conservative Friends and Friends United Meeting, I believe that Evangelical Friends may have more in common with the Biblically-based, Christ-centered, missional Seventh-day Adventists (SDAs) than they do with most FGC Friends. However, this comparison is focused on the FGC Friends because I am a member of a meeting in this conference and I wanted to speak about my own specific experiences.

OVERVIEW:

The Religious Society of Friends (Friends) originated in the mid-1600’s, founded by George Fox in England, when he first heard the voice of God saying, "There is one, even Christ Jesus, who can speak to thy condition." Thus a new Christian denomination came to be established in the 1650’s. In the midst of the Presbyterian dissent against the Church of England, "Quakerism" spread rapidly as a result of the continued prophetic visions and inspired and unrehearsed preaching of Fox and new converts. He and other early Quakers traveled extensively throughout the world. Despite marked persecution in Massachusetts and New York, quite a number settled in America, most notably in Pennsylvania, formed by the Quaker William Penn from a land grant given by the King Charles II of England in repayment of a debt. Many among the multitude of
leaders among the early Quakers were women, affirmed by Fox's prophecies that there is "that of God" in every person. Today, Quakers identify themselves as a prophetic people and the form of worship assumes that the Holy Spirit may speak through any seeker who listens inwardly for the still, small voice of God. "Unprogrammed" Meetings have no paid clergy in the belief that all minister to each other.

The Seventh-day Adventists (SDAs) began in the mid-1800’s during the Second Great Awakening. William Miller, a self-taught preacher, calculated that the Second Advent would occur in 1844. His inaccurate interpretation of Daniel 8:14 resulted in the "Great Disappointment." However, a young woman began to experience visions which supported the immanence of the Advent, and she re-interpreted Dan. 8:14 as the beginning of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. Ellen G. White's prophecies were tested time and again, and she was acknowledged as a prophet. One of the early visions concerned the fourth commandment, to observe the seventh-day Sabbath (i.e., Saturday rather than Sunday).

Similarity of Founders

Both George Fox and Ellen G. White experienced extreme spiritual turmoil and depression in their early years. They understood that the Spirit which inspired those who wrote the Scriptures were still at work in the world (i.e., the Spirit of Prophecy), that the human body is the “temple” (or “indwelling” in Quaker terms) of the Holy Spirit, and that there is no intermediary required between individuals and God/Christ. They traveled throughout the world preaching. Each experienced ecstatic and quieter visions, was ill-educated yet could speak authoritatively about the Bible, and was a strong social and religious reformer. They both lived in times of civil war
and of religious reform. Each spoke against the playing of sports, attending the theater, wearing wigs and jewelry; each spoke in favor of temperance, healthful living (both became vegetarians), and the wearing of simple, durable, plain clothing.

**SIMILARITIES OF DOCTRINES BETWEEN FRIENDS AND ADVENTISTS**

Every person can find truth in Scripture, without need for clergy: the SDA statement that access to God is “without fear or restriction and without the need of any intermediaries such as priests or saints or ritual” is echoed by the Holy Spirit’s revelation to George Fox that, “There is one, even Christ Jesus, who can speak to thy condition.” Neither church has creeds per se (formulaic beliefs stated as part of the worship service, such as the Nicene Creed), though each has doctrines (principles) and distinctive practices. SDAs have no creed except the Bible; Friends have no stated creed. SDAs had no paid clergy in the early years; Friends still have no paid clergy. Both practice a non-liturgical form of worship. The denominations share a common understanding of conversion as an experience of radical changes through spiritual rebirth, which is ongoing. Both promote religious freedom and the separation of church and state.

Each is dedicated to integrity and living out the example of Jesus—believing that each person’s life is a witness to his or her faith. Thus, both groups educate for peace, justice, and reconciliation, believe in changing the root causes of poverty and homelessness, and believe in improving the quality of life for all people. Simplicity in terms of consuming fewer material goods, recycling and reducing waste, plainness in clothing and adornment, and maintaining a balance of work, rest, and play, is important. Both have a common concern for the environment.
Because the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (or the Light of God may be perceived within each of us), SDAs and Friends believe that it is essential to care for health through diet (e.g., White stated that a vegetarian diet is most beneficial for mental and physical health; Friends tend to think that vegetarianism is least harmful for the environment and world’s resources). Exercise, avoiding tobacco and drugs (both groups worked on the anti-smoking campaigns in the 1970’s), and expressing concern for others by valuing cooperation, helpfulness, and service over competition are essential practices. Both offer humanitarian aid without the expectation of conversion. Each group works toward racial equality, religious freedom, and respect for all people. Civil War-era Adventists were conscientious objectors. Because they believed that all races are equal in Christ, they were also abolitionists, though not as involved with abolition as Friends were. Since the Civil War, Adventists have been “noncombatants”—predominantly conscientious objectors, yet willing to serve in the military in a non-combative role, e.g., as a medic. Each denomination has gone through periods of retreat from other religious groups and society in general. Both refer to themselves as a "peculiar people" (i.e., special and distinct from others, as expressed in the King James version of the Bible in Deuteronomy 14:2 and 26:18, Titus 2:14, and 1 Peter 2:9).

WORSHIP SERVICES OF FRIENDS AND ADVENTISTS

Unprogrammed Friends’ Meetings for Worship are conducted in the utmost simplicity. Friends sit facing each other. Each person comes to corporate worship and settles down to wait in silence, listening for the “still, small voice” of God. Vocal ministry is a witness to God’s presence
in one’s heart and is also a sign of the manifestation or “covering” of the Holy Spirit in the group. There is a common discernment process for determining whether or not to speak a message: asking oneself if the ministry is from God or from oneself, and if it is meant for the entire meeting or for oneself. Many Friends express the understanding that they must speak as a feeling of pressure, or sometimes discomfort, even to the point of trembling, or “quaking” with the strength of the obligation. Ministry is to be received in silence, with no discussion or follow-up, though several messages may be connected in a “gathered” (or “covered”) meeting. After about an hour of worship, the meeting may be closed by a clerk shaking hands with his or her neighbors and others joining in the handshaking. In some meetings, the group may join hands and stand together for a few minutes. Some meetings include prayer requests along with greetings, introductions, and announcements. There are no tithes and offerings (a collection box may be available but is not passed) or other formalized rites. Children may stay for the entire meeting for worship or go to “First Day School.” Before or after the meeting for worship, meetings may include some type of formal programming, potlucks, singing, or other fellowship.

Adventists’ worship services vary by congregation. Music and hymn singing are a part of the service itself, which resembles Protestant services: Prelude (introductory music), Welcome and announcements, Call to worship, Introit, various types of prayer, hymns, mission-related information, Tithes and offertory, Children’s story, Scripture reading, Sermon, Benediction, and Postlude. Once a quarter the service comprises a more solemn rite which includes footwashing and the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Children stay for the worship service, as both adult and
youth Sabbath Schools occur prior to the worship. After the worship service, congregations may include various meetings, communal meals, or other programming.
### Differences Between Friends and Adventists

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<tr>
<th><strong>Friends</strong></th>
<th><strong>Seventh-day Adventists</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>hold that God alone is the authoritative source of faith and that the Holy Spirit is the sole guide for interpreting the Bible. George Fox’s prophetic writings and interpretations are not considered authoritative.</td>
<td>hold that every article of their faith must be tested against the Scriptures. They regard Ellen G. White’s writings and commentaries as an authoritative guide to the Bible and the church organization.</td>
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Being mystics (experiencing direct union with God), Friends understand the written (or verbal) word to be only an approximation of the experience of God, so “scripture” must be read situationally instead of literally, interpreted by each person, as each is led by the Spirit. There is not one meaning, and taking the scriptures literally gets in the way of the direct experience of God. The Bible was written in particular culture/s and time period/s and this influences how passages are interpreted—many stories are metaphorical and lead to truth yet aren’t literal and historically true. The “Word of God” is the name pertaining to Christ, not the Bible. The two “greatest commandments” (loving God and loving the neighbor as oneself) supersede the Ten Commandments, which were fulfilled by the death and resurrection of Christ. |

SDAs believe that all seeming contradictions in the Bible can be resolved by a right/correct reading of all of the passages relevant to the question, referred to as “truth.” The Bible is held to be the infallible Word of God. Passages maintained to be historical, such as the six day creation, are taken literally, which leads to the belief in a “young earth.” Prophetic passages are interpreted by using keys within the Bible itself along with selected secular historical records. The Bible was not dictated by God, but the authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the revealed truths in their own words. Thus, the Scriptures are not just writing inspired by God. The Ten Commandments are still valid, as they reflect the character of God, but our standing before God must be through the merits of Christ’s righteousness. |

**Friends** believe that the guidance for the interpretation of Scriptures comes from the Holy Spirit, is individual, corporate, and contextual, and thus neither belief nor practice will be uniform. |

**Seventh-day Adventists** believe that Scriptural interpretation is guided by the Holy Spirit and that the church corporately must have a standardized system of belief, referred to as “the truth.” |
2. **Friends** hold that they are living the Advent—that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand and all must live that principle out as closely as possible in daily life. Friends believe that Christ has limitless power to transform lives, and individual and corporate understanding of Scriptures and other prophetic writings comes from the Holy Spirit. George Fox believed that Christ has already come (the Advent has happened)—the call of God is now, not in the future, i.e., the Kingdom of God is at hand—is present within each heart. The "Kingdom of Heaven is within" is another way of describing the mystical realization of union with God.

2. **Seventh-day Adventists** stress the importance of living in the reality of the imminent return of Christ to this earth. Individuals who have lived according to the light they have received from the Holy Spirit will be resurrected at Christ's return. In the concluding events of the earth, God's people will be identified by their faith in Christ, their keeping of the Ten Commandments and in particular, their observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. These characteristics will serve to differentiate those who receive the seal of God identifying those to be resurrected versus the "mark of the beast." SDAs do not want to get caught up in "end-time hysteria" but do want to maintain a sense of the imminence of the Advent.

3. Most **Friends** would agree on a few essential beliefs: God may be known by each person directly and immediately—experienced inwardly as that "still, small voice within" or as the Holy Spirit—and that revelation is continuous; there is "that of God" or a spark of the Divine in everyone; Jesus as Christ epitomizes the first two points to humanity in a vital way; and participating in a faith community is essential to discerning God's will in our lives. These lead to the "testimonies" or "fruits" of peace, integrity, equality, and simplicity, along with the valuing of diversity, truth, and unity. Friends do not swear oaths.

Many FGC Friends today are not Christ-centered but tend to be more universalist in a broad sense—appreciating the diversity of spiritual

3. **Seventh-day Adventists** hold that the Bible reveals God's standard and that all doctrine must have its basis in the Scriptures. Key doctrines include one triune God who created the world in six days, salvation by God's grace alone, the imminent return of Christ, the infallibility of the Scriptures, the seventh-day Sabbath, rebirth through the Holy Spirit symbolized through baptism by immersion, the prophetic role of Ellen G. White, the unconscious state of the dead, the Communion service as an expression of faith in Jesus, and the pre-advent judgment which began in 1844 (Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary—the most holy place where God abides—to begin judging all people, prior to the second coming).

Yet there is an emphasis on unity which
paths. There is such an emphasis on diversity that often this branch is accused of not being Christian, though many individuals do consider themselves to be trying to follow Jesus’ ministry and example of living.

allows for diversity—without uniformity—because each individual must maintain his own relationship with God. Truth, integrity, simplicity, and racial equality are held to be vital.

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<th>4. Friends</th>
<th>4. Seventh-day Adventists</th>
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<td>have unique forms of structure and authority. There are 3 main branches or &quot;general conferences&quot; which hold yearly business meetings and to which individual &quot;monthly meetings&quot; or congregations belong: Friends General Conference, Friends United Meeting, and Evangelical Friends International. (Conservative Friends have infrequent gatherings but not a separate conference organization). For FGC, see the comparison below: each congregation is autonomous and has final authority; the structure provides for communication, programming, and fellowship.</td>
<td>have a democratically-elected system of organization and governance. Each local congregation’s business meeting holds the highest authority for the local church. Matters which impact the world church are taken up at General Conference business sessions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>monthly meeting</td>
<td>local congregation</td>
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<td>quarterly meeting</td>
<td>state conference</td>
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<tr>
<td>yearly meeting</td>
<td>union conference</td>
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<tr>
<td>general conference (U.S.A.)</td>
<td>division (e.g., North American)</td>
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<td>world committee for consultation</td>
<td>worldwide general conference</td>
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Friends believe so strongly in the spirit of prophecy that the form of worship is the epitome of being open to the voice of God. Friends believe that each person can encounter God directly, without the need for a paid, ordained clergy. Friends teach each other the discernment process for vocal ministry and practice group discernment or interpretation/analysis of prophecies—or as they are called, “concerns” or “leadings.”

Adventists believe strongly in the spirit of prophecy, especially as exemplified in Ellen G. White. They also believe that each person can access God directly, without the need for intermediaries, but churches are led by pastors who have completed certain educational requirements and other training, and who are ordained and paid a salary by the Conference. Each church has some formal arrangement of events for services.
### 5. Friends

Believe in the baptism of the Holy Spirit and eschew any outward rite of baptism with water. Communion is in spirit and in truth the direct personal union with God, through the Holy Spirit, not practiced as an outward ritual. Church membership is not related to baptism.

### 5. Seventh-day Adventists

Baptize by immersion as a declaration of faith and a symbol of participation in the death and burial of Christ followed by rebirth through the Holy Spirit. Communion preparation includes self-examination, repentance, and reconciliation with others; the Lord's Supper includes the service of foot washing along with receipt of unfermented grape juice and unleavened bread.

The Great Commission of Christ to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all that Christ commanded, serves as the basis for the Bible studies required for an individual before baptism and church membership.

### 6. Friends

Do not address salvation definitively, yet there is a commonly-held understanding that as the Kingdom of God is within, salvation is present—not something only for after life. As a result, Friends believe that the ideal is achievable and we can attain peace and social justice on earth.

### 6. Seventh-day Adventists

Believe that Christ will judge each human life; while believers are saved through faith, not by works, they order their lives by the Ten Commandments and the teaching of the Scriptures. Adventists believe in careful stewardship and balanced efforts toward social issues. However, the ideal can only be achieved by the perfection of Christ, not through human effort. One of the results of the Advent will be the destruction and cleansing of the earth, thus, continuous improvement to an ideal is not achievable, and this influences the amount of energy Adventists are willing to expend on social transformation.
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<th>Friends</th>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>have no stated belief about what happens at death or afterward.</td>
<td>believe that those who die are unconscious (asleep). Christ will awaken the righteous dead at the second Advent and take them along with the righteous living to heaven for 1000 years. The living wicked die. At the end of the millennium, the heavenly New Jerusalem will be transported to this earth, and God will dwell with His people here for eternity. At that time, the wicked dead will be resurrected, and they, Satan, and the evil angels will be destroyed by fire.</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>hold that there is much to learn from others’ spiritual paths, there is that of God in each person, that as each one attends to and walks in the Light, we become children of the Light. Friends do not evangelize.</td>
<td>believe that there is one right way or belief, yet all people are to be treated with respect. Adventists believe in conversion through personal and public evangelism.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>are ecumenical and believe that all of the major religions have some truth or light. Friends also believe that every day is holy, none more or less than any other, as a result of the “old law” or Commandments having been fulfilled on the Cross. They hold corporate worship on the first day of the week, following the example of the earliest Christian gatherings for worship. As with each day of the week, a balance of work, rest, and play is advocated, with the awareness of continual union with God.</td>
<td>believe that they are the remnant identified in Revelation and that observance of all of the commandments, especially the fourth Commandment regarding seventh-day Sabbath, will be the distinguishing characteristic of God’s people in the end time. They connect Sunday worship with the &quot;mark of the Beast&quot; which identifies those who will eventually be eternally destroyed.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>hold that the Ten Commandments were fulfilled and there are only the two greatest commandments in force, which should govern all action: love God, and love thy neighbor as thyself. Health, economic, and environmental concerns do lead some to vegetarianism. Many liberal</td>
<td>hold to the teachings of the Scriptures, including the &quot;unclean&quot; dietary restrictions of the Old Testament; many are vegetarian. In the SDA church, gays and lesbians who are sexually active are subject to church discipline, including the potential loss of their membership, as Adventists believe</td>
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<td><strong>Quaker meetings now extend marriage to gay and lesbian people and do not consider homosexuality to be a sin or a perversion.</strong></td>
<td><strong>the Bible condemns same-sex relationships as sinful and a perversion.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>11. Friends</strong> do not tithe and do not collect offerings as part of the meeting for worship. However, one of the suggested queries for attenders seeking membership concerns the readiness to support the Meeting and the programs it contributes to financially. A collection box is available, usually outside the room for worship.</td>
<td><strong>11. Seventh-day Adventists</strong> believe that tithing is a part of faithful stewardship along with offerings arising from gratitude to God for His blessings. Tithes and offerings are returned at the Sabbath morning worship service, and the opportunity to give offerings is presented at other worship meetings as well.</td>
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<td><strong>12. Friends</strong> are often conscientious objectors in times of a national draft. Friends' Meeting places do not include flags, nor do Friends say the Pledge of Allegiance; their first allegiance is to God, not to a nation.</td>
<td><strong>12. Seventh-day Adventists</strong> refer to themselves as “non-combatants” and will serve in the military as part of a medical corps. There is a flag at the front of the Sanctuary in the churches, and SDA school children say the Pledge of Allegiance.</td>
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“When the Spirit of God rests upon you, there will be no feeling of envy or jealousy in examining another’s position; there will be no spirit of accusation and criticism....”

Ellen G. White
Wednesday, September 15, 2004

Asked an acquaintance if she was some type of minister or leader in a church, and if that was a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church. I wondered why she was so quiet about it and understood that it was because she didn’t want to proselytize. She believed that people should be free to come to their beliefs in their own way and time. Also, since there are many stereotypes and misconceptions about Seventh-day Adventists (SDAs), she didn’t want to be labeled or judged based on those. It seemed as if she had seen my curiosity and was waiting for me to ask.

Tuesday, September 21

I’ve been feeling drawn toward the solitary lately, so I read Slattery’s book on prayer and monasticism. “Prayer…may be …an interior disposition toward the sacred in the ordinary events of the day.” It is “about presence, about learning to be present, even to be present to presence” (17). He also quoted Thomas Merton (Contemplative Prayer) on the paradox of monastic life—in seeming abandonment of the world, the person is then “able to listen more intently to the deepest and most neglected voices that proceed from its inner depths” (25). “Prayer is an attempt to reach that deep silence” (29). It seems like there is too much going on and I need more silence outwardly before I can reach the inward quiet.
Friday, October 8

I read more on one of the Adventist sites, and like the Friends, they too educate for peace, justice, and reconciliation, and believe in changing the root causes of poverty. We have many testimonies in common, but we approach the Bible differently, and my understanding of Liberal Quakers is that we extend marriage to gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered people and do not believe that non-heterosexuality is a sin.

Pierre Lacout wrote that, “There is silence even in action. We are reaching this silence when we look beyond appearances, when we broaden our horizons…” (5). Then, “Contemplative silence is a special form of attention…. Attention is seeing with the eyes of the spirit…. Contemplative silence is a look turned inwards to the deep realities of the soul” (7). A friend and I have planned a visit to a local SDA church. I suppose I am paying a particular kind of attention in learning about the SDA beliefs.

Friday, October 22

I have realized that I do practice the concept of Sabbath by reserving Friday nights for myself and Saturday afternoons for my contemplative prayer time. Also by trying to incorporate rest into each day. It means I say “no” to a lot of invitations.

Saturday, October 23

I attended a SDA worship service with a friend. Everyone was friendly and welcoming, introducing themselves and either shaking hands or hugging us. I noticed that some women wore makeup and others didn’t. Only a few wore wedding bands; most didn’t. The service was
very informal. The sermon was about tests for “true” prophets. I don’t think I know what it means to be a prophet.

**Sunday, October 24**

After Friends Meeting, I feel so much more at home with and appreciative of this group of Friends. They are accepting, dedicated to equality and social justice, lacking in creeds and dogma. They understand that there is not one right way but that there is much to learn from others’ spiritual paths. They acknowledge that there is that of God in each of us, that we are all “children of the Light.” Being mystics—those who experience the overwhelming presence of God directly—they know that the written (or verbal) word is only an approximation of our experience of God. Thus, “scripture” must be interpreted by each person, as each is led by the Spirit—there is not one meaning. Friends are dedicated to integrity and to living out the example of Jesus (and others) yet do not evangelize—they help others without needing to convert them.

**Tuesday, November 2**

I was sad to hear that the SDA church ostracizes gays and lesbians who come out—they lose membership and are shunned. Even if it were more a case of “hate the sin, love the sinner,” that seems awful to me too, classifying same-sex love, attraction, and relationships as sinful, not of God. I understand and experience myself as having a “God-given nature,” even as (especially as?) a lesbian.
**Sunday, January 23, 2005**

I’ve been trying to understand what “evil” means, so I read part of a book recommended by a friend. Goldsmith says that Adam and Eve’s “fall from Grace” was the acceptance of the belief in two powers—good and evil; i.e., the act of consciousness” (12). I guess that if one perceives the Whole, there is no good or evil—all is God, so the very idea of evil is an incorrect one. Yet people do choose to act in horrible ways, so what is that—where does it come from?

**Friday, March 11**

I am so “ripe” for another conversion experience that I am a little afraid/wary of reading about Adventism—it isn’t the way I want to go. But I am powerfully curious, drawn to visit again (though not for communion and foot washing). In her book about conversion, Griffin wrote,

> There are many kinds of conversion experience. Conversion is an inner change of heart. The whole course of the convert’s life is altered by the awakening of faith. A whole new life, inexorable, relentless, and invisible...is set in motion.... Evelyn Underhill, in *Practical Mysticism*, as quoted in Griffin, called conversion a ‘violent shattering and rearranging of the self, which can now begin its true career of correspondence with the reality it has perceived.’ Griffin said: it is the work of a lifetime... and quoted John McCall, ‘it’s a process, a continuing series of events.’
Griffin: It is to know a reality which demands a response of us, and that response is one of love" (21-24).

Paraphrasing C.S. Lewis as quoted in Griffin: each choice turns us toward harmony with God, other beings, and oneself, or toward war (30).

But this euphoria—which accompanies so many great and positive life decisions—cannot last for long. The day-to-day realities crowd in; the celestial music dies away; the energy which has been set loose within us has to be integrated into life in some practical way. ... There are practical choices to be made...one example is the need to turn what has been mostly a private dialogue with God into a real commitment to communal worship. For some, this change is painful (152). One of the most striking characteristics of the continuing conversions is a growth in the ability to find pleasure in ordinary experience (167-8).

I have experienced both the shattering and the euphoria; I find communal worship is more of a duty than “pleasure”—I find it difficult to go to Friends Meeting more often than not—it is hard work to be so “present.” But I seem to be charged with finding a path of harmony rather than war.

**Sunday, March 13**

I am afraid of being converted—of “falling in love” with Seventh-day Adventism. Yet, realistically, my goal is to learn—part of my ministry of listening, learning, and teaching—and to understand my own faith and practice within the Religious Society of Friends better. One of the ways of
learning is to dive in, to become as a child, to open up. I have to make the “leap of faith” to get where I’m going! Remember that the greatness of the reaction or resistance to a change indicates the largeness of the change occurring.

The SDA church is unobtainable, unavailable, and so it is perfectly safe for me to “fall in love” with it; I couldn’t—morally, ethically, and integrally—become a member. All of the tenets of Friends make spiritual, intellectual, and moral/ethical sense to me. They fit who I am, how I understand God, and relate to people and this earth. Yet I am feeling called toward exploration of Adventism. I feel fascinated, powerfully curious, drawn in. I felt similarly when I learned about the Episcopal Church, yet it just strengthened my Quaker ideas and beliefs. The only way “out” is through.

**Thursday, March 17**

Met with a Bible Instructor who listened to and answered my questions about Adventism, and who tried to do so without proselytizing. I found the certainty of belief, black and white thinking, and absolutism to be disconcerting. This instructor knows a tremendous amount and has the zeal and the convictions of the converted. I found the beliefs in Creationism, the literal 24-hour/6-day creation and only 6000+/- years of existence, and the denial of evolution entirely unsettling, since I grew up without any of these kinds of beliefs or with any trust in religious fervor.

The Seventh-day Adventists arose from the Millerites in the 1840’s. William Miller construed that the time of the Advent (the second coming of Jesus) would occur in 1843 or 1844, based on the prophecy of Daniel 8:14. Miller used the suggestion from Ezekiel that each
day represent a year, and further calculated that the Advent would happen on October 10, 1844 (Numbers). The Millerites fell apart when the Advent didn’t occur, but the Seventh-day Adventists formed around the prophecies of Ellen G. White (EGW), which explain the date as the beginning of the preparation of a heavenly sanctuary.

Despite this interpretation of the Advent, Miller and the Adventists insisted on a literal Creationism, i.e., adhering to the 24-hour day, 6-day week creation of the earth in Genesis (which is why Jews and Adventists have Sabbath on Saturday—designating the first day of the week as Sunday, on the seventh day, i.e., Saturday, God rested). Apparently the interpretation of one day equaling a year is used only for prophecy, i.e., looking forward, not for history, i.e., looking back. While the Adventists read the prophecies in the Book of Revelation as events which will happen literally, there are some historical Bible passages that Adventists interpret. SDAs seem to believe that all apparent contradictions in the Bible can be resolved by a correct reading of all of the passages relevant to the question, and they refer to this right reading as “truth.” Jewish scholars consider the prophecy of Daniel 8:14 concerning the restoration of the desecrated sanctuary to have been fulfilled—the sanctuary was restored within the number of days specified. However, Miller’s definition of “sanctuary” was different. It seems like a paradox, that the beginning of Adventism had such a contradiction at its heart between reading literally and interpreting, and that this inconsistency continues today.

Shall I talk with other SDAs about some of my questions?

Later, I realized that I do fit with Quakers and won’t be converted by the SDA evangelical zeal.
Saturday, March 19

Was EGW simply “envisioning” the Book of Revelation? I watched the DVD called Final Events, and wondered, “Who believes such rubbish?” It has some homophobic statements, scapegoating gays and lesbians. That alone is enough to put me off.

SDAs have no creed except the Bible, but all members are expected to subscribe to the doctrines of the imminent return of Christ, seventh-day Sabbath, the divine inspiration of EGW’s visions, the unconscious state of the dead, and the importance of the date 10/22/1844, and to practice immersion baptism, foot-washing, and tithing.

Sunday, March 20

These experiences with the SDA church are helping me to understand my own spirituality and faith community better, and are helping me to learn a new language. The SDAs treat EGW’s visions and the visions in the Book of Revelation as literal instead of metaphorical. Bull and Lockhart wrote about the beginning of Adventism: “It was presumed that language was perspecious [clear]...and that words corresponded directly to objects. Language could be trusted.” And the Adventists believed that EGW’s visions were literal (25). EGW was a prophet, but what that means as far as her “authority” goes is another matter. SDAs believe that the Bible consists of “revealed proposition,” (statements of truth disclosed by God and transcribed exactly as they were heard or seen) not just writing inspired by God (30). Yet, they are not fundamentalists and also distinguish between themselves and evangelicals. I understood one Adventist’s explanation to mean that they don’t believe in an eternal hell, a secret rapture, a second chance for those “left behind,” or predestination. Yet they do read the Bible literally,
putting them into the broadest category of fundamentalism, and they do believe in converting others through both personal and public evangelistic efforts.

Marcus Borg states in *The Heart of Christianity* that the Bible is a human response to God and is the product of two historical communities—ancient Israel and the early Christians. It is not God’s witness to God, but two peoples’ witness to their life with God. So the Bible is not a divine product, not absolute truth or God’s revealed truth, but rather is related to the time and place of its writing, and uses the language and concepts of those particular cultures. The laws of the Bible result from the ethics of the two communities; they are not God’s laws for all time. The documents which now make up the Bible were not sacred when they were written, but were declared sacred over time—500 years for the Old Testament and 300 for the New. Yet the Bible is at the heart of Christianity. It is human in origin, sacred in status and function, but not infallible, literal, or absolute. It was written to and for the people of its times, not to and for us. Much of its language is metaphorical. Some events are historical, but it is the metaphorical, “larger” story behind the historical which matters most—e.g., exile and return and images of the human condition. The metaphors speak to human truths (even if they are not always factual reports). Genesis was *Israel’s* stories of creation, not God’s. The underlying truths signify that God is the creator of all that exists, the creation is good, we are created in God’s image, and we are imperfect and want to be united with God. The commandments indicate that we should live balanced and ethical lives, in relation with God and people (Borg, chapters 1-3). This seems closer to what members of the Religious Society of Friends believe, rather than reading the Bible literally, and reflects my own feelings and thoughts, so very different from the Adventists’. 
Saturday, March 26
Only a few years ago, I was entirely unwilling to call myself Christian, yet here I am. But in the “emerging paradigm” (not traditional Christianity), as described by Marcus Borg. I don’t like being in chaos, but do like being at the edge when and where chaos is beginning to sort itself into patterns.

Sunday, March 27
It’s disconcerting to be pulled out of my comfort zone, and difficult to try to discern what the call means. I’ve been through this kind of thing before—I always feel chaotic until things sort themselves out. But I feel like the patterns are becoming clear.

Thursday, March 31
Dreamt of trying to “solve” SDA issues for myself, and of trying to reconcile coastal (more liberal) versus Midwestern (more conservative) views.

Friday, April 1
I suspect that my calling is to establish relationships with more “traditional” and evangelical faith communities in some way—Evangelical Friends, perhaps.

Douglas Morgan wrote that Miller “built his theories on the basis of a direct encounter with Scripture, free of interference from clergy, commentaries, or creeds” (20). This sounds much like Quakers. Rufus Jones’ chapter on “The Family of Love” founded by Henry Nicholas in England in the mid-1500’s (preceding Quakers by a century), describes the Familists’ beliefs that
“ceremonies and services are mere vain husks”—that the religious life is an inward experience of God incorporated into the soul plus a moral life in daily walk and conversation. Like the Anabaptists and Quakers who followed, Familists did not swear oaths, nor did they engage in or support war or capital punishment. They saw the Scriptures as only “shadows” since they were merely words, and true understanding of God is inward and wordless. Familists were anti-baptism since believers who follow Jesus’ example become baptized in the Holy Ghost (without needing a rite). They denied original sin, condemned all war, prohibited the bearing of arms, held that all days were the Lord’s days (none more holy than another), and stated that hell is in the heart and conscience. Jones states that by the middle of the 17th century the Quakers, with clearer insight and with far wiser leadership than the Familists had, were presenting all that was valuable in the “Family of Love,” with a broader expression of common human brotherhood and with a more positive insistence on the necessity of carrying religion into daily life (435). It is really interesting, seeing the historical development of Friends. Taking the scriptures literally gets in the way of the direct experience of God!

**Wednesday, April 13**

Am I crazy, being so involved in the SDA stuff? During Sabbath hours (sunset Friday to sunset Saturday), they try not to spend money or go to “commercial” establishments—no eating out, buying gas, going to concerts, etc. They could go to the Symphony on Saturday nights during the winter, but not in the spring or summer before sunset. One couldn’t be a professional musician unless in the Adventist music field. It’s a totally different approach to life. No attending professional conferences which take place on Friday evening through Saturday night. Yet this
practice does lead to simplicity, a slower pace, and mindfulness. It reminds me to seek balance in my life—creative activities, quiet time, and intense learning. Practicing my ministry of writing, doing the healing work. Somehow, this reminds me to be who I am, deeply, and not apologetically. But how can Adventists deny science and advances in knowledge?

SDAs feel themselves to be called “out” of the world, (both like and unlike Friends, who felt themselves to be called out of the world during the “Quietist” period in the eighteenth century and who were called back “into” the world by the revivalists in the nineteenth century). SDAs are taught not to socialize with outsiders (Seventh-Day Adventist Kinship). It seems to me as if, in waiting for the Advent, in the belief that they are called out of the world, and in the apocalyptic views, SDAs are experiencing God’s absence rather than presence or immanence. The view that God is external and while Christ is expected in the second Advent, is not currently present in the world, does seem to focus on a very poignant separation from the Spirit. I have experienced a sense of disconnection during periods of depression but the Quaker emphasis on the immediacy of the Light of Christ within has given me sustenance during the darkness.

Thursday, April 14

We have to let energy, whether positive or negative, flow through us, not let it get trapped inside. To me, that seems to be the idea behind EGW’s emphasis on hydropathy (i.e., hydrotherapy), eating whole foods, etc. If she had bottled up her visions, she would have sickened and died. God spoke; she answered, wrote down what she saw and understood, and brought these things to others. Realizing that God is within us, as well as all around us, “equalizes the pressure” when we experience God’s call—we usually “hear” it as the “still, small
voice”—yet if we don’t heed it (and even when we do), it grows into a steady pressure, and can be clamorous.

Plain and durable dress was important to EGW (Numbers)—so why do the SDAs dress up so much at services? Apparently they’re taught that it is to show respect for God, that it is traditional, and some people have “Sabbath clothes” which help set the tone for the day and helps set it apart. SDAs don’t wear any jewelry (similar to Conservative Friends -- “Plain Quakers”), including wedding rings, but some women do wear make-up and dye their hair, which seems like a contradiction to the testimony of simplicity.

**Friday, April 15**

EGW, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 291: “By communion with God in nature, the mind is uplifted, and the heart finds rest”—describes me, as a solitary.

I want to be “let off the hook” for awhile—relax from the SDA “investigation” and just be a Friend, in our non-Christocentric, non-Biblically-based, no-rule way.

**Saturday, April 16**

What I felt during Sabbath School was amazement at the depth of thinking. I expected the participants to stay on the surface level, but they went way beyond me—showed me up, put my stereotypes to shame. I was glad to have a Quaker friend present during the worship service. He said it was very like the Baptist services he had grown up with, though they’re very different now. The pastor remembered my name. I felt far more comfortable, happy, relaxed, open, and centered this time.
My presence in and of itself at SDA churches is a kind of ministry, as are the questions I ask. I bring what I’ve learned back to Friends Meeting in my written sermons, vocal ministry, listening and discernment, and ordinary conversations.

I can’t kneel. I can sing familiar songs without worrying about the words too much. I don’t have to say “amen.” I can pray silently. I can learn the vocabulary and use it. I can look for the connections between Seventh-day Adventism and Quakerism and not force similarities for the sake of unity—I can let the differences stand.

In EGW’s vision concerning the SDA church’s relationship to the World Council of Churches and ecumenism, she wrote that Christ calls for unity (within a Spiritual basis), and yet, there must be allowance for diversity within that unity—there can’t be uniformity—because each individual must maintain his own relationship with God. There can be oneness in diversity. SDAs must aim for unity yet do so without compromising their truth. (EGW’s truth is from the reformed tradition, with a literal reading of the Bible.) From my experience in Sabbath School, Adventists do emphasize deep thought about the Scripture and their faith, not shallowness of learning.

**Sunday, April 17**

Think of “salvation” and “redemption” as reconnection with the Whole. My difficulties with SDA are mostly with the literalism—creationism, a young earth, the oppression of gays and lesbians, and the Book of Revelation. And as with all evangelicals/conservative Christians, they believe in the sinful nature of people and an unchangeable God. I believe God changes and grows with us and the universe. In Exodus 3:14, God names himself to Moses as “I am,” or “I am who I am
becoming." God is always in flux, will ever be changing. We change, God changes, and we change again. Each stirring of the wind, each movement of the leaves, and each chirp of a bird shows us the breath of God, the spirit of life. With each inhalation our life blood is renewed. We breathe, we grow. Not only living things have cycles of change—a star is born and dies, rocks are formed in various ways, are worn down, and eventually become sand. Everything we know changes or is modified. How could the essential, underlying and completing spirit which is God not change? God assigns himself neither identity nor definition of his relationship with us, but simply a statement of being. Nothing which is can be static forever. To be is to change. God expands with each of us as we discover our lives.

SDAs also believe in blood atonement/sacrifice—which is a very violent idea about God; a theology of fear—fear of annihilation if the right rules aren’t followed (or so it seems when I listen to ordinary laypeople, despite official theology that God is always forgiving, never turns His back on us and won’t "strike us down with lightning", that nothing we can do can separate us from God’s grace)—and in Satan as a literal being and embodiment of all evil, opposite to God. I think SDAs aren’t alone in these particular beliefs, but they are representative of evangelical Christianity in general. I do not believe—never have believed—in Satan—I tend to see God as the all-inclusive connections in the universe, within us and encompassing everything. My brain works the way that brain researchers and theologians have both defined as "mystical," which is not at all dualistic but more holistic (thus God as whole, not as only and entirely good, with a corresponding bad being/fallen angel). So where do bad thoughts come from? From my mind, from my experiences....
**Wednesday, April 20**

Somehow deep down, I fear that I need to follow the “rules” or God will reject me. Even though I believe in God as the connection between all things, and don’t believe in hell or Satan. But I am loved, do love myself, and am connected to the Spirit.

**Thursday, April 21**

I feel released from trying to live the SDA “rules” (keeping the Sabbath, no alcohol, no jewelry, eating vegetarian) and also feel like rebelling against them. There are good things there. But Friends are my spiritual home. Writers like Mulholland and Gulley, Marcus Borg, and Jack Spong come so much closer to the ways I believe. But why do we like to be scared and to believe that these are the end times (e.g., TV shows such as *Revelations*, movies, books on this topic)?

**Saturday, April 23**

Went to Sabbath School this morning, to a different class than the usual one—there was more preaching than conversation. I felt strange, alienated. It wasn’t meaningful. I could never belong there. What we call mental illness they call demons. They have such strange ideas, to my way of thinking.

I asked about the flag at the front of the church sanctuary. Presently, the emphasis on separation of church and state means neither is imposing itself on the other, but still includes respect for the country and government in which the church resides. There is a flag at the front of the Sanctuary in the churches, and SDA school children say the Pledge of Allegiance. Some people vote against the Republicans or Conservative Right because they believe that the
Conservative Right and Catholics are going to unite to impose their beliefs on everyone as a state religion and create Sunday laws, which would contravene the seventh-day Sabbath. Yet a pastor should never be heard to advocate for a particular political party from the pulpit. To be in God’s community doesn’t mean that one isn’t a citizen too. Yet having a governmental flag in the church seems very wrong to me—our first (and sometimes only) allegiance is to God, not to a government.

Douglas Morgan describes the SDA’s view of government thus: “God’s reign must come through destruction and re-creation, not progressive improvement.” This seems to underlie an interesting history of SDA relationship with the U.S. government and alliances with other Christian political movements. Because they felt “called out of the world,” believing in the immanent return of Christ, Civil War-era Adventists were conscientious objectors; because they believed that all races are equal in Christ, they were also abolitionists (albeit somewhat reluctantly) (Numbers). After the 1950’s, Adventists began to refer to themselves as “non-combatants.” They still believed in pacifism, yet wished both to display their distinctness from the Jehovah’s Witnesses (who were adamant conscientious objectors and refused to allow their children to say the Pledge of Allegiance in school) and to show that the SDAs weren’t disrespectful of the U.S. government (Morgan).

The Bible Instructor seems to enjoy my questions. Too bad I don’t enjoy the answers.

Has this been an infatuation with a church, and have I fallen “out of love” with it? Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God. And I did certainly feel joy. Seventh-day Adventism is a way of life, just as Quakerism is.... What I want is to let the light shine through me and spill over, and to be able to help others who are in pain or need.
It's like being an anthropological participant-observer.

Sunday, April 24

My gifts of ministry are: listening and discernment; learning and teaching—learning both about other faiths and practices, writing essays, teaching about Quakers; occasional vocal ministry; healing. As far as outreach goes, my presence as a Friend is a kind of “witness.” The kinds of questions I ask may lead SDAs to think more deeply about how they connect to God and practice their faith; I did a program for the Episcopalian Women's Spirituality Group—will I do one for the SDAs? What kind of reporting back to the Meeting is appropriate—verbal or written, to Ministry & Counsel?

What I did at the Episcopal Church: from 1999-2002 I performed a ministry of music; I participated in a Women’s Spirituality Group 1999-2005, and facilitated a program on Quaker Silence in the Worship Sharing format. What did that group do for me? I had a member of that church on my recent Clearness Committee; studying with them helped me understand Quaker history; I wrote the four “Sermons of a Shaman” from my interactions with them; they encouraged my music; they encouraged me to read spiritual Christian literature on spiritual direction and companioning, contemplative life and prayer, radical Christianity, and women’s spirituality; and together we attended programs like Jack Spong’s talks and Margaret Guenther’s workshop on prayer.

The Religious Education director at the Episcopal church noted that she thought that I brought a new perspective on the life and witness of another community that they did not know much about and that their community was blessed by my presence. She believed that I
enlightened them, by being willing to share without expecting the others to become part of my church. While I was willing to stand up for what I believed in even when it varied from the others’ views, I listened to other voices, clarified my own views, and found that which is enriching in a variety of traditions—especially through music, which is universal, above and beyond any one faith/religion/spirituality.

How did that affect my participation in Friends? A Friend and I began “spiritual companionsing;” I suggested the meetings for healing, and I suggested involvement with the Interfaith Thanksgiving.

What has been the result of my time with the SDAs? I’ve gained a far better understanding of theologically conservative and evangelical Christianity, and a better understanding of Quakers.

**Sunday, May 1**

Have I not gone deep enough into Seventh-day Adventism or Quakerism? I need to write a comparison/contrast essay. I am feeling as if I’m only at a midpoint here. Midpoint of what, exactly?

**Tuesday, May 3**

I want to understand how SDAs decide when to interpret and when to read literally (if there is any rational reasoning).
**Sunday, May 8**

What is the purpose of going into the SDA church? To be open, to learn? It’s not the place for me—too restrictive. Wait and see what shows up in my writing?

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**Friday, May 20**

Went to Sabbath School again this morning, and was once again surprised by the questions and answers the participants came up with about the section of Mark we read. I had never thought to ask myself why Jesus did such and such. On my way out, the pastor was trying to remember my first name, and recalled my surname when I reminded him of “Kim.” I added, “the Quaker minister,” and that was also how I introduced myself to one of the Sabbath School members. At the very least, I can be a witness to the presence of Friends among them.

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**Tuesday, May 24**

I wondered, “Why this particular SDA Church?” I answered myself, “Because I know a couple of people, because the pastor makes an effort to remember my name, because I liked the associate pastor’s preaching, because I like the questions and answers the people in Sabbath School come up with (I didn’t connect with the preaching version at all), and because it’s easy to get to.

Because the worship service at another, smaller SDA church seemed chaotic, and the people were actually too friendly—I don’t like being hugged by total strangers, though I do like folks to introduce themselves.

But to be fair, maybe I should visit the local other churches too, especially one of the Hispanic ones.
I'm called into some type of ministerial relationship with the SDA church, as part of my various ministries as a Friend, and as I was called into one particular Episcopal church. When one is called, one has to answer...figuring out how to respond is the hard part. But I have the support of and clearance from my congregation, and they're writing a formal "minute" of such introducing me to the SDA church in general, not any particular congregation.

May [undated]
The idea of Sabbath being a single and complete day of rest, relaxation, and joyfulness, a day for practicing that which brings us closer to God, is a wonderfully simple idea in this increasingly busy and complex world. My question for the Friends is: is each of us practicing the idea of Sabbath as holy connection every day? How can we live out our understanding of Sabbath every day? (From Sabbath School discussion: if there were no people, there would be no need for Sabbath. Jesus, as fully God, created both people and the Sabbath. The many rules of Orthodox and Hasidic Judaism take concentration away from the meaning of Sabbath.)

May [undated]
The SDA emphases on racial equality and the sinfulness of gay, lesbian, or bisexual (GLB) relationships seem very contradictory. While it seems that slavery was condoned in the Old Testament, Jesus came for everyone. All of EGW's arguments for racial equality could so easily be used for GLB equality. Adventist and evangelical views elevate human prejudices above God's law of love. See Mark 7:7-9.
**Friday, June 10**

I never consciously knew, pre-SDA involvement, that many people live their lives with real fears about the horrible ending of the world and the hope for a totally perfect heaven afterward. That they live with the fear of God’s judgment on them and hope for God’s vengeance on everyone who has hurt them (“justice”). I never understood God in that way and still don’t. But I know many people who want any new leader to be the Messiah and for everything to be miraculously perfect when the new leader begins. They act as if Judgment Day is coming—they act chaotically, striking out—and it’s all fear-based. Maybe they fear that now they’ll be held accountable and they’ll have to change. Maybe those who haven’t been living with honor and integrity have something to fear, if only change. These are people who create “tribulations” – emotional volcanic eruptions, tornadoes, earthquakes, boils, etc., which hurt themselves and those close to them.

Why don’t most people experience God in a mystical way? They’d be more compassionate if they felt/experienced the connection with the All. They wouldn’t be as fearful.

**Saturday, June 11**

I feel I have to slow down to a contemplative crawl. Listen, do nothing, be. Be with God. “Be still and know that I am God.”

I am awake, aware, resting in God. Wondering why we put so much emphasis on two peoples’ (the Old Testament Israelite and early Christian) understanding of God and their writings about that knowledge. What makes those particular people’s perceptions “sacred?” I agree with the Friends’ concept that we can find sacredness in writings ancient and
contemporary, that there is not one right interpretation, but that which touches us deeply is of
God.

Why is it that I don’t want to use titles with other people (because they are hierarchical),
or for God (such as “lord” or “father”—because these are patriarchal, male-centered), yet crave
the title of “minister” for myself? This is an ongoing struggle with my need to be recognized. A
friend reminds me to remember that these masculine words come from people/our language,
not from God – and asks if I am withholding honor/respect from God just because of our limited
language choices? Honestly, I don’t think of “honoring” or “respecting” God, but of being one,
listening and trying to act based on the understanding that comes from that perceived union….

Monday, June 13
In the Adult Sabbath School Guide discussion of Mark 12:26-7, Jesus says that God is the God of
those who are dead (Abraham, etc.), and that God is God of the living. Is that supposed to mean
that there is an afterlife, that the dead are living and therefore resurrected? A contradiction, a
paradox. To say that God is for both the dead and the living, how does that translate into the
dead are living? If a=b and a=c, does that mean that b=c? Can’t remember enough
logic/geometry to know.

Everything and everyone continues to live in God, who exists in the present, past, and
future (everything all at once), yet who defines himself in the present tense only (“I am”). So that
is a way of understanding the “afterlife” – that we’ll be cognizant of everything all at once, and
so “alive” when we’re (re-)united with God.

What is the difference between a mystic and a prophet?
According to the definition in the New Oxford Bible introductions to the Prophets (862-5 OT), Daniel (1126 OT), and Apocalyptic Literature (362 NT), EGW was a prophet. Prophets are persons capable of transcending themselves and therefore are able to voice a message other than their own; they are channels for the speech of God, albeit expressed through their own personal experiences; they are advocates for marked, daring, radical, subversive, and unpopular social policies—they are advocates for fairness in social relations and a pure worship of God as an alternative to the dominant social and religious mores; they exercise enormous imagination in discernment and articulation—redescribing reality and construing social experience in new ways. They leave behind a powerful and enduring influence and vision of reality. They are not predictors or fortune-tellers. But they do believe that God’s intention for the future is identifiable and knowable, and that this intention can be reliably expected, because the character of God is known and reliable. God’s intention for well-being (i.e., for fertility, peace, justice, righteousness, and joy) is certain. The community must live in moral coherence rooted in God’s rule, and the present moment is critical.

Numbers’ book on the health reforms of EGW reveals that she was hit on the head with a rock in childhood and was in a coma for 3 weeks; also her father was a “hatter” (i.e., made hats, which probably involved a mercury process) and EGW may have had mercury poisoning. Could her visions have been hallucinations from possible mercury poisoning or from the blow to the head, which could have caused a kind of temporal lobe epilepsy? Does it matter why or how she experienced her visions—whether because of a physical effect or because God reached out to her? According to everything I’ve read she was a prophet, albeit not a perfect one: EGW’s later
visions overturned earlier ones and she changed stances on issues like medical help for illness and foods which were acceptable to eat. Roy E. Graham wrote that in EGW,

we have an illustration of an individual who was very sensitive to what can be described as a concept of holiness in her experience. She was intensely devout and concerned to do what she believed was God’s will for her both personally and in ministry to others. These convictions combined with a strong personality to produce a leader who was to exert a major influence in Seventh-day Adventism both in her life and subsequently through her writings. While she saw her task as primarily within the framework of her own denomination, she produced material which she offered to a wider audience... (210).

If the prophets are those who are capable of transcending themselves and voicing messages of the Spirit, and are advocates of daring, radical social policies and a “pure” worship of God, then Friends taken as a whole are prophets. Certainly George Fox was. Inarguably, we try to live in moral coherence, i.e., with integrity and very much in the present. Quakers, as a whole, are a prophetic group. We believe so strongly in the spirit of prophecy that our worship is the epitome of opening ourselves to the voice of God. We believe that each person can encounter God directly, without the need for a paid, ordained clergy. We teach each other the discernment process for vocal ministry, and we practice group discernment or interpretation/analysis of prophecies—or as we call them, “concerns” or “leadings.”

I understand God to be the connections between every being, to be the Whole, everything all at once, existence. A mystic is one who has experienced union with God, with everything all at once, who understands that God is within, who perceives herself in all and all in
herself. “Everything about them conveys wholeness and inclusion” (Flinders, xxi). A prophet is one who radically changes society, based on their understanding of God, and whose words are captured (more or less) and shape the religious body and its future. Someone who has visions and amazing imagination and interpretive abilities, whose “vision” is relevant and new long after they’re gone. What crossover is there? Many mystics were prophets, but not all prophets are/were mystics. EGW was a prophet, but not a mystic, or so it seems from what I’ve read so far. George Fox was both mystic and prophet. I consider myself a mystic but only a very minor prophet in the sense of being able to practice vocal ministry.

Flinders wrote, “What is not often celebrated explicitly in Christian mystical writings...is the experience of a formless god, one who is not so much a being as a state of being...” (xxi-ii). And, “the culmination of the mystical life as many Christian mystics have described it is the so-called unitive state, during which the seeker feels herself wholly united with God. Helpless to describe this state, mystics reach for metaphors: a drop of wine blends into water, the wax of one candle melts into that of another, starlight is subsumed in the light of the rising sun, and boldly, Catherine of Genoa cries out, 'My me is God!'” ... “an experience of divinity that is without form, and therefore without gender, a divinity that is indistinguishable, as far as they can tell, from their own deepest sense of self.” Yet, “For orthodox Catholics, however, as I understand, there is a difference. God must remain, in a certain and very important sense, ‘the other’” (xxii). So the experience of Catholic mystics was heretical because they proclaimed that God was not “other!” “The use of orthodox language to describe their experience was a basic skill of survival” (xxiii). And so many Christians believe this—that to claim to be the daughter or son of God is heresy, that only Jesus was God incarnate. Yet we all have the capacity for (but
perhaps not the grace of) union with God while we live, not just after death. Jesus himself said this. I take Jesus’ statement that “I and the Father are one” to mean that not only was he God, but that we are too, in the sense that we can all achieve union with God; we are all sons or daughters of God, or are of the nature of God.

Flinders wrote again about mystics, that “they were making an arduous journey, solitary and often terrifying. They were making it, moreover, because they wanted to more than anything else in life” (xxii). “Their own hunger was too great to be satisfied with anything short of everything...” (xxiv). That is exactly how I feel. Once connected, always seeking that wholeness within God.

Wednesday, June 15

SDAs don’t want to get caught up in “end-time hysteria” but do want to maintain a sense of the imminence of the Advent. Is that a way of “being present?” With the Advent and Heaven, they’re trying to imagine/picture what union with God might be like. George Fox believed that Christ has already come (the Advent has happened)—that the call of God is now, not in the future—and yes, it seems to be a way of being present. Gulley and Mulholland believe that all people will be reconciled with God, but Fox didn’t believe that. He did look forward to Christ leading Friends into the new age/Kingdom of God—the end times.

Friday, June 17

What do I believe? That Jesus (on the cross) was an example of the fact that any of us can experience a sense of absence, a sense of separation from God (and other people) and that this
sense of separation can supersede our knowledge that God is always present. When we experience that, we may forego acting with compassion toward ourselves and others, and that is sin.

To obey is to “hear,” and to act. If we can’t “hear” God, can’t sense our relationship, we may do harm. We may feel empty, without hope. Our community has to help—to reach out to those experiencing this loss and draw them in; express love and caring; reiterate that hope and joy, while not present at the moment, will come again. We have to remind each other to seek connections: with God, with each other. To act as if we are connected, whether or not we feel connected. To learn compassion and to practice it always—integrity, peace, simplicity, equality.

**Saturday, June 18**

Went to West Virginia, today, to go to the SDA church, but they were closed, all gone to Camp Meeting. I had looked on the web to see if that might be the case, but hadn’t seen anything about it, and I’m sorry to have missed them.

**Sunday, June 19**

Listened to the “New Dimensions” radio program with guest Harvey Cox, who wrote *When Jesus Came to Harvard: Making Moral Choices Today*. According to Cox, the Gospels are a combination of history, recollection, and interpretation. It’s good to keep a variety of voices—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Thomas. The Gospel of John may have been influenced by the interpretive framework of Buddhism. Mary Magdalene and other extracanonical gospels help fill in the picture and reveal the heavy hand of the patriarchal editors, who left out the Gospel of...
Sophia (Wisdom) and Mary Magdalene. In the Old Testament, Wisdom/Sophia was the companion of God during the process of Creation. In the letters of Paul in the New Testament, Jesus was referred to as the Wisdom/Sophia of God—Jesus was the fleshly expression of the feminine aspect of God. Referring to God as both feminine and masculine is an old tradition, not a new feminist innovation. The central message of Christianity is that God has chosen to become “one of us.” Jesus’ parables don’t mention God but put the listeners into other people’s stories or situations. Jesus’ central messages were: look around you and see the presence of God, here and now; and observe the entanglement of our lives with all life and the universe.

Hurray for this kind of “liberal” Christian scholarship!

**Tuesday, June 21**

Recorded (officially recognized) as a “Minister of Ecumenism” by the Grand Rapids Friends Meeting.

**Friday, June 24**

The “end of time” could refer to the absolute present (past, present, future all one). “Final judgment” could mean that all will be incorporated in God, and thus will know all of the harms/evil done in all times, as well as all of the love/goodness. To know infinite darkness as well as infinite light—something we can’t imagine—unimaginable pain and grief as well as joy and rapture. Horrible and terrible and wonderful and amazing. That’s why it’s important to act in the belief that we are all connected (whether or not we feel this), to love all—self, enemies, friends and family, those who are unknown—because all will be revealed when we abide in God.
Spong wrote about life after death, “For Jesus it seemed to mean something like communion
with God” (289). Immanence (here and now) and transcendence (that which goes beyond).

[Jesus] engaged each moment and each person with the intensity of eternity....

The attention, the gaze, and the presence of Jesus to that person was portrayed
as total. That person was perceived as being the only person in Jesus’ life at that
moment. In that manner he seemed to challenge with his very life the hierarchy
of values by which human beings judged one another. To Jesus, each person
bore God’s image, each person was worthy of God’s love, and therefore each
person had the potential to grow into the full life of God’s Spirit (Spong, 244).

“The life of Jesus seemed to call people into wholeness and wellness” (Spong, 246). –
Does my life do so as well?

“Jesus made God real...” (257). “There is no hell...in Paul’s writings” (283). “The business
of the church is to love people into life” (288). –If only all churches practiced this, formal religion
wouldn’t have such a bad reputation.

This life [of Jesus] is the life of God being lived among us.... When those whose
fear of God’s presence was so total that they struck back to kill him...[what] they
actually did was to free the meaning of his life from the boundaries of finitude
and to make him timeless, eternal, and ever-present.... [Simon/Peter] saw Jesus
inside the meaning of God.... How does one talk about that? Only symbolically....

To quell the doubts and to answer the questions, details were added (290).
Spong’s understanding draws me deeper into Christianity, rather than the distancing I experience with the fundamentalists' thoughts.

Wednesday, June 29

This week’s Sabbath School readings are on Jesus as “Lord and Savior.” I have trouble with both of these words. For me, savior means that God’s love is present and calls to us—inexhaustible, infinite, emancipating compassion. To redeem means to return, turning and re-turning to our deepest selves within the Whole. What about “lord?” Its roots sort of mean a keeper of the bread (masculine) or mother of meat (feminine)—an employer, as opposed to an “eater” of bread/meat or laborer. It's also a translation of the Latin of the Greek of the Hebrew for Yahweh (the ineffable name of God).

I don’t understand God as “reigning/ruling” over me. Earthly lords have such a reputation of neglecting/abusing the people who lived on and worked the land, and of living off them as if they (the lords) were fungi. It's a very medieval concept.

Friday, July 8

I've worn jewelry less and less since beginning this SDA experience, and now it doesn’t “look right” when I hold something up against my outfit while looking in the mirror in the morning. I wonder if this is a long-term change for me.

Worked on the “God-Given Nature” essay about the SDA stance on same-sex relationships. Almost ready to have a spiritual companion read the draft.
Saturday, July 9

A sermon point which stuck with me: salvation is by faith alone, but belief in that salvation frees us up to do good works. Or, in my language, trusting in our connection to the Whole allows us to create constructive relationships with ourselves, others, and God.

As ever, I wondered why I was at this church. Where is my deepest self? Am I truly called here, and why? Yet I still have a strong sense that I do need to be there. I yearned for Sabbath School when I wasn’t able to attend—missed the discussion of ideas; today hearing a fellow say that the Adult Sabbath School Guide’s translation of Luke 14:26 was unfortunate made me feel better about the week’s reading—I had had trouble with it too.

I said something in Sabbath School about reframing the idea of “surrendering to God” to a more positive “making a commitment to God” and they talked about it, liked it. I prefer to think of surrendering or submitting as giving back, making oneself available to God; committing to connection and relationship. Maybe anyone who has ever been assaulted has trouble with the idea of surrender, and also with the “parent” model for God. That is probably why I couldn’t finish the thought about “God as parent” during Sabbath School.

Been thinking about the Psalm 16:7, which says “I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; my heart teaches me, night after night.” This seems to be in answer to the prayer of “Thy will be done” – part obedience, which means listening, and part giving God “authority” over us or letting God “direct” our lives by acting on what enters our heart via that still, small voice. As for “savior, redeemer, lord,” I think of Jesus as the ultimate example of “being in relationship” (with self, God, others).
But church—I can see the appeal of it for some people—not only the community, but also the appeal of the charismatic preaching. Yet I find myself “translating” during the service, e.g., “sin” into “separation from self, others, God.” Then it is bearable, and I can get something from the messages.

I don’t want to do music for them—I don’t want to play music at all, and their musicians are so good I’m afraid I feel inadequate.

I think I’m attending so that people begin to recognize my face and name. As for what’s next, I still can’t imagine. Perhaps it’s time to make an appointment with the pastor and talk things over with him.

Asked the Friends for someone to talk with when I’m doing the Bible study—a spiritual companion is willing to help with this.

**Monday, July 11**

I was told that the church will be having evangelistic meetings starting in October and I might want to go. I think of Baptist revivals and altar calls when I hear “evangelistic meetings.” The format would include a minister speaking for about 20 minutes on some aspect of EGW’s writings, then 20-30 minutes of small-group discussion. I could be part of one of the small groups facilitated by an acquaintance (providing a safety net for me). And yes, there would be altar calls (“What you fear will happen”). Still, it would be a chance to experience what I’ve been reading about.
Why am I afraid? Is it of being converted? Because of what it would mean if I were? Would I give up my essential self, my rational being, my honor and integrity, my Quaker community, my friends? Am I afraid of not being in control? Of being spiritually brainwashed?

Friday, July 15

In everything, give thanks. Thanks for this time of reflection, this time of opening up, my heart spilling over into tears.

Saturday, July 16

In church, while listening to the singing, I felt a flood of tears—a release, thinking about being released to become a leader, and to minister. Church is a time when I open up, and this is why I’m afraid of altar calls. I’m afraid of being carried away by emotion.

What do other ministers do when they need to be ministered to? Go outside their congregation to another minister. I need someone to pray for me, pray hard. I am so tired; feel like a wrung-out dishrag. I pray that I might continue to open up to healing and the continuing process of conversion (turning toward God). Called a former-minister friend. He calls it “weeping for humanity” and offered himself as a minister for me. He also counseled me to let the schools of religion know that I’m interested in their programs and ask about financial support.

That’s actually one of the things I could offer to the SDA church—a ministry of listening, though I don’t have the SDA knowledge to respond in their way—but caring, being present to another person, listening for God—I can do that. Do they have such a need?
Today's Adult Sabbath School discussion included their belief about the reality of an evil being (Satan) who plants thoughts in our minds and tries to direct our actions—I just don't think that way. I think both “good and bad” thoughts come from our own minds and our experiences. But what does draw me in—that they are truly trying to be good people. They are thoughtful and try to talk and act out of care and compassion. Not judging others, but trying to live their beliefs for themselves. They are happy when someone comes to share their beliefs but they don't seem to be proselytizing. What are they like in the mission field? What will I see at the evangelistic meetings?

**Sunday, July 17**

Worked a lot on the comparison table between SDA & Friends' beliefs. Am using Cooper’s book.

Like SDAs, early Quaker theologians (i.e., Robert Barclay) also believed that all biblical passages relevant to a topic had to be “harmonized.” (See entry on March 17, 2005.) However, they used a “situational” approach to read texts in context of the culture and times, not a literal one (Freiday, xxii).

**Tuesday, July 19**

Still grappling with literal vs. interpretive readings, especially of the creation, Revelation, and prophecies. There is an unnamed evangelist preaching at Christ Community Church and his outlines are on the web at http://www.hope4thephopeless.com/home.htm. There it says, "Expect it to be symbolic. The book of Revelation was written in a sort of "code" to preserve the prophecies from the malicious intent of those who would destroy them. Local and literal people,
places and things take on a worldwide and symbolic form in prophecy." So this implies that they read Revelation, or any prophecy metaphorically, not literally. Yet Bull and Lockhart state that SDAs take EGW's prophecies literally (25). Which is it?

It's time to call the pastor and make an appointment. Created a "spiritual resume" to send him. How do I deal with my reluctance to address (or refer to) him as "pastor?" This reluctance feels like a barrier.

Made the appointment with the SDA pastor.

**Saturday, July 30**

Reading Chuck Fager's book: a "summary definition of a Liberal Quaker: one who feels united with others by a common experience of being gathered or called into this faith community, despite the diverse names the experience may be given" (38). This defines me.

**Sunday, July 30**

d'Aquili and Newberg wrote: "if God is truly infinite, then God should have infinite manifestations. Why, then, should any particular version of God be set completely apart and exclusive of any other version? ... ritual in religion tends to lead to the development of a group cohesiveness that excludes others not in the group" (167). This concept of the brain function they call a "holistic operator," and God experienced in terms of the mystical "absolute unitary being" is called the "God as connection" model.... It explains why Quakers don't have ritual and aren't exclusive.


**Tuesday, August 2**

This evening I met with the SDA pastor and a senior elder. These are the items I addressed: I feel called into relationship with the SDA church; I'm here as a minister, to learn and carry that learning back to my own congregation; I’d like to build a bridge between our congregations—are there mutual concerns in the GR community—joint project? How can I serve this church?

We met for more than an hour. I’m glad I’ve read and thought through so much history and theology lately, because we discussed many things, and I represented the Religious Society of Friends’ varied and collective beliefs as best I could. I wish I could hear the pastor’s sermon on Saturday, on that of “God within”—have asked to borrow a video. The pastor said I had given him a lot to think about. He thinks it’ll become clear what I am being called to do as I continue to attend and study with them. He thanked me, and believes my presence alone is a witness.

**Friday, August 5**

The pastor and I also talked about the upcoming evangelistic meetings in October, and he is looking forward to seeing how they turn out—both because of the new format of small group discussions, and because he is interested in how people will react to the altar calls (which he thinks will be “soft”)—many Adventists do not like altar calls, and believe they have no part in church services! Whereas certain SDA ministers include some kind of “invitation to respond” in most services.

In *Without Apology*, Fager discussed the revivalism beginning in the 1870’s and the reaction counter to revivalism, which led to the beginning of the Pacific Yearly Meeting, and
later, the reunification movement within the Society of Friends. He states the theological underpinnings of reunification:

Their belief that the Inner Light is available to all persons;

Finding the measure of authenticity in the *practice* of worship and witness in the faith community, rather than adherence to doctrinal formulas or emotional experiences;

The insistence on a free ministry, equally available to all;

A fiercely congregational polity, with “higher” structures kept to a minimum and largely restricted to cooperative and consultative functions;

Concern for the testimonies, such as peace and equality;

And, ... an emphasis on the magnetic effects of personal example and contact, “letting your life preach,” as the proper basis for congregational growth or “evangelism” (61-2).

So, along with my upbringing contributing to my aversion to revivals and evangelistic meetings, the Liberal tradition of Quakerism provides justification for and reinforces my disinclination.

*Tuesday, August 9*

John Woolman: “Love was the first motion, and then a concern arose to spend some time with the Indians, that I might feel and understand their life, and the spirit they live in, if haply I might receive some instruction from them, or they be in any degree helped forward by my following
the Leadings of Truth amongst them…” (127). This comes close to describing my feeling about sojourning with the Adventists....

**Saturday, August 13**

I liked what one man said today in Sabbath School about setting boundaries, i.e., don’t let others define your Christianity by their labels and expectations. I’d like to talk with him about the question of the father/parental/familial model of God not working for those who were assaulted/abused.

If the Final Events DVD is a “precursor” to the evangelistic meetings in October, what are they going to be like? What messages will be given? Don’t dismiss them until I’ve experienced them. On the video of the August 6, 2005 service was evidence of the similarity to Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses, in the door-to-door handing out of the DVD and the return visit a week later to ask for people’s opinions/reactions. I can’t reconcile the DVD with my interactions with SDAs who hold more liberal views.

**Monday, August 15**

Isaiah 45:5-7 “I am the Lord, and there is no other.... I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I the Lord do all these things” [emphasis added]. This passage seems to provide evidence for God as an integrated, holistic being rather than solely good with a separate evil counterpart.
Sunday, August 21

Went to Battle Creek Friends Church (Evangelical) with a spiritual companion today. They were very friendly, recognizing that we were strangers. They have two services because of the size of their congregation. The early service has older folks, and the second one more families and young people. They have a “praise and worship” style—a choir of six singers and a band (the words and notes were repetitive but the musicians were skilled). They clapped and swayed (unlike the SDAs). There was a greeting like the “Peace” in the Episcopal service near the beginning, in which everyone shook hands. I looked around at people dressed casually yet with jewelry, so unlike the SDAs. There were a few prayers and a 5-minute quiet prayer/centering time with the lights off and soft piano background music. The sermon was gospel-based, but focused on a few verses, not on many verses like the SDA sermons (SDAs try to gather all relevant verses on a particular topic). We introduced ourselves to the pastor as being from the Grand Rapids Friends Meeting. So, a beginning. Read Douglas Gwyn and Marge Abbott on evangelical and liberal Friends.

Monday, August 22

It seems to me that the Evangelical Friends have moved a long way away from being a prophetic church. They also separate themselves from the word “Quaker.”

Wednesday, August 24

I don’t expect anyone’s thinking to change because of something I write (though I can hope that it would). Writing the essay on homosexuality, “God-given Nature” (Appendix II) is my way of
engaging SDA and Evangelical thought and texts. I gave it to the Friends Meeting Ministry & Counsel. If I were to give it to someone in the SDA church, I should also add that it represents my thought and not my church’s. A Friend called with the email address of his Quaker seminary advisor, who has had some Adventist contact.

**Saturday, August 27**

Visited another SDA church today. During Sabbath School, I asked why SDAs dress up so much for church (although they didn’t at this particular place). Because it’s special, they’re visiting God, was their answer. But God is always with us and isn’t just “in church,” I think. The folks in Sabbath School decided that the Holy Spirit leaves us when we sin (and may come back—it sounded like a revolving door!).

**Sunday, August 28**

Reported to Friends Meeting Ministry & Counsel. Before Meeting for Worship, one Friend suggested a worship-sharing format for Bible Study, and perhaps something like Lectio Divina. Several people expressed interest. A spiritual companion and I are going to the Quaker Bible workshop on September 24. During Meeting, one message given was that we are called to be a prophetic people, that is, not only to listen inwardly to that still, small voice, but also to speak those messages from God. To use the discernment process of asking, “Is this message from me or God? If God, is it meant just for me, or might even one person benefit from hearing it?” That we may stand or remain seated, but should project our voices so that all may hear. That God will
Tuesday, August 30

Wowee, what a great conversation with a couple from the SDA Church tonight! They’re very liberal—deeply thoughtful and challenging—thinking things through for themselves, not just accepting the status quo and doctrine. The fellow said he thinks their church focuses too much on the Advent to the extent that some Adventists don’t really live thoughtfully—they’re rule-bound and legalistic.... This pair, too, sometimes have a difficult time with the Bible Instructor’s approaches to things, though we all admire the knowledge of the instructor. They find west Michigan very conservative. They understood when I asked about dress at church—together we came to understand that when I protest about the dress it is because it reflects bringing “the world” into church—it’s a way of “being seen,” not so much a matter of immodesty or expensive clothing. They think their church is very welcoming of divergent views and will accept me as a Quaker in their midst. They think I know more than many Adventists do about their beliefs. As for there being any “rational” guidelines for when to read the Bible literally or when to interpret, they said that if the writing is prophetic, it should be read symbolically. But each person will understand things differently, uniquely. Regarding my convening Bible study with the Quakers—the goal is to get the group to trust that they can speak their ideas without being “put down,” to share and discuss with each other. I don’t have to have any answers. If I can pose a question which gets them going, that’s all that is needed. Not to necessarily get them to share my views(!), but for us to come up with better understanding of the texts and stories in relation to
our lives. They suggested that I ask a particular SDA pastor to explain Creationism (in person, not via email). They exclaimed that this pastor is really good at explaining.

**Thursday, September 1**

I've been wondering why I should go to the evangelistic meetings. There are so many things I disagree with SDAs about: labeling glbt folk as inherently more sinful than other human beings (this seems to me to be a theology of hate, not love and compassion); the interpretation of the end times (Book of Revelation); the belief that the theory of evolution is evil. I've read a lot of SDA history and theology, know more than most non-SDAs and perhaps more than some SDAs about their faith and practice, and I'm not looking to be converted.

And to be fair, there are many things I admire about the SDA church, which is what keeps me coming back. I still don't know exactly why I'm there, except that the Bible study in Sabbath School challenges me, and I'm learning and growing in general—and perhaps that is sufficient for now.

**Friday, September 2**

One of the church members thought that the evangelistic meetings would be helpful in that they would provide information I was seeking, would help me connect with more members, and through them I would gain new perspectives.
**Saturday, September 3**

I see God as intersticial, existing in all of the spaces between things, in the connections. Infinitely loving and compassionate, reaching out to all people in all ages. If we choose not to listen and respond, well, we have free will, but that doesn't limit God. The Calvinist idea seems to be in direct contrast: God is limited and there is limited space for people in heaven. When people begin to describe God as wrathful and vengeful, that seems to me to be a model of Satan, or a way of describing evil.

**Tuesday, September 6**

“It is more important for each of us to be the person we were meant to be and do the things we are called to do than to maintain a close family relationship, painful as that may be for everyone involved” (Watson, 156). Consequently, honoring father and mother cannot supersede integrity and good boundaries. Watson’s book might be a good one for the Friends Bible Study group.

**Monday, September 12**

These are the kinds of things I have going around in my mind recently: I keep attending church in spite of the portrayal of SDA beliefs in the *Final Events* DVD; I keep seeing a sense of SDAs being aware of God's absence rather than presence; in the education field, SDAs are up with the current brain research and teaching and learning theory...so why doesn’t this currency apply to other areas of knowledge, Creationism, for example?
One SDA member’s thought that the theory of evolution is evil and forms the basis for the Nazi genocide horror in WWII horrified me. I recognize that this thought may be typical of “black and white” thinkers and isn’t necessarily what other SDAs believe. But I have noticed more duality of thinking in SDAs than in Friends. I appreciate Friends’ willingness to live with gray areas and with not knowing the answers. I am glad for the Friends’ conviction that one’s beliefs depend on personal revelation—on how the Holy Spirit leads one to interpret things—rather than the SDA adherence to a “right” or “correct” set of beliefs. Two SDA theories I find difficult to reconcile with the science I learned are that carbon dating measures some substance from the "void" and so doesn’t reflect the age of items truly, and that dinosaurs were a product of genetic engineering and as such they were a by-product of human arrogance and had to be eliminated, i.e., they didn’t get onto the Ark (scientists believe that most dinosaurs were extinct by the time humans evolved!). I inferred that the “young earth” idea based on a literal six-day creation is "because Ellen White said so."

Perhaps these are psychology or sociology of religion subjects—the need for answers and control, and the Judaic/Christian/Muslim definition of a God who is an all-knowing (omniscient) and all-powerful (omnipotent) being. I get the omnipresent part—I don’t perceive God as a being, but as the all-pervasive connection, always and forever. But mystics seem to be a very small subset of perceivers. I see all creation stories as theories to explain our origins, including the Big Bang theory. There were no video cameras, no one wrote down these things; we have no eyewitnesses. The Bible comes from human interpretation of visions and trying to understand the ineffable. Groups of humans decided that these were the stories to live by, and
left other stories out. "God is capable of anything"—well, that only holds true if God is a being.

(This is where I differ from Quaker theology, which is theistic.)

_Saturday, October 1_

I don’t really feel emotionally safe in going to the Evangelistic meeting today. I wish there were a friend who would go with me. What I’ve been feeling is raw grief, physical pain—which is exhausting. My self-esteem is at its low point. Everything is connected—my feeling unheard and devalued in the world, Mom’s dementia and her trying to draw me back into relationship with her, the dreams I have of danger everywhere, thoughts about the upcoming holidays, the changes I feel deep within myself as I learn about conflict management and designing organizational change. I needed time to myself; instead of going to church, I spent the middle of the day in Aman Park, just being still. I will probably always have trouble being myself and feeling centered around anyone else—I may always feel at my best when I am alone in the woods and fields.

_Wednesday, October 5_

What is the nature of my soul? Who is it that I am? How do I hang on? I have cared for all the world, yet cannot care for myself at the moment. What I’ve been feeling has been almost unbearable. Is this horrible self-doubt and hatred always going to be part of fundamental change in my self? (And if so) what is it that is changing this time? Is this upheaval a reaction to deep change in myself? Naked and broken…. I have felt myself on the verge of disintegration—
and perhaps this is only when deep, fundamental realizations can occur and change can be
lasting.

I was a prisoner of my parents and grandparents. I was stripped of my humanity, denied
my own perceptions and reality, degraded, shamed. But I am still alive, have survived, sometimes
thrive. I can heal. I can make a difference in the world. It has taken a lot of energy to get here, to
break down the barriers. Help me to be present....

I still need something from the SDAs. My acquaintance’s assertion that I seem to be
looking for information is incorrect—I’m seeking connections. But with everything going on, I
don’t have the emotional energy to go to two churches. For now, I don’t know what to do.

**Saturday, October 8**

This week’s Sabbath School lessons were particularly relevant. Sunday focused on conversion,
being called to ministry, and identifying what I’ve been called to do: teaching and learning,
writing, listening, contemplation. Monday’s lesson defined “saint” as “a person the light shines
through” and “someone whose life—speech, actions, attitudes, relationships—points to Jesus”
(Fowler 16). A particularly “Friendly” (Quakerly) idea! Saints connote “all believers,” not just one
particular group of people. Tuesday’s lesson was about what peace means to Christians—and I
read the texts to denote: to be untroubled and unafraid, to be reconciled with God, to be joined
with all people, to be in that particularly mystical union with God which Jesus epitomized. I need
to spend more time just be-ing. Wednesday focused on “unity” as “universal, in which all things
in heaven and earth move toward an ultimate unity in Christ” (18). Again, ultimate union with
God and the universe. Friday’s discussion question asks about not experiencing “peace” even
though one has given oneself to God. My answer is that to be in relationship isn’t always gentle and one may not feel calm, but one has to make the commitment to listen, to act, to trust. Letting the light shine through can mean that we don’t continue to focus on the darkness and difficulty, but that we let ourselves find meaning and then become literally “lighthearted.”

**Friday, October 21**

I went to a talk about Creationism (“Intelligent Design”) vs. Evolution. I think some groups of people mistake simplicity of thinking for wisdom; others mistake complexity of thinking for wisdom. But isn’t wisdom about knowledge which connects us and the compassion out of which we act? The speaker mentioned St. Augustine, something along the lines of God being eternal and outside time, so that to try to “pin down” the sequence of events in creation is pointless.

Tim Berra wrote, “evolution itself is a fact…. *How* evolution occurs...is theoretical.” And, “Creationists insist on a young Earth, but if there is anything science knows, it is the great antiquity of the Earth and the solar system. This has been verified by at least five independent radioisotope clocks” (141). He also stated that, “In recent times, Christian fundamentalism has been a peculiarly American movement; nowhere in Western Europe, in fact, has creationism been an issue” (142). I wonder why that is?

**Saturday, October 22**

Tried to say something at Sabbath School along the lines of wisdom being different from intelligence in that wisdom comes from our connections with God and people, and in always
acting out of the compassion which comes from that connection. One fellow responded, "so that which draws in, rather than that which separates...."

Sunday, October 23

Listened to Christa Tippett’s Speaking of Faith radio program (www.speakingoffaith.org) today, featuring Jamie Smith from Calvin College, discussing “Evangelicals out of the Box.” He calls it progressive evangelicalism, saying that evangelicals need to hold onto the concept of personal holiness but also move to a corporate and public holiness via a commitment to the poor. He thinks that evangelicals should not be so pro-big-business and pro-free-market because those stances further injustices, but should look at the Bible for what matters: the Prophets, and Jesus. He says we are in a post-secular society, and calls this radical orthodoxy, which results not in Christianizing the state, but neither withdrawing politically—not using the partisan political strategies we’ve seen recently. This would be a policy of engagement which wouldn’t translate into public policy, but would create alternative ways of embodying beliefs within the church community: modeling a community of virtues, not lobbying for political changes. The state should be a pluralistic public sphere, and the church could stand to just take care of their own for a few years. This sounds similar to “emergent” Christianity—a positive trend in my opinion.

Also, Nancy Murphy, a professor at Fuller Seminary in California, was on the program, talking about evolution and Creationism. She said that those who are committed to not resolving the two have done a very good job of teaching the public that mode of thinking, but that we need to teach that events in the natural world are a result of both natural causes and God. Evolutionary process is a means by which God created/creates the world. Amen to that!
I asked for a friend’s prayers both for traveling mercies and for my willingness to be open to learning at the leadership institute I'll be attending. Before going, I've been trying to spend as much time as possible in the “church without walls,” walking and sitting with God in the forest, where I can be totally receptive and unguarded, without the barriers I put up around people.

**Monday, October 24**

Yesterday’s Sabbath School lesson seems to correlate disbelief or unbelief with evil, and “unbeliever” with non-Christian, so that all those who are not Christian would be considered evil. Exceedingly non-Friendly.

I’m a “liberal” Quaker because I feel very little need for ritual and don’t want to get caught in “dead faith,” yet it is often the singing at the SDA church which catches at my heart—we don’t have superb singing in Friends’ Meeting.

**Wednesday, October 26**

Today’s Sabbath School text is about salvation coming by grace through faith. To me, “grace” is the indescribable call from God; faith is our listening and response. As God reaches out to reconcile us to “him,” if we can open up, this connection reaches our hearts and the light can flow through. Jesus was the epitome of that of God within, and the light spilling out.
**Friday, October 28**

Maybe I should ask for an invitation to sit with an acquaintance at church. I’m willing to be open but I don’t want to be alone. I just have to live through pain.

**Saturday, October 29**

I stayed for church, which was okay—I was sleepy, but the sermon was on why there are so many Christian denominations—each has some of the truth…. In Sabbath School the big question was, “What is sin?” I said it was “separation from God, which leads to acts of harming others or oneself.” One person responded that it is the choosing to ignore God or to not trust God, and lots of little choices follow, which take one further away from God. Satan’s sin was in wanting to control things, to be equal to or better than God. I still don’t believe in a personal God-as-a-being, or in evil personified. I believe in God within all, and transcending all (more than just the universe, not just a synonym for the universe).

Went to Aman Park and sat in the sun, looking at trees, plants, sky, and realized that I feel better. Hermit-y, but not so fragile and in pain. I can learn to respect myself and walk my talk. To repel those who seek to take from me without my permission. To step back, to observe and listen without reacting. To love myself, feel my fears and let them go, to find the gentleness of spirit that heals all wounds, to be serene. To shield myself from hurt, envy, jealousy, to go inside myself and honor my feelings, to honor the creative source within, to be grounded, to know that as a child of the earth I am not ever alone and will be healed enough to share this energy with others. To trust in my path and in the open doorways, to wonder and be adventurous and play, to not get caught in chaos, fear, suffering, seriousness.
**Sunday, October 30**

After Friends Meeting, went to Aman again—felt like I was flying high like an untethered balloon, and so deliberately grounded myself. Sat in the sunshine—slanting light, scents of Queen Anne’s lace, leaves, apples. I feel good, strong.

**Saturday, November 5**

Today in Sabbath School the lessons emphasized that the differences which had separated Jews and Gentiles were eliminated by Christ—that there was “one new creation…a new society; a new humanity” *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, 49). There is unity of all peoples, all creation, with God. This “church without walls,” our universal and shared access to the presence of God, seems to depict the union I experience as a mystic—as one people we become “God’s holy sanctuary, ‘a dwelling place of God in the Spirit’” (51). The teacher challenged me by asking if all denominations are equal. I stand by my answer—not the same, but yes, we are all united as one body in God. **All** believers have access to God’s presence and are the sanctuary for the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is important to remember the past—including the present divisions (denominations), so that we keep moving toward and not away from God. I believe Friends have as many “pieces of the truth” as the SDA church, though we understand those “pieces” differently. The Study Guide asks what can be done to help heal the division and disunity which exists within the Christian Church (52)...this is the basis of my ministry and another friend’s as well.

I still find it extremely difficult to talk about these things—Sabbath School stretches and challenges me, especially as my views are often very different from SDAs’ views.
Sunday, November 6

Someone in Sabbath School didn’t believe that Affirmative Action had been a good thing, though I think it has. I think we wouldn’t have made changes without the extrinsic motivation of legislation—the same is true of environmental laws. Sometimes we have to legislate change and provide a structure for it. The Ten Commandments are an example, as is Jesus’ preaching and his relationships with God and people.

The SDA church, along with many others and society in general, chooses to persecute GLBT people. Our fighting back isn’t enough—we get beaten, raped, murdered, and imprisoned, lose our jobs, families, churches, houses, etc. Getting anti-harassment legislation provides some structure for change. Getting equal opportunity legislation helps. The church used to believe that left-handedness was sinful and evil, and that slavery was condoned by God. Society changes gradually, and legislation provides impetus.

Monday, November 7

Realized that I was at ease with having the pastor in our Sabbath School—I saw him as an equal and had talked fairly openly with him about my Quaker beliefs. I’m guarded and careful in Sabbath School generally, often feel off-balance, wondering if I’m being judged. I feel less free to say what I think and also feel less articulate.
Tuesday, November 8

Liberal Quakers believe that human language is imperfect and can only record small glimpses of the truth of God. So we’re not literalists or fundamentalists.

Talked with a Sabbath School teacher today about my thoughts related to the question, "Are all denominations equal?" This teacher asked the question because of my work with other denominations—thought I might have an authoritative answer which would be different from theirs. So the teacher was reaching "out of the box." But the teacher does believe that SDAs have the truth, or more of the truth, especially regarding Sabbath—and believes that the denominations will try to unite as one Christian body (catholic church) and will impose Sunday laws again, because EGW prophesized so. There is and will be a drive to ask individual denominations to give up that which makes them unique, e.g., seventh-day Sabbath. I tried to explain that even the interfaith movement doesn’t do that. But it’s a good question to discuss with my Friendly spiritual companion—is the megachurch movement and even our ministry trying to do something which could be seen as harmful? We’re reaching for dialog, discussion, relationship, connection.

I also asked one of the Sabbath School teachers if she would have entered ministry, had the ministerial path had been open to women. She, in turn, said that it sounded as if I were still thinking about paid ministry. I don’t think I am. I find pastoral care both uplifting and draining, and am glad to be part of a committee, not having to bear the responsibility alone. I like studying theology, but wouldn’t want to have to write a sermon every week. I wouldn’t like being on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. She explained that the congregation doesn’t pay the pastor, but that the tithes go to the Conference, thus it is the Conference who pays the
pastors, and that teachers in the SDA schools get a portion of the tithe too. I hadn't understood that before.

I asked about Sabbath as a day of rest versus the day of corporate worship, and she didn't really answer, except to say that there are rules governing appropriate behaviors for Sabbath. From the SDA Church, Fundamental Beliefs: "The fourth commandment of God's unchangeable law requires the observance of this seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship, and ministry in harmony with the teaching and practice of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath." And I challenged that difference between Jewish ordinances and SDAs' –Jews don’t care if others work on the Sabbath, as long as they don't themselves. But she challenged the servant aspect—do they pay others? If not, then it's not work for the other. The teacher talked about the creation of the SDA church—a lot of borrowing from other Protestant denominations, but she herself can’t understand why the Saturday to Sunday shift occurred. Yet she acknowledged the changing understanding of core principles—e.g., at first Sabbath was defined as 6:00 p.m. Friday to Saturday nights, but with further study, they came to understand it as a sunset-to-sunset cycle.

From the Church Manual [http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/church_manual/]

The Sabbath is a special day for worship in the home and in the church, a day of joy to ourselves and our children, a day in which to learn more of God through the Bible and the great lesson book of nature. It is a time to visit the sick and to work for the salvation of souls. The ordinary affairs of the six working days should be laid
aside. No unnecessary work should be performed. Secular reading or secular broadcasts should not occupy our time on God’s holy day.

"The Sabbath is not intended to be a period of useless inactivity. The law forbids secular labor on the rest day of the Lord; the toil that gains a livelihood must cease; no labor for worldly pleasure or profit is lawful upon that day; but as God ceased His labor of creating, and rested upon the Sabbath and blessed it, so man is to leave the occupations of his daily life, and devote those sacred hours to healthful rest, to worship, and to holy deeds." - The Desire of Ages, p. 207.

**Wednesday, November 9**

I have so many questions about Sabbath-keeping. Isn’t paid ministry work? (Yes, and ministers have difficulty enjoying the Sabbath as a day of rest.) Would I want to be paid for vocal ministry—paid to open myself up, to lay my soul bare and let God speak through me? To be paid for pastoral care—to listen and discern? To be paid to write sermons? I would like to be paid to study and share what I learn by writing! Corporate worship is "work" for me—it takes a lot of energy and concentration (perhaps it should be defined as "service" rather than "work"). Sabbath School is a joy. Yard "work" isn’t work, nor is laundry, if I can hang it outside—these are activities which somehow bring me closer to that of God in nature. But in other seasons, I do laundry during the week. If these things bring me joyful connection to God, if I am not doing
salaried work, and if I'm not paying someone else to work, then I can "justify" my activities when I do them on the Sabbath.

If people set aside a day (nightfall to nightfall) for God, why does it matter which day of the week it is? One of my SDA acquaintances said that as long as there have been calendars, they have been seven-day weeks; the Jewish calendar was so strong that people always went back to it; God commanded that the seventh day be for rest and worship (in Exodus, Matthew, etc.). She asked, if Quakers are listening for/to God, why haven’t we “heard” God speak about the seventh-day Sabbath? And why are Sunday-keepers so willing to pay others to work for them on this day (e.g., going out to dinner after church)? I believe that every day is holy, none more than any other; that we must strive for balance between work, play, and rest; and that we are to seek God continually. Every act should be approached in a sacred manner, as connection to God and/or people, not as something to be done for its own sake.

How and when did the switch from Saturday to Sunday happen? What about the change from Julian to Gregorian calendars—didn’t that change the days of the week? Apparently not—see THE WEEKLY SABBATH: SATURDAY OR SUNDAY? at http://www.religioustolerance.org/sabbath.htm on this. It also explains that conservative theologians believe in a literal six-day creation with seventh-day rest, and that this idea first shows up in Exodus, not in Genesis; liberal theologians believe that the Sabbath day was designated arbitrarily. Also, aren’t days/dates arbitrary too, considering that God is outside of time?

I wrote to a Quaker professor to ask if he knew of any Friends who felt led to return to the Saturday Sabbath (and wrote or preached about this), but he had not. My Adventist
acquaintance had asked me why, if Friends are a people who actively listen, we had not "heard" this message? Why aren't we keeping this commandment? Is it because Friends don't subscribe to the belief in a literal six-day creation? Although I wondered if Evangelical Friends do. I thought that was part of what was meant by considering the Bible to be the "infallible, authoritative, written word of God."

Regarding the other commandments: I still struggle with "honor thy father and mother"—what does "honor" mean? Especially for survivors of abuse? And the name of God is unknowable—how can it be taken in vain? Yet, I do understand that it means not to curse or blame God for misfortunes. Yet, in my terms, one can't blame or curse a non-being! If I used the ideas of connection, union, or wholeness as epithets, then that would be a negative, not a positive way of speaking (and the word "God" does carry those meanings for me).

**Thursday, November 10**

I don't know, absolutely, for certain, that Jesus was entirely God. I wasn't there. I can choose to believe so—and that's faith—but I don't know. I don't have a "personal relationship with Christ"—I'm a mystic and my brain seems to work differently. I experience union with God, but it's not usually in words or even in images. The brain research says that this is just one way people experience God, and it's a small part of the population whose brains work this way. But because I am like this, there are beliefs that many of the more conservative theologies espouse that I can't subscribe to—because of (what seems to be) my direct experience of God. I'm not a prophet like EGW—and I don't deny her experience—but as humans, we aren't able to completely know all of God—we can't (or won't) know everything until we die or unless there is
an Advent. Our brains are wired to sift through experiences and to block the majority of sensory input and make sense of (or make connections between) the rest. So we’re limited—we’re not capable of infinite knowing. It seems as if Jesus was directly connected all of the time, that he was God embodied. Yet I can’t know for a certainty. Again, I can choose to believe so. But it also seems to me that Paul (and Peter along with the other disciples) created a religion around Jesus—interpreted and made rules based on their human understanding of their experiences with God. And so it has been with all religious leaders and writers since. We have pieces of truth, but not the whole picture. As for Sabbath—again, it’s important to create balance between work, rest, and play, every day, and within the other cycles—the week, the season, the year, etc. So there are days set apart—Sabbath, holy days/holidays, sabbaticals. Sabbath means rest, rejuvenation, reconnection with the Ultimate. We need reminders, guidelines. Some people need laws and rules because either they don’t experience a direct connection, or somehow their connection is faulty—and they behave in harmful ways toward themselves and others. Some people have more empathy, some less.

And then I come back to the Sabbath School lessons on Ephesians about God’s love, the radical change in understanding that all people are God’s people—and yet the SDAs continue to practice a hateful attitude toward LGBT people, and I do not experience a hateful God!

EGW had visions from God, which she wrote down, interpreted, re-wrote, and then she tried to preach her understanding of those visions. But she wasn’t Christ—she wasn’t God embodied—and so her understanding was necessarily limited to a human wisdom. Inspired but not inerrant, and as a group, the SDA church continues to study and learn, and sometimes re-interpret. The same as the Friends do with George Fox’s prophecies and preaching.
So, no, denominations are not all “equal” yet we each have some understanding, pieces of the truth, and we are united as one body in Christ, have equal access to the presence of God, and are a sanctuary for the indwelling Holy Spirit.

My heart is full and overflowing. I’m grateful for the learning I experience with the SDAs and the Friends, for all the other theological writings.

Literalism and interpretive reading are both, quite literally (ha ha), mindsets, brain functions.

**Saturday, November 12**

Wednesday’s lesson states that our access to God is “without fear or restriction and without the need of any intermediaries such as priests or saints or ritual” ([Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide](#), 60). I asked about baptism, and one of the Sabbath School attendees said they follow the example of Jesus being baptized.

When the teacher asked if there were prayer requests, one of the participants asked me if there were any from my congregation. I said yes, named it, and thanked the questioner for asking. I was surprised and pleased to be recognized in that way.

I thought there were some interesting parallels between the Jews during Paul’s time and the SDAs, who can still be very insular in some ways, despite their evangelizing mission. They have gone through periods of retreat from other religious groups and society in general, as have Friends during the Quietest period. I myself feel so much need for retreat into solitude, time to be with God, apart from community, though I recognize that making a commitment to a community of faith is part of the ongoing conversion process. Yet I keep being called not only
into my own (primary) faith community, but also into others. It is a continual struggle to balance my life—work, Friends and SDAs, friends, family, creative time, solitary/contemplative time, etc.

I’m trying to live the question: What does Sabbath mean? Why Saturday or Sunday?

“1700 years of tradition are hard to change,” one friend observed. What does observing it mean for my relationship with God and people? I can see how rules give a sense of comfort, security and certainty. But are they relevant to me?

Friday, November 18

Back to the question of not spending money on the Sabbath—there is a spectrum of interpretation and behavior, from those who justify eating out by paying with a credit card, to those who look at when the work is being done for them—not subscribing to a Sunday newspaper because some of the work is done on the Sabbath, even though the workers choose to work on that day and the company chooses how it allocates work throughout the week. The underlying concept is to clear one's thoughts and concerns from the mundane and secular, so that one can focus on being present to God. So, to prepare, one looks ahead during the week and tries to accomplish tasks before Friday sunset. I guess I'd say it is both of the following: the act of payment in and of itself is work for the payer (whether or not another person is involved), and it is also a combination of making payment (even if through taxes) and using the services provided by a person who is working during the Sabbath.
Saturday, November 19

I realized in the SDA church this morning that I didn’t have the usual discomfort of feeling reluctant and resistant which I usually have. In Sabbath School I talked about the process Friends use for discerning if a personal leading is something the Meeting should support or take up, and one person said he hadn’t realized we were not so different. I stayed for the worship service itself and a young person delivered the sermon, which was short, sweet, to the point, about not judging based on appearances. I wished I had that kind of spirit when teaching.

Friday, November 25

Walked in the park for an hour and a half today, recouping my soul, listening to the birds.

Saturday, November 26

The sermon in church today was on thankfulness—in all things, give thanks—and on being a "peculiar people," which the Quakers have also been called. The Sabbath School lessons this week were on becoming new—how is it that we keep trying to live according to what we believe is right (the SDAs might say, "God’s standards") and keep turning toward God and not away? Continually called out of our comfort zone, like orthodontia—when the braces stop hurting, it is time for them to be tightened. I said I could not imagine God ever giving up on reaching out to us (which contradicts SDA teachings). Another person made the analogy of rebuilding of a car engine—you can’t see the changes from the outside, and we can’t judge people’s interior changes from their exterior. When are the changes "good enough" to last awhile or forever? What does it mean that we are all made new again, yet still have to change our habits?
I felt comfortable and engaged instead of out-of-place. I went downstairs for the baptisms, to see if it felt different—and it did, though I couldn't see, or hear as well as observing via the video link. To be in the same room is different—to be present to the Spirit. One could not experience Friends Meeting from a video!

**Sunday, November 27**

Reported to Friends Meeting committee on Ministry and Counsel about the ways I have changed as a result of my involvement in the SDA church. I read and study the Bible regularly. I even used scripture in vocal ministry! I have been more conscious of observing a time of rest, seventh-day Sabbath specifically, though not as rigorously as Adventists—I also try to find more balance between work, play, and rest in my daily life. I continue to make an effort not to swear. I no longer drink alcohol (for health reasons). I eat less meat, and am more conscious of my diet in general. I have a greater knowledge and understanding of Quaker theology, practice, and history, from liberal to conservative and evangelical—along with SDA theology and practice and history. Though I hold different views, I have a greater appreciation for evangelical thought in general and I understand the arguments for Creationism. I am more open about my religion at work. I continue to grow in understanding of prophecy and other spiritual gifts. I try to walk and talk what I believe, and I am more committed to ministry. I think I’ve worn jewelry (and only pins) all of three times since March. I’m still thinking about how to "give back" to the SDA church.
Thursday, December 1

Up until tonight, I've felt that I didn't want to make a commitment to keeping the Sabbath in terms of not attending certain functions that are a part of my job. But tonight, I'm having doubts about that decision. I still spend money and go the public library, and those things don't bother me, though I do think about them. I haven't done work for my employer on Friday night or Saturday for months, though. I don't have church membership to fall back on—does the minute on my ministry give any credence? Probably. The idea of asking for exemption from work-related functions scares me. What am I getting myself into? Am I serious about this? Serious enough to stick with it and make a commitment? Is it a real leading? Do I follow it for now and live the question over time? One decision doesn't have to stand for my lifetime.

I wish the SDA church would reconsider having the U.S. flag in the sanctuary (especially at the front!). Our first allegiance is to God, not to a nation. God's commandment says, "Thou shalt not kill." Jesus said to love God and love thy neighbor as thyself; he didn't say it was all right to go to war, but said to turn the other cheek. I wish the SDA church would also be more consciously supportive of the conscientious objector option.

Friday, December 2

I asked two Jewish colleagues if they attend certain work-related functions on Saturdays, or if they cite religious conviction in asking not to attend. One does not attend, citing an obligation to teach adult education classes for the Temple during that time. The other considers attendance at commencement a requirement and a conflict. I do not want to feel hatred for what should be a celebratory ceremony both for those who are graduating and for those who
made it possible. So, I took a step that seems fairly momentous, and asked to be excused from attending graduation for religious reasons. I remind myself that one decision doesn’t mean that it’s a decision for all time (unless the world ends or something happens to me tomorrow). I think that the Minute from Grand Rapids Friends Meeting commends me to the SDA church, that my attendance has been fairly regular there, and that this is sufficient substantiation, if it is needed. If asked, would I work on Sunday morning? Yes, very probably I would unless I had committed to do something specific for Meeting that day. Yet I feel an obligation to attend Meeting on Sunday mornings because I am a recorded member and minister. This continuing process of conversion (in the sense of “turning toward God”) is not easy. My SDA friend asked if not doing salaried work on the Sabbath brings me a sense of peace, and my answer is unreservedly “yes.” I’m beginning to think that it brings me closer to connection with the spirit, and that this is truly a leading. I just have to keep living the questions.

A Quaker friend let me know that he loves the idea of observing a Sabbath and that it makes sense to him regarding my involvement with the Adventists. He agreed that Friends don’t seem to feel obligated to observe Sunday as a day of rest any more than any other day.

**Saturday, December 3**

Went to Aman Park for a long walk and saw a flock of yelping Sandhill Cranes, more than 25 of them, a bright Pileated Woodpecker, and reflections of snowy trees in the creek. I felt leaping, bounding joy, a still and clear heart, a calm mind. I am convinced I made the right decision not to attend graduation. Regarding the future and Sabbath—way will open.
I felt I might be "nuts" because I'm afraid of becoming pious, zealous, narrow, judgmental. But that's not who I am. I become more open as I stretch. Understanding and using shared language doesn't mean I share the evangelical conviction, but means I can communicate more effectively.

**Sunday, December 4**

Friends don't impose our views; we don't evangelize. We offer help and accept where people are at. So our aid isn't contingent upon their changing their ways and beliefs to match ours, unlike SDA and other churches' evangelism. They seem to see perfection ahead, but only if certain conditions are met by each individual. Some SDAs see unrealized opportunity and possibility for those who haven't met the conditions, but still see the conditions as absolute, I think.

Modernism kept the idea of an unchanging God, but that doesn't fit my paradigm. Mine is a paradigm of shifting structures, temporary and function-based, flexible, fluid. Like water, and chaos theory—describing smaller, rapidly-changing patterns instead of one large unchanging structure. Contemporary Liberal Friends are like this, postmodern. A fluid model fits my conception of God as the connections between everything, an inclusive model instead of exclusive, instead of a changeless being who controls and directs everything.

**Monday, December 5**

I received a response from a knowledgeable Friend to my questions about SDAs and Quakers regarding Sabbath. Much to think about—Friends don't emphasize any day over another as more holy, not even Christmas or Easter—thus no emphasis on Sabbath. Every day is holy. So
how do I integrate this belief with the practice of Sabbath—and leave it at the personal level, not as a concern for Friends Meeting? Live the question.

Monday, December 12

The SDA emphasis on two aspects of good and evil, God and Satan, as separate and entirely opposed to each other is in and of itself opposed to wholeness. The battle to destroy evil is to destroy God as well, along with ourselves. To disown our deepest fears, to hate this aspect of our psyche and the universe is to deny life. Jesus represents a third way.

And the SDAs do not (cannot?) acknowledge that the Kingdom of God is at hand—is here in our hearts. The “Kingdom of Heaven is within” is another way of describing the mystical realization of union with God. We are One Being, One Connection. To make war on any part is to make war on the whole.

Sunday, December 18

Not “Sacrifice” but rather “Model”: Jesus was the ultimate example of how we can reconnect with God and neighbor, via his life and stories/teachings. He wasn’t “atoning” for our inherent evilness. The idea of Satan seems to me as if God dissociated from himself all of the bad parts and said to that separated self, "Have at it." Thus, in the "fall" of Satan, it seems as if God invented multiple personality disorder.

What would happen if God re-integrated these two selves? What would that look like to us? How would our theology and practice change?
Are we, as Friends, trying to live integrated lives, acknowledging the darkness, light, and everything in between, trying to live as though connected to every being on the earth and in the universe? Do we acknowledge our shadow side and take responsibility for not acting on it but moving toward the light?

I'd like to have a conversation with an Adventist about Satan, a conversation which allows for the possibility of movement but which doesn't require it. A talk with someone who can push back gently as I push against SDA theology. I just don't understand their concept of Satan. It seems dualistic, leading away from integration. I seem to experience God in a totally different way, as connection and wholeness.

**Monday, December 19**

A *New Kind of Christian* by Brian McLaren is an amazing book about an evangelical who meets postmodernism, and thus is born "emergent Christianity" or "progressive evangelicalism."

Curiosity led me to look for his web site.

Going back to the idea of Satan: "The question is this: to what degree are the Biblical writers speaking in the language and imagery of their times, and to what degree are they affirming a cosmology of cosmic warfare between angels and demons, etc? The cosmology seems to come not from the Bible itself, but from Babylonian and Zoroastrian religion, which influenced the Jews greatly during the Exile" (McLaren, A New Kind of Christian website).
Thursday, December 22

Read Meredith’s discourse on Seventh-day Sabbath. He cited Gal. 4:10-11, Rom. 14:5, and Col. 2:16-17, stating that the Apostles met on Sundays because it was supposedly the day Jesus was resurrected. He interpreted the "Lord’s Day" in Rev. 1:10 as the literal first day of the week, though he admitted that this is tradition, not a commandment. Based on Deut. 5:15, Meredith wrote, "the Sabbath Day was given to the Children of Israel, and to them only, as a Sign between God and them" (10) and that "the Son of Man was Lord even of the Sabbath Day; which can be no otherwise understood, than that he had Power to Change, alter, or abrogate that Precept, concerning the Seventh-Day Sabbath..." (11). Since the days change when crossing the international date line, this meant that the days of the week weren’t instituted by nature, “since it is nothing but a Sport of Light that continually moves about the Earth, and never abides one Minute in the same Place; and therefore the Night...is a Shadow in a true and proper Sense" (12). Thus, he wrote that, "the Observation of the Seventh Day is not of a moral and unchangeable Nature, because...before the Coming of the Israelites out of Egypt, the Precept of the Seventh Day was but a Precept of Remembring, but not of Observing..." (12). So it applied only to the Israelites and no one else. Meredith explained the history of worship on First day (Sunday) thus: "The First Day was by Human Laws ordained to be kept, as soon as the Civil Government fell into the Christian hands, which was in the Time of Constantine the Great..." (18). Yet, he states later, which could be used to justify either day, "the Action it self is more to be regarded than the Circumstance of it, and the Thing it self before the Order of it..." (18). At some hours and times we are more free from outward hurry and disturbances, and prefer those hours and times for devotion... (18). I still don’t know what I think.
Monday, December 26

One of the women at the SDA church asked me to play music for an upcoming service. I don’t know what to play! Quaker hymns? Bach? Other sacred/classical music? To play as a form of prayer—can I manage it?

Thursday, December 29

The SDA model of the “Great Controversy” battle between God and Satan bothers me because of its dualism and its military imagery and warfare framework.
Sunday, January 1

In Friends Meeting today, thought about seventh-day Sabbath and George Fox’s (and other early Quakers’) responses that Christ superseded the laws and ordinances of the Torah, including the fourth commandment. That each day is holy, none more than any other, and that to observe the Sabbath without observing each and every ordinance is to deny grace. (Galatians 4:10, “You are observing special days, and months, and seasons, and years.” Rom. 10:6 “For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” and Gal 5:4, “You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from Grace.” Hebrews 10:1 states that “the law has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities....”) But what it means to me is a day of balance in a week of working. If we try to observe balance in each day, why not each week? An evening and a day of “fasting” – refraining from (or reducing) commercial endeavors, a day of rest and walking with God in nature, of studying the Bible. Not a day to be worried about how exactly I live the regulations of Jewish Sabbath or guidelines for Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath, but a day to rejoice in grace. And why Friday to Saturday, instead of Sunday? It just fits my natural rhythms—Friday is the night I am most careworn. If I need to do salaried work, it makes sense to give my brain a respite until Sunday afternoon, letting new thoughts stir and grow. What about recreation, like concerts, which cost money and require another person to do work? Each to his or her own conscience and relationship with God. It is neither the spending of money nor the gaining of wages which defiles.
Sunday, January 22

Václav Havel said that “Consciousness precedes Being” and I think yes, God precedes Being—so many people conceive of God as a (personal) Being, but I think God goes way beyond that....

I have “cast shadows” but I also have the capability of letting the Light shine through me. I do take responsibility for and have been reflecting on my mistakes.

Saturday, January 28

Today, while driving, I felt/heard/thought, “Why do you deny me?” Slightly amused. Was this God speaking as a Being? Was it about my wanting an administrative position? It felt like a gentle nudge to stop spending my time and energy toward that end and to open up.

Read Bradford’s view on EGW as a prophet: he stated that her prophetic writings were of more value spiritually than for their historical and theological accuracy. The writings represent the voice of the Spirit in our hearts, instead of the teacher to our intellect (61). Well, the Bible was also written by prophets (or in their name), and is of more value to our spiritual selves than as a collection of documents to be taken as incontrovertibly historically accurate! Bradford also said that pastors and evangelists took ideas from their culture—some of those ideas were accepted in their time but we question them today (61). As knowledge changes, so does our understanding of prophecy and spirituality. We reinterpret. Bradford makes the argument (which other SDA writers challenge) that Spirit and study have to lead in our reading of the Bible, instead of a literal reading of the text as if it were accurate and unquestionable.
**Saturday, February 4**

Observed an altar call today—the speaker was the minister who will do the evangelistic meetings in September. I didn’t like his style, nor his stretched-wide smile which didn’t extend to his eyes and just seemed like a prop. I don’t think I will want to go to the September meetings.

**Sunday, February 5**

Paul and Peter said that Jesus came for **everyone**, not just Jews (or Christians). It is not the miracles Jesus did or did not perform that are meaningful to me, but his complete and total embodiment of prophet and mystic. He was connected deeply to God, all of the time, until the end, when he experienced the separation and distance from God that most people seem to live with their entire lives—and it is in those moments that he became totally human to me, in grief, overwhelming sorrow and loss.

About “Creation versus evolution” – I don’t believe that it is a case of “either or,” that believing in one denies the other. Bradford makes the case that prophets are given inspiration and understanding in the context of their culture and time, and that later knowledge can change our interpretation of the prophet’s vision. But I believe that God doesn’t give prophets visions so alien to the time that absolutely no one would be able to understand or accept them. Genesis was written a very long time ago, and our understanding of science has come a long way. The two creation stories in Genesis were products of the culture and knowledge. The theory of evolution doesn’t deny God at all, nor is the mechanism of evolution entirely understood yet. All of this is openly acknowledged by evolutionists, and scientists are willing to take in new evidence and revise their theories, which Creationists don’t seem to be able to do. Creationists
dismiss and deny evolution, trying to elevate their own beliefs to the level of “science,” yet they use bad logic which has nothing of the scientific method in it. I think we need to learn about both, from experts in both fields (theologians and scientists), and believe what we want to, but it is imperative not to impose beliefs on everyone. We have to live with some ambiguity—none of us were present at the beginning—so we cannot know for certain. (Even Adam wasn’t created until the sixth day, according to the Bible.)

*Thursday, February 9*

Theology is the study of our responses to God, and evolution is the study of our DNA’s responses to the environment. Faith is about hope, and science looks for evidence to support a theory. They are two halves of a whole—again, not an “either/or” but “both/and.”

*Wednesday, February 15*

Maintain your own heart’s peace in adverse circumstances. Can I do that? Be gracious?

*Friday, February 17*

“Come unto Me, ... and I will give you rest. Rest in the midst of work. Heart-rest in the knowledge of my keeping power. Feel that rest steal into your being. Incline your ear and come unto Me; hear, and your soul shall live. Grow in strength, not overwhelmed with cares” (Russell).
Saturday, February 18

Maybe God has been calling me to leave title and position as part of my identity and I’ve been ignoring this call—so here it is repeated—not gently but seriously. I feel like the man who would not give up his riches.

Am I leaving a kind of shadow behind? Give me strength, peace, and wisdom for whatever is ahead. I don’t have to prove myself (to God or anyone). Can I leave fear and anger, renounce action and be open as a vessel? Can I be a go-between, a voice? Remember that a prophet’s life is not a glorious one, but difficult. Am I able to let go of what I want to do—administrate—and give up that kind of power, yet still be efficient, helpful, patient, and full of goodwill (god-will)? Can I live by walking cheerfully over the earth, meeting that of God in everyone, being open and not being attached to whatever comes out of my mouth? Can I give up taking credit and seeking accolades? Can I live a balance of this solitary and community life?

Sometimes I hate this calling. It seems so strange and difficult, always stretching me beyond my comfort zone, not in directions I want to go in. What seems worst is feeling isolated—with whom can I talk? I don’t want this life, I want to be an administrator. But the Friends didn’t acknowledge my ministry of administration! They recorded me as a minister of ecumenism. I don’t attend Sabbath School to become a better leader. I go because I’m called into relationship between these denominations. Understanding leadership helps ministry; the two are intimately and intricately linked but my time and energy are to be spent in the one area and not in the other.
Talked with a friend about all of this—she understands deeply. Then she asked, “Why doesn’t everyone hear God talking?” I wish I knew—perhaps it has to do with the way our brains function. Is God trying to call my energy and attention into the spiritual realm?

**Sunday, February 19**

Hold to virtue and do the daily duties which come to me. Part of my recent anger is because I perceive comments relayed back to me to lack integrity and to impugn my honor and character. How not to let dishonest perceptions, envy, or spite influence me? I am who I am and have to trust my own virtue, knowing that others will see the truth eventually. I do not have to react to provocations (and yet I do, time and again).

**Monday, February 20**

A friend says to let the chaos come through and out—stop fighting it so hard; live in my body rather than in my head—paint and draw. Rest, refocus, and rebuild myself. It is time to shift focus, priorities, and my energy to leadership in other areas. Go hang gliding! Don’t force ministry or writing as substitutes but take a rest and let those come back in their own time and at their own pace. I feel like I’ve been going at a frantic pace, and it is time to slow down, be still and cool, quiet, solitary, the dreamer on the shoreless sea. Also time to let loose and have some adventures. I have to find my path, but it is not the one I had been following. A friend said that I **am** a leader, am respected, and that her heart would be broken too, if she were in my position. I must not let the views of a poisonous culture determine who I am. It seems as if recent events
were designed to break my spirit and shatter my motivation. It seems opposite of empowering and building up.

Friday, February 24
What am I called to do (versus what my head and heart wanted to do)? My heart broke right open—and I could hear, “Not this path.” (“At this time?” my head replies hopefully.) What are my spiritual gifts versus my “worldly” talents and skills?

Rest, be open, grieve, let go, listen. Be with God (“I am with you.” “Be still and know that I am God.”). Be the mystic, shaman, prophet. Be the Voice. Embody the soul. Stop competing with others. Their skills and talents are not mine, and I can admire and appreciate them without being envious. I have a different path. My gifts complement theirs. Refocus. I have to be willing to live out whatever journey God is calling me to.

Saturday, February 25
God crashes in on us mystics and prophets most distressingly and breaks us open. Maybe that is why we’re not meant to be “worldly” leaders—so that we have the energy and availability to do this other thing, to be present to this overwhelming Self, to lead in different ways. And to be separate in some ways—in solitude, apart from others. The difficulty is that this path is uncertain, murky, and often seems to be interrupted before it becomes clear.

Am I redefining my paradigm? I need to let the universe’s (or God’s) energy flow through me instead of trying to direct it. If I’m to write, the words will pour out. If I’m to speak or act, the same. Let the grief flow out, let the energy flow through—be connected, live God’s inward
presence outwardly. Mary Oliver wrote, “Neither does the tree hold back its leaves but lets them flow open or glide away when the time is right” (10). This earth is the living presence of God.

Reading Mary Oliver, I wonder when, where, and in which activities I feel and express “playfulness, grace, and humor, those inseparable spirits of vitality” (10). I am often earnest and serious, and could be more playful in most situations. On prayer, she wrote, “What some might call the restrictions of the daily office they find to be an opportunity to foster the inner life. The hours and appointed and named; they are the Lord’s. Life’s fretfulness is transcended” (11). This as in observing Sabbath, a pattern of solitary time and rest, both necessary and joyful for me. As I am back to the Sabbath question—I know that every day is sacred, so it doesn’t matter on which day we have corporate worship. But a seventh day of rest so closely fits my internal bio-rhythms that this is what makes sense to me.

“I want to sit down on the sand and look around and get dreamy; I want to see what spirits are peeking out of the faces of the roses” (Oliver 11). About her partner’s flying lessons, she wrote, “Week after week M. came home looking the way I feel when I’ve seen wild swans. It was terrifying, and wonderful” (12). I need more dreaming time and less frantic time, more creative time for poetry, adventures, and art, rather than time spent on work. “For me it was important to be alone; solitude was a prerequisite to being openly and joyfully susceptible and responsive to the world of leaves, light, birdsong, flowers, flowing water” (22).

(poem)

The dusking breezes

soften to will o’ the wisp

over snow-drenched earth
**Sunday, February 26**

Seek meaning in the uncertain path.

**Monday, February 27**

I don’t feel like I am “enough” in and of myself. A friend responded, “That is an impossible statement—you are wonderful.”

Am I experiencing another type of shamanic death, a rite of passage, the “humiliation” so many mystics speak of? A friend’s response: It is not permanent and it is a passage. This type of pattern often moves us to something better. I should do the things I am uniquely able to do, design a place for myself where I most want to be. In the meanwhile, there are periods in our lives when it is good to cut down to doing just that which is expected, to give the minimum for a time.

My dreams speak of the confluence of my inner and outer lives, affirming the profound directions in which I am going. My spirit and inner self are “together” but my body isn’t in the right place—my environment is “out of whack” and it is worth the effort to look for possibilities around me which could help me align the parts of my life more closely. Because my spiritual life is alive and vibrant, the outer life will come to this state as well, not necessarily soon—I must stay focused, seeking and making opportunities. I have to do things to let the future get better.

**Wednesday, March 1**

My fury has filled me, wakes me up and keeps me awake, and is exhausting. How is it that I generate so much pain and anger?
Why do I feel like I need Sabbath School more than Friends Meeting right now? Is it more comfortable in some way, less challenging? Or more challenging? Is it easier to talk intellectually than to seek inwardly? Friends Meeting has always been hard work, because it requires and demands openness. Sabbath School lets me come at things in small, manageable chunks, and the readings are so very relevant.

**Thursday, March 2**
Recalling the story of the friends of the paralyzed man who lowered him through the roof of a house to get him to Jesus—maybe that essential reconnection will occur for me with the spiritual. Perhaps this is a “break-in” from above.

**Friday, March 3**
I went to the beach to rant and rave about the damaging processes in my environment which seem to be part of an abusive culture rather than something more humane and functional. I feel shut out and shut down. How is that positive? How does it lead to connection, collaboration, enthusiasm, and new ideas?

**Saturday, March 4**
Kraybill wrote about the Amish belief that,

Salvation is linked to obedience and faithful practice rather than to belief and emotion.... The code words of the evangelical mind-set—personal salvation, personal evangelism, and personal devotions—accent the individual rather than
the community as the center of redemptive activity.... The Amish bring a much more holistic, integrated view that does not separate the individual from community or faith from action.... One is a communal language of patience, humility, community, and practice; the other is an individualistic language of beliefs, certainty, feelings, and experience. Whereas evangelistic Christians want to know, control, plan, and act to guarantee their salvation, the Amish outlook is a more modest and perhaps a more honest one (36-7).

I think that SDAs are a combination of the two models—personal salvation and evangelism, yet entirely within the community and daily practice. Quakers seem to tend toward the community model, yet we believe in individual interpretation of the Bible and grant that its cultural and historical contexts do not make it inerrant.

**Sunday, March 5**

St. Francis, as quoted in Jan Karon: “Keep a clear eye toward life’s end. Do not forget your purpose and destiny as God’s Creature. What you are in His sight is what you are and nothing more. Remember that when you leave this earth, you can take nothing you have received...but only what you have given; a full heart enriched by honest service, love, sacrifice and courage.” I think that for the past few months (years?), I’ve become obsessed, and now have to change my thought patterns and habits, and embrace the whole of my life. A complete life, present to all aspects and obsessed with none.... Prerequisite: to find balance between more deliberately drawing apart from and living in the world. Somehow I have to trust the universe, to make this a covenant with God.
What came to me during Friends’ Meeting: I’ve been feeling terrible disappointment and bitter anger, and I think it is necessary to mark our periods of darkness and chaos as a necessary antecedent to the renewal of hope, rejuvenation, springing into cheerfulness, balance, and joy. I am very grateful for the communities which help me through these times.

“Present Hope” (poem)

‘Present’

Shrieking stones cascade
under tumbled, root-torn trees,
chaotic threshold

‘Hope’

Singing stones tumble,
reflecting sky, clear streambed,
rejuvenation

*Thursday, March 9*

What are my dreams? To see and live in Spain and New Zealand, to see a glacier and the Canadian Rockies, to travel widely. To paint and draw; to go hang gliding once. To ride a scooter—even to test-drive one. I want to go kayaking again soon, and perhaps to have more boxing lessons. I also want to continue to work on the house.
Friday, March 10

Is my obsession with worldly titles and positions too deep to let me move forward? Can I change?

A friend asked me if I could trust. No, that is the problem. I don’t have any previous experience of trusting to draw upon, to give me confidence. I feel so shaken—to the core, to the bone—that I have not been able to believe or live my ideals. I have been lashing out, reacting with this terrible anger and bitterness. I feel so disconnected from my very self. Broken, wounded, needy, causing pain to others. I wish I could feel some renewal, some lasting renewal. I wish I could trust. I wish I were able to be cheerful and look for that of God in everyone and in every situation, that I were able to give thanks in everything. Instead, what I seem to be undergoing is more like Watts’ testimony that

It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God…. By hanging on and protecting ourselves we avoid life…. We are scared stiff to awaken to the truth that we are being swept along by the life of God as in a mighty torrent, that it sweeps us away from our possessions and our very selves to carry us out to the oceans of God himself. Therefore we cling desperately to floating logs or swim with all our might against the stream, not seeing that this effects nothing but our own discomfort and exhaustion (57).

Watts wrote that, “The knowledge of God is God himself dwelling in the soul” (16). Somehow, all of this is God acting within my soul? I have to accede that this makes sense, if, as he says, “It has been necessary...to go through this passion to the bitter depth of ‘my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me,’ to the sense that his life is utterly meaningless” (59). This
process destroys symbols, barriers, and selves, so that we “may not rest content with anything less than...[the] divine essence” (59). Thus, “in fear of the loss of ourselves we cling to ourselves with all our might, strangling the breath out of our bodies in the effort” (69). I do feel choked with bitter feelings.

Another friend said that I have a gentleness about me—I wish I felt it right now. I saw a deer grazing in the park: they represent gentleness. I pray for strength to deal with my feelings, for eventual peace, for patience to endure until that peace stills my heart, for balance in thought and activity, and for God to draw close to those who support and challenge me. “Spiritual life demands a relaxation of the soul to God” (Watts 70), instead of tensing up the ego with pride and fear. What are the things I can do with love and care?

*Saturday, March 11*

My Sabbath Schoolmates reminded me that I don’t have to reinvent myself from the ground up. There is probably a smaller shift needed in my understanding in order to accept my state of being and for it not to seem like such a big muddle. The key is to not let my feelings become so overwhelming that I am unable to ask for help, but to ask before I get excessively frustrated. I do not have to try to close this hole in my paradigm quickly—it is an opportunity for healing and changing the paradigm itself. I can ask myself if the structure of my situation makes my tasks easier or more difficult to accomplish, and if I using my talents and skills. If the answers are “more difficult” and “no,” then I will need to look for other opportunities. If the answers are “easier” and “yes,” then stay with the current situation.
Sunday, March 12

Yesterday was an opportunity to “give back” to the Sabbath School by facilitating—asking the questions to get the discussion going. I asked two of the others to open and close with prayer, so that we all pitched in and none of us carried the burden of responsibility alone. In two weeks, I’ll play music for Sabbath School, another way of giving back.

Today at Friends Meeting the message that came to me was that when Jesus said that he and the Father were one, we understand that not only to mean that he experienced immense union with God, but that each of us can too. I was reading Alan Watts’ book on mystical religion and he said that without that experience of direct connection with God, rites and rituals in religion are meaningless. We, as Quakers, are very qualified (not uniquely, but especially able) to bring this idea to other denominations throughout the world, because of our experience of union and the way we try to practice it in our daily lives.

Thursday, March 16

In earlier days, I would have been dismembershiped (read out of Meeting) for practicing a seventh-day Sabbath. I’m glad we don’t practice shunning now! Where will it lead? As I make decisions, where will my heart, mind, and body direct me? EGW, in Early Writings, says that, “The Lord is unchangeable, therefore His law is immutable” (65). But this contradicts what I believe—that God changes as we do.
**Friday, March 17**

I met with a friend today, who called me “resilient.” What do I think, how would I characterize myself lately? Confused.

I wondered if I left my situation, would I be able to process my grief and anger, or would I become stuck in my current feelings? As painful as all of this is, it does seem to be accomplishing something. Maybe I'll learn to trust, without having to be at the center of decision-making in all matters.

**Sunday, March 19**

I feel like I have my life back. I need to examine my life from a higher perspective, from the standpoint of love, compassion, and gentleness, while being aware of and open to signals, while practicing discernment. I need to heal, to know that I am a universal being, whole. I am capable of releasing the outer skin of my present identity and finding a new rhythm in my life.

**Tuesday, March 21**

I’ve been living the seventh-day Sabbath without it being a “religious conviction.” But my body, mind, and spirit feel better for it. So, I’ve been reading early Quaker writings and re-read portions of Ellen White’s *Early Writings*. Early Quakers did all agree that the Sabbath fell on the seventh day, not first day, although they followed the laws of the time and the common practice of resting and holding corporate worship on first day. But they didn’t view one day as sufficient, so they held meetings for worship on 2 days each week. To my knowledge, and to the knowledge of others I’ve consulted, no other Quaker has written on the seventh-day Sabbath
since Elias Hicks addressed the question in 1842 (pre-EGW). Below are the Bible passages and
the justifications Quakers wrote between 1650 and 1812 against the observance of Sabbath.

Matt. 11:28

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you
rest.”

[i.e., Christ is himself the Sabbath]

Rom. 14:5

Some judge (esteem) one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to
be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds.

Gal. 4:9-11

Now, however, that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can
you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits? How can you want to be
enslaved to them again? You are observing special days, and months, and seasons, and
years. I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted.

Col. 2:16-17

Therefore do not let anyone (judge) condemn you in matters of food and drink or of
observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. These are only a shadow of what is to
come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

Heb. 4:9-10

So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God’s
rest also cease from their labors as God did from his.
Early Quaker thought seems to have been: that the Jewish Sabbath was a “sign and figure and shadow” (Fox) which became the substance of God with Christ; that Christ is the end and fulfillment of the Law for everyone that believes; and that Christ is the Sabbath and the Temple, the day of rest. If we accept Christ, then observing the Sabbath is a practice contrary to that acceptance. Accepting salvation means essentially that we cease from labor in some sense—George Fox said that, “our rest is in Christ, the body... the Saints’ rest is in the substance of Christ.... Here all men rest from their works, and every soul that believeth hath entered into his rest” (6). “Christ [is] the second Covenant, the perpetual and everlasting rest” (7). “Christ... sanctifies man and brings him to rest and peace with God before daies was” [i.e., as it was at the beginning of Creation] (10). “Christ made all things new, he ends the Law, ... he ends the [previous] Covenant...and ends the Sabbath” (11). “The devil will lurk in a shadow, or a type, or a sign, or figure, ...to keep people from the body [i.e., Christ]” (16). “Paul nor the Apostles no where commands the Saints to observe the Jews Sabbath day” (18).

The Sabbath was previously an outward day but with Christ became altogether spiritual, moral, and perpetual; all days are alike holy in the sight of God (Keith). A specific day or time of worship is not holy, because all days and times are holy (Barclay 349). Thus, we should feel our hearts brimming with thanksgiving and praise constantly, and we should rest continually in God.

My questions: When Paul used the words “sign/figure/shadow” in relation to the ordinances and the Sabbath, did he mean that they were “predictors” which were fulfilled and embodied in Christ (Fox)? When early Quaker writers used the word “superstition” what does that mean? Did the commandments and ordinances have significance only for the Jews from Moses to Christ (Israel needed the Commandments because they were disobedient?), and Christ
superseded those (he was the end of the law and gave us 2 commandments (love God, love our neighbors as ourselves—the other commandments Jesus mentioned in Matt 19:18: “Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness”) but no mention of keeping the Sabbath)? The Sabbath as “a sign between me and the children of Israel forever” (Exod. 31:17) was never said to any other people in the Bible (i.e., Christians in the New Testament).

Willis wrote that, as he was “Lord of the Sabbath,” Jesus would have reproved his disciples if he had meant to perpetuate the observance, instead of justifying the breach of it (24). Why didn’t he reprove people for breaking the Sabbath or any of the ordinances?

Yet we do need to set aside time to listen for God in community (“corporate worship”) and be freed from our “outward affairs” and rest. Fox said Apostles and early Christians meeting on First day did not call it or establish it as Sabbath, nor did they bid believers to keep Sabbath (9). Elias Hicks referred to the “emptiness” of rites and outward ordinances and called the observance of a seventh-day Sabbath “hurtful,” “irrational, non-essential, and contrary to truth” (353).

We don’t talk about God “changing his mind” but we do say that we get new pieces of information or new understanding—but it seems like the prophecies EGW received contradict Paul’s understanding and are “regressive” or “reactionary.” How do SDAs address this? Was not Jesus, as Christ, the fulfillment of the Law? Why then look to the commandments and ordinances? Why did EGW have those visions?

My thoughts regarding the Biblical texts above:
• Rom. 14:5-14:6 Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Paul seems to regard these principles, along with dietary ordinances and avoiding wine, as unnecessary. In Rom. 14:23 it says "But whatever is done against one's conscience is sin," so if EGW's prophecies have convinced the SDAs, then not to observe the Sabbath would be a sin for those who are persuaded.

• Col. 2:16-17 This also means not to let anyone condemn you if you DO observe these things.

• Heb. 4:9-10 [actually look at all of Heb. 3 & 4] Why couldn't this also be used to justify observing the Sabbath? One Adventist stated that this passage looks to back to Genesis and also forward to rest as "salvation in God's presence at the end of time."

It seems to me that I need to keep living seventh-day Sabbath without trying to make intellectual sense of it right now. It's an embodied way of living, not a theological issue per se – it is a relief, not an arguable discussion point. Yet it is spiritual. It is a kind of willingness, an assent rather than a creed or doctrine or tenet. So I don't think I'm convinced in a rational way, yet my body and spirit are giving signs of a consent made flesh.

**Sunday, March 26**

For me, as with early Quakers (and many other denominations), one day for corporate worship isn't enough. I also need time to study with a group. My primary day for corporate worship is first day (Sunday), with the Friends; my day of study and also secondary day of worship is seventh day (Saturday), with the SDAs. My primary day of rest and refraining from commerce or
salaried work is Saturday; my secondary rest day is Sunday. In this way I combine practices of both churches and follow my biorhythms. It means I don’t attend work-related events or work from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. It probably means I won’t attend work-related conferences or classes for which I pay on Sabbath either.

That I am also a contemplative means that I need long periods of quiet outdoor time, more than most people—withdrawning from the world and labor. This gives me joy: to see the creek and trees, to hear the Sandhill cranes purling in the sky.

I’d like to do a study of George Fox and EGW as prophets, and of Quakers and SDAs as new/emerging religious movements, set in their respective periods. If it were going to be academic, I’d need a co-author to ground it in a theoretical perspective (i.e., religion or anthropology).

**Thursday, March 30**

What I feel is not “convinced” or a “conviction” —which both include the idea of being changed by argument—but that I have consented to the validity of the seventh-day Sabbath—I feel/sense/am in accord with, have given assent to it, agree to the relevance and meaningfulness of it. The SDAs might say that the observation of a seventh-day Sabbath is justifiable or justified, or a conclusion correctly derived, and appropriate to the end in view, but those definitions aren’t meaningful to me. I would not impose this on anyone else, but it feels right to me. "In concord" means being in a state of agreement or harmony, or having made an agreement by covenant. I am in concord with the Sabbath—it is valid for me, a spiritual concordance. It is an embodied truth or harmony.
**Friday, March 31**

And yet, as I read the history and exegesis of Bible passages more fully, the explanations are persuading me.

**Saturday, April 1**

In Sabbath School we discussed the trinity. I think that God, Holy Spirit, and Christ are names for different aspects of one whole—God the overall, encompassing idea; Holy Spirit the inward; and Christ the outward manifestation—the physical body in which the divine lives.

EGW (and Miller before her) emphasized that intercessors (clergy) weren’t to substitute for an individual reading of the Scriptures and coming to one’s own conclusion, so why is there so much emphasis on the one and only correct interpretation? For a church without creeds, the SDA doctrines are very explicit.

**Thursday, April 6**

Regarding Sabbath, "signs, figures, shadows" meant that adherence to one day veiled the importance of observing each and every moment as holy. Sabbath is but a fragment of the immensity of the spirit-filled life.

I found out today that as most of the first Christians were Jews, they attended temple and observed Sabbath, and also held meetings for worship on Sunday as well, so they could participate in both. (A "both/and" situation!) They called it Eighth Day, the world made new, humankind reconnected to God via the resurrection (a summary of Porter).
**Saturday, April 8**

I feel like I can't keep up with the changes happening in my thinking these days. Where am I? What do I believe?

**Wednesday, April 12**

I thought of the comments in today's lesson outlined in the Teacher's version of the Sabbath School Quarterly—which asks us to question how we live and to examine our attitudes, so that we reflect Jesus' teachings. I haven't been able to do that in this wild grief I feel, in survival mode. At this level, there is no sense of values, beliefs, ethics, no sense of self as agent, no essential identity. There is no foundation at this level. I don't have a sense of my place in the world, or a sense of basic security, which is completely antithetical to my Quaker mystical self.

**Friday, April 14**

When I went out into the sunshine at noon, I started to feel better, and at the park after work, felt restored. What makes the difference? Sunshine in and of itself? Having asked a friend for help? Who knows, but I'm grateful.

Having read a 45-page article on EGW and whether or not she had temporal lobe epilepsy (Couperus), it seems likely that she did, but does it matter? Could it be one of the ways God or the Holy Spirit talks to us, via brains which function differently? Mystics' brains and the brains of Buddhist monks who are deep meditators also function differently, which scientists can see now by studying which areas of the brain are active when the subjects declare that they are
in the meditation condition being studied. So the bigger question is, did White's visions come from God? Or were they hallucinations caused by a misfiring brain?

Tuesday, April 18

I remembered that some shamans live their lives backwards and upside-down, being humiliated (or humiliating themselves) to help others learn through humor. This also happens in the "dark night of the soul" in Christian terms. We are brought low, struck down, so that we can be re-birthed, can be made open anew, so we are emptied of ego and stop trying to control and direct things. If we ignore this calling, we get sick—physically, spiritually, whatever it takes—until we pay attention.

Wednesday, April 19

I feel as if my soul has gone "walkabout" and there is just a shell walking around which doesn't know what it means to be human. Who am I as a human being? How do I construct a sense of self from the inside out?

I saw a bald eagle yesterday, and wondered if there was something to be learned. In Christian terms, Exod. 19:4, God says to Moses, "I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself." Sounds like a shamanic journey, representing the reconnection of the community with God. The eagle also is a symbol of the Great Spirit, the Holy Spirit, our connection to the divine, and our ability to live in the realm of the spirit while remaining balanced and rooted on this earth. It represents grace, trials, trust, heart and courage, soaring above the ordinary, recognizing that which needs to be worked on in one's soul or psyche, and broadening one's
sense of self beyond the immediately visible. Look for beauty, follow my heart, and love myself as I am loved by God! I am graceful, powerful, strong, whimsical, joyful, prayerful, sometimes fragile and regretful, complex, creative.

**Friday, April 21**

It seems to me that Christians celebrated First day as God’s (“the Lord’s Day”) for corporate worship, rest, etc., from the very beginning (Porter, 18), and that Paul’s letters reinforce the concept that to observe a seventh-day Sabbath (and ordinances) would be to go “backward” – i.e., would invalidate the new covenant. If Christianity began with the Resurrection, and so the “Eighth Day of Creation” began on that day, which is to say, First day, then why does the Adventist Sabbath make sense?

In Acts 15:20-21 and 29, James said that Gentiles only had to obey these Jewish laws: to abstain from eating food offered to idols (i.e., sacrificed), from blood (unkosher meat), and from fornication. But Paul didn’t forbid food offered to idols and rejected other food restrictions (Gal. 2:11-12, Col. 2: 21) and said sabbaths were only shadows (but did he mean weekly Sabbaths or the “ceremonial” sabbaths—feasts/offering?). Gal. 4 says that if you are led by the spirit of loving your neighbor as yourself, you are not subject to the law. But does loving God (and Christ) mean following their example, of observing a day to rest and contemplate blessings, and letting our “neighbor” rest too? Porter wrote:

>[No] day of the week is better or worse than another day—after all every day belongs to Christ. Nor is it a question of which custom has greater authority. The point rather is that each observance has a totally different kind of authority, and
is carried out for a different purpose and in a different manner. The Sabbath is based on the Jewish ceremonial law. To observe it is to admit the claims of that law and all that it presupposes. The Lord’s Day is based instead on the fact that on this day the Lord Christ rose from the dead, bringing newness of life to all who accept his name. The one rests on legalism, justification by works, and salvation by the performance of ceremonial. The other rests on faith in the truth of the Gospel, and the experience of the new life communicated to those who do believe that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. In short it is that distinction between Law and Faith which is so fundamental to Christianity. By observing Sunday and disregarding Saturday, the Christian was confessing his faith in the Gospel, he was declaring the very nature of his religion (20).

Porter also states that the simplicity of the 10 Commandments came to be stressed as a way of helping illiterate people learn and remember in the Middle Ages, and that the fourth commandment was used as a reason to maintain a spiritual Sunday. During this time people began to read the Old Testament literally. “Canons came to be directly based on the Hebrew ceremonial code. Sabbath regulations were increasingly applied to Sunday. The performance of unnecessary work on Sunday came to be viewed as a sin in the same way, and for the same reasons, as Sabbath-breaking within Jewry. Here we see the Church definitely losing sight of the principles for which Paul...had contended” (23).

I read Paul as saying that observing Jewish laws meant a failure to understand what the Gospel meant. Rom. 2:12-29 says that the law of Moses was for the Jews, the law of conscience for Gentiles; Rom. 3:20 that the law makes people aware of their sin; Rom. 3:21-26 that it is not
obedience to the law but the faith of Jesus Christ which redeems and emancipates us; Rom. 4:14
that adherence to the law voids faith; Rom. 4:15 the law brings wrath, but where there is no law,
neither is there violation; and Rom. ch.7-8 say that now the law is spiritual, not the fleshly
commandments (the law is holy and good but sin uses the law to make people more sinful than
they would be otherwise). In 2 Cor. 3, Paul wrote that the letter of the law kills and was a
ministry of death; that in Christ the old covenant was set aside; and that we see clearly and are
transformed by God, not by the law. In Gal.2:16-21, people are not justified by carrying out the
law—if justification comes from the law, then Christ died for nothing. In Gal. 3, all who rely on
doing the works of the law are cursed (only belief saves and allows us to receive the Spirit), and
the law was a disciplinarian until Christ came, but now we are not subject to it. In Gal. 4, Christ
redeemed those who were under the law; those who want to be justified by the law cut
themselves off from Christ and grace; the whole law summed up is: love your neighbor as
yourself; and if you are led by the Spirit you are not subject to the law. Finally, Col. 2 says that
the record of legal demands (10 Commandments) were erased, set aside, and nailed to the
cross. The laws about food, drink, and sabbaths were only shadows.

If my conscience and spirit say to set a day aside, to rest body and mind from work, to
study and pray and remind myself how to live out “love your neighbor as yourself” and I don’t
condemn or judge anyone else for not doing the same, and I don’t rely on doing this so that I’ll
be saved (i.e., following the letter instead of the spirit of the law), then I see no reason not to
observe a seventh-day Sabbath. I don’t see it as forbidden. Neither do I see it as something that
will redeem me in and of itself. Is it something which brings me peace and helps me feel closer
to God? Yes. More so than first day? Yes and no—it fits my biorhythms, and in conjunction with
first day rest and study and corporate worship, and with finding balance, prayer, and rest each
and every day, this works for me. Yet I still feel confused and uncertain....

A Quaker friend just called to tell me about the spiritual gifts she sees in me, of eldering
in the best sense: that in a gentle, slightly persuasive, quiet, open way, I support people in
developing their gifts. In doing so I am not overbearing and don’t hold anything over people;
my gift of vocal ministry and even my presence changes the dynamic of Meeting for Worship.
What a gift she has given me today!

Saturday, April 22

In Sabbath School we talked about the refining process—the more rooted the change that
needs to happen is, i.e., the more endemic or systemic, the more painful it is. I felt as if God said:
“Let’s rip away your identity, open you up, cut away all this dross, and see what happens....” Will I
be more receptive to God/Spirit? More able to practice the spiritual gifts spoken of yesterday? I
didn’t expect to be so uprooted. But, the fewer things in the way, the fewer distractions, the
more able we are to conduct the spirit of God.

Again the question of seventh or eighth day for worship: SDAs rely on Paul for so much,
but not on his interpretation of the old and new covenants. Where is the “right” of it for me?
Jesus meant to reform Judaism, to bring a new understanding of and closeness to God and
fellow human beings. The example he lived was to celebrate Sabbath without the legalistic (and
to my mind somewhat ridiculous) restrictions: he restored joy to the practice of community
prayer, study, thought, and rest; it was a restoration of Eden each week, as close as we can come
to it now. Does it really matter which day one observes? And why couldn’t I practice this on First
day? Because it isn’t the Sabbath. Still, could I practice the same guidelines on Sunday, of not engaging in work or commerce, of dedicating a day to study and walking with God? I do to some extent, but not to the degree I observe Seventh day. What is it that is being asked of me?

I didn’t expect to have my self-image and self-esteem so radically affected by the events happening around me in the world. If uncertainty is an indication of openness, maybe certainty is an indicator of being closed.

What dost Thou wish of me?

Not to preach. But to observe and live out the questions, to be open, to let the healing Presence flow through, to seek the union of Spirit and human being and nature. To practice learning and applying, asking and answering, continuing to try. To ask different questions, new questions. To put ideas together in different ways, to interpret for others.

I feel emptied out.

Sunday, April 23

My head can’t figure out the contradictions between Old and New Testaments regarding Sabbath and the Christian First Day, but my heart and body say to practice a seventh-day Sabbath and continue corporate worship with Quakers on first day. The Ministry and Counsel Committee of Friends Meeting says this is fine, good, not to worry; the group continues to express its support and thinks it meaningful that I have studied and thought so much about this. One Quaker elder reminded me that all days are probably alike in God, that all time is one time (omnipresent means not only in all places, but also in all times). Instead of an either/or situation, maybe the way I practice is an example of “both/and?”
The SDA guidelines help me observe Sabbath more fully; it is hard not to get caught in legalistic observance but to remember that it was “made for man.” There will be times when I am away and using public transport will be necessary to do the things which bring me closer to God. But how to reconcile this with my family—how much do I need to explain? I’ve explained to those who need to know at work.

I do not agree with the SDAs that Sunday worship is the “mark of the Beast” (i.e., evil)! It is the mark of Christianity versus Judaism. How do the SDAs resolve what Paul has said, and the entire history of Christian practice with their theology? Isn’t Paul the guide in what it means to be Christian? Why are the SDAs Christian and not messianic Jews?

I met a Quaker fellow who teaches at an Adventist college, and he has been invited to give a presentation about Quakers. I wondered if part of why I’m called into the SDA church is to make clear the connections and differences, in addition to living in the “in-between spaces”, the “both/and?”

The things I see in common between George Fox and EGW are that they both experienced extreme spiritual turmoil and depression in their early years, that they understood that the Spirit which inspired those who wrote the Scriptures were still at work in the world (i.e., the Spirit of Prophecy), that our bodies are temples, that there is no intermediary required between us and God/Christ, that they both traveled far and wide preaching. Both experienced ecstatic and quieter visions, were ill-educated yet could speak authoritatively about the Bible, and were strong social and religious reformers. They lived in times of civil war and religious reform.
**Thursday, April 27**

When I asked what would constitute “Sabbath breaking” severe enough to cause a member to be disciplined by the church, I understood from the answers that the transgression must be observable and deliberately contrary to the church teaching, such as being employed for pay on Saturdays (in a field other than health care or the pastorate). Yet the church is compassionate in that every opportunity would be given to the member to discuss the situation, pursue other opportunities, and be restored to the community and God before any formal disciplinary action would be taken.

**Thursday, May 4**

I read Paul as meaning that we should not obey the commandments for their own sake—that would be legalism—or because of a fear of annihilation, but that we should live love and live by listening to the Spirit. So I have come to think that it isn’t important to obey the Sabbath because it is the fourth commandment, but by living the joyful celebration of my connection with God in a very conscious way each week, then God can live through me more clearly.

Do I think it is wrong not to observe the seventh-day Sabbath? No. Is it wrong for me not to observe it? No. Is it right for me in the sense that I feel called to it, and it gives me peace and a sense of balance? Yes.
**Saturday, May 6**

In the world, I do not feel accepted for who I am, let alone for my gifts and talents. I cannot see how to live graciously in this chaos. But what is God's gentle will? What does God's compassion mean and where does it lead me?

From *If God Is Love*: "to heal, to bring life, ... to love those around him. This was the kingdom of God" (Gulley and Mulholland 278). I don't feel capable of this right now. I feel too wounded, all of my grief and anger brought to the surface. It is I who needs to be healed and to be loved, to find new life.

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**Sunday, May 7**

I heard a radio program in which parents hoped that their schizophrenic son would cease believing that he is God. I thought, what a loss that would be, for that sense of infinite connection with all beings and infinite graciousness to all people to die away. I've been living in fear, knowing suffering and pain intimately. Time to open up again, expand into my God-self, God-consciousness, to allow myself to Be, to be with and in God. Infinite compassion, infinite love, infinite reaching out and blessing. Both/and, part and parcel, all things in-between.

How do my spiritual gifts differ from or merge with my professional life? Do the gifts of listening and discernment, learning and teaching, connecting people, vocal and written ministry, openness and reaching out, contemplation, and healing match the qualities of any position I might take, or would performing certain duties diminish my energy and focus on spirituality? How do I find an appropriate match for a career in the world?
**Wednesday, May 10**

Apparently I need to become a blank slate, completely open, without any preconceptions, frameworks, or vision. Without any ego, sense of ownership or expertise, like a monk who does the tasks assigned without being attached to them, yet does them with complete love and attention, in the attitude of serving God and others, selfless. Without pride, yet honestly and carefully. Apparently I am called to this and am capable of achieving it—living out Jesus’ example. But I don’t want to. It is appallingly painful. What I most want is to have a sense of belonging, a belief that I matter and am valued, that I have worth as a human being. Yet all of that has to come from within, not from how others perceive me or treat me. Through all of this, I have to keep doing the daily duties as they come to me. Apparently I can’t just withdraw and retreat.

“For creativity and sanity man needs to have, or at least to feel, a meaningful relation to and union with life, with reality itself” (Watts 4). Being told that I do not need to have a framework for understand what is happening around me in the world is contradictory to the human need to make meaning.

**Saturday, May 15**

Went to visit some friends for the weekend, and we went birding Saturday morning. I felt uncomfortable about paying to use public transportation. Then we ate dinner out, and saw a movie. One friend actually did all of the monetary transactions for me, and was willing to do so without needing an explanation. Still, I was asking other people to work for me. Also, I felt strange spending the day differently, not focused on spiritual matters. So, it was not the
handling of money, and not even necessarily having other people working for me, it was the lack of focus, along with the extra activity, that made the day less restful, less centered. It became Saturday, not Sabbath. We talked about it the next day, and my friend named the feelings I’ve always had about Sundays—that when we spend Saturday doing errands and recreation, it dispenses the energy from the week, and there isn’t much left over for Sunday. Sunday then feels “blah” and becomes a day for worrying about Monday. If we spend Saturday as Sabbath, we use the energy from the week for spiritual matters and rest, and feel renewed on Sunday to do more secular projects and move back into the workweek. The conversation also helped me realize that having the handyman work on Saturday (his choice, not mine) would disrupt my balance, so I asked him to reschedule. The rhythm of Sabbath has become joyful, restorative, and essential.

Only time will tell if I remain steadfast, and I do think that this is between God and me. It is an expression of love, not a behavior based on fear and observed because it was a commandment.

Thursday, May 18

It is saying yes to the idea of Sabbath, but getting there by a different route. So what does it mean to pay attention to prophecy? Is getting to the underlying concept what is important, even if the approach or reasoning differs? EGW’s prophecies were always in answer to a question from or issue of concern amongst the SDAs. If I arrive at observing the Sabbath, yet don’t believe all people have to do the same, do not believe that Sunday observance is the "mark of the beast," is that important to my continuing relationship with the SDA church? Probably no more so than my different beliefs on other matters. Is this one of the fundamental
27 beliefs of the SDAs? Well, I don't believe totally in most of the others, either. On the other hand, there are parts of most of the fundamental beliefs that I do accept. Two years ago I wouldn't have claimed to believe even one-third of what I admit to now.

**Friday, May 19**

The practice of Sabbath has become elevated from obeying a rule to restoring tranquility and contentment, and I stumbled across the following entry about revelation which expresses it well:

God "reveals the rules of conduct.... His Word takes the form of instruction and of Law.... The Law derives its value from this divine origin, and hence is elevated from a juridical reality to become the delight of the spiritual minded" (Léon-Dufour 500).

**Sunday, May 21**

I am called to make a fundamental change in my life and my attitudes. I can reflect deeply and learn how to lead with integrity....

Yesterday in Sabbath School we talked about evolution a little, and my feelings were that the others were making generalizations about those who believe in evolution, and were judging those who do. Since I am such a person, I felt as if the comments were directed at me personally. But I know that wasn't so. My understanding of evolution is that it is a fact that DNA mutates, but how, why, and when it does is unknown, which is why it is still referred to as the "theory" of evolution. Scientists are trying to find answers. Most evolutionists do not deny God, yet do keep science and faith separate—faith isn't part of the scientific method, nor is the scientific method applicable to faith. Just as there are other Biblical passages and time periods
that are read figuratively, i.e., are interpreted, so also many people read Genesis figuratively and symbolically instead of literally. For example, the prophecy in Daniel (8:14) about the sanctuary being restored within a specific time period—if one reads that literally, it did happen—but if one reads that as a symbol of the second Advent, even using the accepted substitution of one year for each day, the prophecy doesn’t work, so it had to be reinterpreted…. EGW’s prophecy said Daniel 8:14 represented the making ready of the heavenly sanctuary instead of the Advent. As for what I think about Creation, I wasn’t there, and it doesn’t really matter to me. In public schools, teachers teach what the geologists and anthropologists and other scientists are trying to grasp, not articles of Christian faith, especially not an evangelical subset of those beliefs.

**Wednesday, May 31**

I spent the evening with an Adventist couple. I wanted to discuss the issue of talking with family members about observing the seventh-day Sabbath with someone who had converted. We covered a lot of ground in our conversation, and of course I was quite happy to talk about Quakers.

One theme we touched on was shunning, and they pointed out that the SDA church does not practice shunning. Someone could be dismembershipped (or choose to drop membership), but would still be welcome in church and Sabbath School. This rectified an impression I had gotten a year and a half ago. Somehow it is very comforting…I feel that if I were to begin a romantic relationship, I wouldn't have to stop attending.
**Monday, June 5**

Last week the message during Meeting for Worship was that it takes courage to be a Quaker. The message in yesterday’s Meeting was that it takes courage to live with integrity, to be of good cheer, and to continue to try to meet that of God in everyone. I want to be more intentional in these three things.

**Wednesday, June 7**

I’ve been struggling with the Sabbath School lessons, wishing I felt connected to the words I read. Despite feeling hopeless, I keep reading each week, just as stubbornly persistent as ever despite depression and grief. I don’t see despair as a sin, or hope as a virtue. I do see doggedness as a necessity—despite all of my lack of understanding, I do survive. Maybe there will come a time of thriving.

Both faith communities are of help, and feeling heard by all of the people who listen to me makes a positive difference. Telling my story over and over again is somehow a relief, complementing the essential contemplative time. I wonder if being bored was an indicator that there is finally some relaxation internally, a shift into a different mode?

**Monday, June 12**

Do I have any hope for my sense of self in the world? No, but I still have to find some meaning in the larger scheme of things. So what hope can I find? I can practice giving up my will and letting God guide. I can bide my time and see if any good comes out of the situations in which I find myself. I can devote my energies to creative endeavors, to ministry, and to my
contemplative relationship with God. Can I re-find caring and enthusiasm without letting my life become unbalanced again?

In a sense, God has “slapped me upside the head” and told me to pay attention, made me aware of how important my integrity is. I must follow my own path, without letting ambition overwhelm kindness, gentleness, and honesty. I cannot let my passion overpower my daily relationships, or let my need for approval and recognition lead me to betrayal, “war-mongering,” or the creation of enemy-relationships. Mine is not the warrior path, but the way of the adventurer.

**Tuesday, June 13**

Can dispossession lead me back to gentleness?

Reading *The Gospel of Judas*, I think the idea that only those who have a spark of the divine within will go to the divine realm of the immortals when they die (Ehrman), may be similar to the SDA idea of a remnant, the saints whose souls will be resurrected and attain heaven. Adventists maintain that all others die completely, that both body and soul cease to exist forever (are burned up in a literal fire). Yet I think they would not be pleased to have this comparison made.

The idea that God is purely spiritual, not a Being, resonates with me!

**Friday, June 16**

I feel ambivalence and a lack of trust. Can I learn to act without ego? How does one create relationships without investing self and care? I used to like being a generalist, so why do I feel so
resistant to that role now? I am still grieving the loss of a vocation I created. I feel lost regarding my sense of self. I think I am also grieving for what I perceive to be a loss of integrity amongst my acquaintances. Yet I also feel almost open to hope and possibility.

Do I want to be happy? Yes. I can only be responsible for my own integrity.

**Saturday, June 17**

After talking to a friend, I feel riled up again. Can I ever get to a calm, peaceful place? Can I ever be satisfied?

**Saturday, June 24**

In Waterton Lakes National Park, Alberta, Canada—camping in the Rockies—nothing seems to matter except nature. Out here it doesn’t matter who I am—I just am. And with these friends, I am my best self. (The adventurer self!)

**Monday, June 26**

A week away, a week of perspective and of being the best person I can be has allowed me to see how much I have hated and how destructive my thought patterns have been—how much vitality has gotten consumed. Hope, dreams, vision, and voice all have been destroyed systematically.

I don’t feel any attachment to Sabbath, yet I am attached to the idea of a true sabbatical for myself—rest and renewal. I don’t feel a sense of mission or passion. I have no faith, only frustration, resentment, and cynicism.
Tuesday, June 27

If things that happen will not affect my life, or the way I do my daily duties, then they are not worth my emotion. I need to shift my idea of “caring” to a different model, and not let anyone else determine my happiness. If I can learn to step back from my feelings, be more dispassionate, be kinder to myself in not taking things personally and to an extreme, I think I can manage better.

Just when I felt ready to walk away from the SDA church came a request to do special music for the next Sabbath, pulling me back in.

Saturday, July 1

On March 9, I asked myself, “What are my dreams? To see (live in) Spain and New Zealand, to see a glacier and the Canadian Rockies—to travel. To paint and draw; to go hang gliding once. To ride a scooter—even to test-drive one. I also want to go kayaking again soon, and perhaps to have more boxing lessons. I also want to continue to work on the house.”

I went to Alberta, to the Canadian Rockies, camping for a week with my Canadian friends, and saw glaciers at Glacier National Park in June. I am considering a tutor for art lessons; hang gliding is scheduled for July 14. I went for a ride on a scooter last week but couldn’t drive it myself since that requires a motorcycle endorsement on my license; I decided not to buy one this year but to spend some money for art lessons and continuing to fix up the house and commissioning a painting. So, I am trying to meet some of my dreams head-on!

I’m feeling better about myself, having embarked on some adventures and having had some affirmation of who I am.
Saturday, July 8

Played music for the worship service today, for the offertory and the special music (which falls between the Scripture reading and the sermon), and many people thanked me afterward. I remember not wanting to play music for the church, but now it feels fine.

One of the fellows keeps a couple of beehives, and a young Quaker wants to learn beekeeping, so I will try to connect them.

In Sabbath School, we’re at a place where I don’t understand Adventist thought and theology, and don’t care for what I do comprehend. I suppose more study is needed, although I don’t feel like it right now.

I have to laugh to myself when I hear people singing (or saying) that they want to hear the voice of the Lord, because for me it has meant accepting that my life will be turned upside down time and again. It demands complete self-honesty, courage, and strength. When I haven’t been totally honest with myself and have done things the way I wanted to, I have made mistakes that have hurt others badly. But sometimes my presence or example seems to act as a catalyst for people to begin to make changes in their own lives, or sometimes a wounded person can begin to heal him/herself because of the gentleness which flows through me. Sometimes I get so used to feeling upside-down that I don’t realize how uncomfortable and dreadful it can be for others. It also makes me sensitive to wrongness, when people around me turn their environment upside down to suit themselves, instead of being willing to suffer change themselves in order to help the community grow.

Maybe trying to administrate isn’t right for me; maybe the universe needs something different from me. I have to be true to myself and my calling(s), and not lose myself again.
In view of this, why am I journeying with the SDAs? Is it for one or a few people, a church, a denomination, for others to learn more, to connect the Friends and Adventists? I wish I could see clearly. Is it to prepare me for something else?

Friday, July 14

Emailed a colleague at an Adventist university and a couple of Jewish colleagues about work conferences and Sabbath: the Adventists attend workshops from Sunday mornings to Friday sunsets; the Jewish colleagues attend workshops on Saturdays but try to make time for Shabbat observance. For my professional development plan, I requested to attend a Canadian conference which meets on weekdays. This coming year it happens to be very near the place where my Canadian friends live, so I will be able to save money on housing, and stay with them over the weekend! It also will let me have a quiet Sabbath instead of trying to travel home on that day.

Sunday, July 16

When visiting my sister, I bought the kinds of foods her family likes to eat for brunch, so that instead of going out on Saturday, I could cook for us...and that went well. We ate out after church today (Sunday) instead. I played music for a small, Lutheran church at the request of the organist, who also serves as a SDA organist, and did it today because my sister and her family are Lutheran and said they would like to go. I felt good about playing, although I wished I could have stayed for cookies and punch with the congregation instead of rushing away because my nephews were hungry!
Earlier this month when my sister and nephews stayed with me for the weekend, we were returning from an afternoon at a park when my sister acknowledged that I don’t like to spend money on Saturdays, but asked if we could stop to eat at a restaurant so she could get the kids fed without having to go all of the way home and cook. I agreed and sat with them, though I didn’t eat. It was odd, but okay. She had gone with me to the Adventist church that morning…I really wanted to show off my family. I was a little disappointed, though, because as it was communion Sabbath, the service was solemn—very somber, with dark music instead of the bright music we usually have, and with weighty prayers and scriptures—when I had wanted my sister to see the joyful service which draws me to this church.

Thursday, July 20

I’ve been so depressed since January. How I wish I could be still and cool, peaceful, joyful, having fun with change. But change is being imposed on me and I’m not part of the discussions or decision-making process, and therein lies the difference. Gelassenheit (submission of one’s will) is needed. How can I find contentment in my heart and stillness of mind? How can I let the light shine through me? I felt so much better after the trip to the Canadian Rockies—how to recover my best self, and not lose it again?

Am I capable of treating those in positions of power as I would want to be treated if I were in their places?

I keep feeling pessimistic. I worry that my comrades will begin to hate me if I am not able to move beyond this distrustful cynicism.
**Saturday, July 22**

Two and a quarter hours walking in the park, restoring my soul. Thought about what my vocation means to me: to provide resources, to remove barriers, and to teach people how to better survive in the world. That’s all.

Why am I on the journey with the SDAs? To keep myself engaged in the faith questions like: Is God a being? (What does “Be still and know that I am” mean if not?!) What does it mean to try to discern and follow God’s will? How do I live my daily life? How do I try to engage Sabbath each day? I still don’t know what the SDA journey means for the Quakers.

I think I wanted to feel important, and I no longer do, and that is the unspoken loss I’ve been experiencing. Is that why I want to administrate, to feel important?

The Friends are seeking alternative meeting places, and a SDA church still seems like a good possibility, perhaps one of the smaller ones which would still be close to downtown.

**Sunday, July 23**

Can I forgive myself for hating? Can I forgive those whom I have hated? Be angry with God if I need to be angry.

The study of sanctuary and judgment in the Book of Daniel this quarter seems to be at the heart of SDA belief, and it is difficult to understand, since they interpret the passages and symbols differently than I do.

I’m scared of having Friends meeting for worship at the SDA church I’ve been attending, but I don’t understand why. It could foster a closer relationship between the two congregations.
George Fox wrote in his Journal, “Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts…” (346). Love God and neighbor as myself. If I can reconcile myself to the idea that I am where I’m supposed to be—and from that I can love God and find peace within myself, if I can accept the obligations God asks of me—writing, honoring the contemplative time required of me, and the community life, actively creating balance between them—then I’ll be doing my best to fulfill the two commandments from which all others spring. Choosing the best options for honoring my need for Sabbath right now. Being willing to admit my wish to feel important, and the resulting hatred when I do not experience a sense of being valuable, is part of being honest with myself. Acknowledging my fearful feelings regarding Friends worshipping at a SDA church, even though I don’t understand them, is part of living with integrity.

Saturday, July 29

Went hang gliding yesterday! I felt a little scared as we were ascending, but the view was interesting. Yet the motion/air sickness I felt made me glad to come back to earth, and I think this is one adventure I won’t repeat. But it is part of living my dreams, thus important.

Wednesday, August 2

Patricia Loring’s pamphlet on spiritual discernment points to many issues which have concerned me during the past two years. In discussing ways in which to test leadings, she defined one as, “Comparing them with the Bible or with the writings of spiritual leaders or saintly people from Quaker and other traditions” (8). When I sought to find similar journeys of the Quakers with
other faith groups, I came across John Woolman’s concern to live with and learn from the Indians. Another test is peace, which can manifest itself in a multitude of ways.

On a personal level, the reconciliation of disparate parts of one’s self or of one’s experience in a new, sometimes unexpected direction or action can issue in a deep interior sense of peace. Quaker experience has been that living close to the Spirit has the effect of such harmonizing and reconciling both within and between persons.

Feeling at peace with a decision or an outcome, even if it is not what one sought or hoped for, even if it calls for considerable hardship or change, has been a frequent indication of rightness....

Disturbance of a person’s peace is a common accompaniment of a new task or burden being laid upon them, often long before the nature of the task becomes clear. Faithfully discharging the task leads to restoration of inner peace (9).

This sums up what I have experienced in this ministry with the SDAs. I felt inexplicably called, again and again, into relationship with that church, despite its theology which in many ways is almost opposite of my own. This call very definitely disturbed my peace, yet has resulted in a sense of rightness over a period of time. I think it has also led to a closer relationship with some of the members in my own Meeting.

Loring continues,

Sometimes what is required is simple and obvious. At other times a prolonged period of living with the disquiet is necessary before the particular response
required of the particular individual becomes clear. The response may require a 
re-viewing of the person’s entire life, direction, and background in an effort to 
see how it is being drawn toward or intersects with the source of the disquiet.  

...It requires even more discernment to discover whether the ministry 
called for from a particular individual in a particular instance requires prophetic 
speech, humble and hidden activities, bold and dramatic action, professional 
service or some novel and previously unimagined course (10).  

...In many instances discernment of our gifts lies very close to discernment 
of our leadings—but not always. In keeping with God's mystery and 
unpredictability, it can happen that we are led into areas of weakness or 
disability. This may assist us in learning humility; may help us be clear that credit 
for successes does not belong to us personally; may uncover and develop 
unsuspected abilities; may be an exercise in obedience, or function in ways that 
ever become clear (12-13).  

I have often wondered what this call means. I have reexamined my call to ministry, tried 
to discern whether or not formal education in seminary would be helpful, and have assessed 
what my spiritual gifts are and considered how to best use them in compliance with God’s will. 
My situation has been disquieting, and I have tried to analyze my strengths and weaknesses 
objectively, living with my feelings, which said one thing, and the doors closing, which said 
another. I have come to think that this past half-year in particular has been an exercise in 
obedience and humility. Plunged into despair and shame, into the dark night, wondering if there
would ever be clarity or hope, yet linked with an underlying and deep-rooted willingness to be
changed, to take emotional (and some physical) risks—all of this has left me believing that I
have come out on another side of my spiritual life, extraordinarily transformed (not the goal of
submission to the will of God, yet a welcome side-effect) and more quietly, that I have become
more “attuned to authentic movements of the Spirit leading us into greater fullness of life”
(Loring 15). This experience does seem to “reflect an experience of God which is more verb than
noun, more relationship than knowledge….” And I seem to have groped my “way in search of
reality, past easy definitions and conceptions of” myself, becoming “graciously freed from the
distortions imposed by ‘the world’” (Loring 15).

**Sunday, August 27**

In the Sabbath School study of the Book of Daniel, I think the first item is to address the
assumption of when Daniel was written. If we start with Daniel having been written in the
second century B.C.E., as the introduction points to in my Bible, and then we interpret the
symbols as representing short-term, literal events (futurecasting), the timing works. If we start
with Daniel having been written in the sixth century B.C.E., as the text itself says, and take the
symbols as representing events on a scale of larger magnitude (prophetic time), then the timing
works this way too. So it is a matter of where we start and what we are looking for that guides
our interpretation. I’m willing to read Daniel through the SDA perspective, but what I am
disappointed by is that some of the Quarterly has illogical and contradictory arguments, which
don’t “prove the point.”
When I asked for clarification, the answer I received was approximately that the 2300 day (or year) prophecy in Daniel 9 began in 457 BC when the decree was given by Persian King Artaxerxes to rebuild Jerusalem. Going forward 2300 years from that date takes one to 1843 AD, but because there was no “0” year, it is actually 1844. The prophecy states that beginning then (1844), the sanctuary would be cleansed. Early Adventists believed that this was when Christ would return to purify the earth and take his people to Heaven. This did not happen, and the believers were devastated, hence the term “Great Disappointment”. Since there was no earthly sanctuary in 1844, the believers eventually realized that the terminology referred to the Day of Atonement of the Old Testament, which was a day of judgment and cleansing for the people of ancient Israel. On the Day of Atonement each year the people of Israel were judged by God, and the earthly sanctuary was cleansed through the sprinkling of sacrificial blood by the High Priest in the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary. This pointed forward to the sacrifice of Christ to take care of sin once and for all. Christ is now considered by SDAs to be the “Great High Priest,” and in 1844 he went into the Most Holy Place in the sanctuary in Heaven. He is now deciding the eternal destiny of all people, and through the merits of His own blood He is removing the condemnation of sin from His people. So, what really happened in 1844 was that a judgment began in Heaven. During the time between 1844 and the Second Coming, the names of all people who have ever lived will come up before God, and their eternal destinies will be decided (thus the term “pre-advent judgment”). If the judgment did not come before Christ’s return, on what basis would Christ determine who His people were? Revelation 22:12 says: “And behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.” Thus,
Christ could not reward people according to their works if he had not already judged their works.

Sometimes the shorter explanations don’t work well; some SDA beliefs may never make sense in my theological view of the world.

*Thursday, August 31*

It takes a long time to build relationships and it is still not clear to me what might make sense or appeal to both church groups for a joint project or collaboration. I want to be persistent in the relationship, and maybe nothing observable will ever result. But I am a witness to them and they to me.

Wanting the Quarterly to be better than it is and wanting the church to be the best it can be is hopeful.

As a Quaker, I don’t want to engage in power games, but maybe knowing how they are being played out around me, and which ones I do use, even inadvertently, will probably help me survive better. How is it that I can best serve integrity, values, ethics, God and neighbor? Perhaps by better understanding the culture of power. Or perhaps by stepping out of the fray for awhile and concentrating on other things. I felt myself to have been drawn into an interesting case of manipulation this past week, and listened to someone with power trying to use an old weapon against me—that there are those who fear me and my anger, that my anger is out-of-control—but I no longer believe that. The issue we were discussing was not about me in any way, despite this person’s wish to make it my problem.
I found myself thinking that we all need comforting and love even when we may not deserve it, and that if we want to help others grow to their full potential, we should offer sincere praise and encouragement, warmth and tenderness. That some individuals have broken trust with me is their trouble to mend. It is up to me to keep hold of my integrity, to be trustworthy, to choose to trust, to respect and take care of myself. I need to look to my own skills, talents, and gifts. My outlook and feelings are mine to own and direct. Though I will inevitably be influenced by others, I can choose to focus on the positive rather than the negative. I can choose to be cheerful, lighthearted and full of laughter, or quiet, and I can choose to consult with others for a healthy dose of reality.

I wonder if I’ve been idealizing the SDA church and people. If so, what are the implications? I want so much to believe in integrity, I want to see it, and perhaps I project it where it doesn’t actually exist.

Friday, September 1
My job is to let the holy spirit live and express itself through me. I can step back, be less intense and headlong, be kind, friendly, and courteous. I do not have to defend myself or anyone else. I can act out of compassionate generosity.

Saturday, September 2
I’m having a difficult time with last week’s and this week’s Sabbath School lessons in the sense that some of the arguments (regarding the timing of Daniel) contradict themselves or are simply not well-constructed arguments. E.g., "In Daniel 10:2,3 the same word appears as in Daniel 9:24,
and it obviously doesn’t mean “weeks of years.” (Daniel fasted 3 weeks of years, or 21 years?) Also, even if one accepted the error that the word in Daniel 9:24 means “weeks of years,” a week of years is still seven years, the same number of years as if you used the day-year principle.” So if they are the same, why try to make a case that they aren’t?

And, August 22, “The 70-week prophecy comes to 490 years. The 2,300 days, if literal, come to a little more than six years. Could 490 years be “cut off” from a little more than six years? Of course not. From 2,300 years? Of course. Hence here’s more evidence that the day-year principle must be applied to the 2,300-day prophecy, as well. It makes no sense to apply the principle to the 70 weeks, which is only part of the 2,300 days, and not apply it to the 2,300 days, as well.” To be consistent, one would cut off 70 weeks from 2300 days, not 490 years from 2300 days—mixing and matching literal and prophetic times. These inconsistencies bother me, in the sense that they just aren’t stated or written well.

Then, some of the arguments are fine and make good sense, like the animal symbols being representative so the timeframes should be representative too. Sometimes it bothers me that the unidentified writer of this quarter’s study guide uses “obviously” far too often when it seems like he is stretching to make a point, instead of providing more solid evidence from the Scriptures. E.g., from August 27, ”Notice in Luke 2:1 that “all the world” should be taxed. Only a world power could tax all the world. How interesting, too, that Daniel 7:23 says that the fourth beast will “devour the whole earth”; that is, the fourth beast is obviously a world empire, such as Rome.” But my Bible says, ”all the Roman empire” should be “registered” (i.e., counted for the census), so what seems obvious to the quarterly writer isn’t to me. Especially when it goes on to say, ”Though Daniel doesn’t name Rome, the New Testament does.” Well, ”the abomination of
desolation” spoken of by Jesus, in reference to Daniel, isn’t actually clear and unambiguous. So, I just don’t get it. I am frustrated, trying to understand what most of SDAs already know. Is it the case that some quarterlies are simply better than others, and this is one that is less than stellar?

I talked briefly with a couple of Adventists about the Quarterly, and they agreed that some are better-written than others, that this particular one does assume a lot, especially for a heavy and complex area of study, even for SDAs who have been studying this material all of their lives. I feel reassured about my impressions and frustration. I feel buoyed by this couple and our conversations. It helps a lot to talk with someone who has converted and also with a person who, while being a “birthright” SDA, has understood what conversion means.

**Saturday, September 9**

One of my Adventist beginning-to-be-friends invited me to observe foot-washing. I had odd feelings about the rite, in addition to self-consciousness. It was overwhelming despite its simplicity and matter-of-factness, and I got out to the parking lot before I started crying.

My name was in the display case inside the church entrance, where they put folks who are new members, but a little to one side, not quite in the same place, and I don’t know what that means, and would have to ask the pastor to find out. And I was asked to play music for Sabbath School next week.

I went to Aman park for awhile, listening to/watching the creek. It’s a grey day, and I feel uncertain and alone. Am I going to be sucked under, into the Adventist tide? Are they all praying for me to join the church? What in the world does this “relationship” with the SDA church mean, anyway? Would I be contradicting my Quaker principles if I participated in communion? If I did
ever participate in footwashing and/or communion, I would cry. They’re not symbols—it would involve a giving of my heart. I feel split open again, conflicted. I just needed a simple invitation, and heard it both from the pulpit and from this “sister-in-Christ.” She and her husband have invited me into simple companionship, and I want so much to be in relationship....

**Thursday, September 14**

Met up with an Adventist friend from another area church today, who said that some of their church were either thinking about writing, or had actually written to the Conference about the poor quality of this quarter’s Adult Sabbath School study guide, saying that it made unsupported leaps and faulty arguments, and hoping that they wouldn’t see another substandard study guide like this one....

**Saturday, September 16**

This month’s Sabbath School Superintendent read an article about a book written by an anthropologist on the subject of the SDA church and culture. The article stated that the anthropologist had participated in every aspect of SDA life, yet had not joined the church, and asked why had she not? The Superintendent also read an assertion that Sabbath School is the heart of the church, and when a Sabbath School dies, the church ceases to progress. He then asked us what we found compelling in Sabbath School, and the answers reflected my own thoughts and feelings: connection and personal relationships with others in one’s individual Sabbath School classes, and the challenge of learning more through discussion than one would by simply reading and studying on one’s own. The Superintendent then asked again why would
this anthropologist not have joined the church, and I spoke up: “As a Quaker minister in your
midst, I agree with everything that’s been said about Sabbath School—these are the things I find
important, but as a Quaker, I am already a member of a church and of the “body of Christ,” so I
wouldn’t change my membership to join this church.” I heard the buzz around the church as
people reacted to my “coming out” statement, but it just seemed to be surprise, nothing
negative. The Superintendent admitted the possibility that the anthropologist was already a
Christian—the article didn’t say. He closed with a prayer, and I played a lullaby (“haunting,” one
person called it) to close the communal portion of Sabbath School before we separated for the
individual classes. Then I went to a different class than the one I usually attend, and found it to
be more formal while still allowing for questions and comments. I like the format and wide-
ranging discussion of my customary class better, but may go again to the other class from time
to time. I stayed for the worship service, and one woman took my hand and thanked me both
for the music and for all of my comments. Connection and relationship.

_Tuesday, September 19_

It seems to me that part of being a Friend is not participating in baptism with water, Eucharistic
communion, tithing, or other rites, which are but “symbols, shadows, signs, figures, or types.”
This quarter’s Sabbath School study guide often mentions the “antitypical” atonement and
cleansing of the sanctuary, i.e., Christ’s entry into the heavenly “holy of holies” to do the work of
pleading the case of each soul before God’s judgment and providing us with the “covering” of
his own merit in place of our sins. I didn’t understand “antitypical” until just now—if an earthly
rite is a “type” then the heavenly or spiritual reality would be the “antitype.” Thus, Quakers strive
to meet the “antityypical” reality as closely as is possible—acknowledging baptism by the holy
spirit, recording ministers' spiritual gifts while acknowledging that only God can ordain,
understanding that every gathering, every act, and indeed every moment of being represents
communion, and so on.
CONCLUSION

After a period of adjustment, of “living into” the Sabbath, I found the Adventist observance of the seventh day to be fulfilling and rejuvenating, even though I didn’t observe it for the same reason as the Adventists (as an identification of the remnant to be resurrected at the Second Coming or Advent). The ways in which Adventists observed the Sabbath varied geographically, yet these were the common elements: setting the day aside for focusing on spiritual matters and one’s relationship to God—especially through nature, reading and studying religious materials, resting, praying and contemplating, not being employed for pay on Saturdays (in a field other than health care or the pastorate), and not asking others to work for one except in case of emergency, from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. There were things I regretted missing—attending concerts usually—but I liked not having to devote Saturday to running errands and doing chores, all of which seemed to proliferate from week to week. I rested easier during the stress of the week knowing that for one twenty-four-hour period I would not be busy, but would devote the day to being apart from the world’s business.

When I spent Saturday doing errands and recreation, it dispersed the energy from the week, and there wasn’t much left over for Sunday. Sunday then felt “blah” and became a day for worrying about Monday. When I spent Saturday as Sabbath, I used the energy from the week for spiritual matters and rest, and felt renewed on Sunday to do more secular projects and move back into the workweek.

Yet I found that the SDA worship services did not meet my need for the unstructured corporate communion which Friends practice. Thus, my primary day for corporate worship has remained first day (Sunday), with the Friends; my day of study, rest, and refraining from
commerce or salaried work was seventh day (Saturday). In this way I combined practices of both churches and followed my biorhythms. It was an embodied way of living, not a theological issue—it was a relief, not an arguable discussion point. It was a kind of willingness, an assent rather than a creed or doctrine or tenet. My conscience and spirit said to set a day aside, to rest body and mind from work, to study and pray and remind myself how to live out “love your neighbor as yourself.” I didn’t condemn or judge anyone else for not doing the same, and I didn’t rely on doing that in order to be saved (i.e., following the letter instead of the spirit of the law). I saw no reason not to observe a seventh-day Sabbath—I didn’t see it as forbidden, nor as something that would redeem me in and of itself. It was something which brought me peace and helped me feel closer to God. In conjunction with first day rest and study and corporate worship, and with finding balance, prayer, and rest each and every day, this worked for me.

Also, as with early Quakers (and many other denominations), one day for corporate worship sometimes wasn’t enough and I also needed time to study with a group. There were times when I felt like I needed Sabbath School more than Friends Meeting. Friends Meeting has always been hard work because it requires a wide opening of the self to the Spirit, yet Sabbath School let me come at things in small, manageable chunks. This study with a worship group so different from my own certainly led me to a different understanding of what it means to be a Quaker, and I’m grateful I had the opportunity to do so as part of a recorded ministry. Now I feel I have been released from this particular calling and what remains is to share the results of my experience with others.

This journey was intensely personal and remaining true to my intention to learn from the Adventists but not to cause the SDA church or congregation to change was difficult as I
struggled to find where and when I could speak as a Quaker who believed passionately in the

tenets of my faith without offending the person who is truly “other.” For example, the one
doctrine I would want the SDA church to re-examine is the question of gays and lesbians—
homosexuality—because their stance seems so antithetical for a church which preaches and
practices love and equality, and I think they could be better than they are in this area. The essay
I wrote (Appendix II) came not only from the wish to engage the scriptures for myself, but also
to educate and persuade, yet I only shared it with a few Adventists. On a related note about
equality, the SDAs are a far more racially-integrated denomination than Friends, despite Friends’
dedication to equality, and Friends could learn much from the SDAs in this area. Meeting people
in the SDA church as a Quaker and as a recorded minister deepened the conversations we had.
Playing music resulted in recognition and conversation and opened up opportunities for further
interaction.

I was often surprised by the welcome I felt from the SDAs as a hosting faith community.
The congregations welcomed me again and again, thanking me for making the effort to
understand their beliefs and doing their best to educate me without expecting that this would
result in a new membership. It is probable that they hoped for conversion, but they never said
so overtly.

To fulfill the obligation to share my learning with the Friends Meeting which recorded
my ministry, I reported to the Ministry and Counsel regularly, and those at Meeting for Worship
heard my vocal ministry change as a result of my study with the SDAs. I also shared my new
knowledge more formally at a program following worship. I used a comparison of theology and
practice between the liberal, Hicksite Friends and the SDAs (appendix) to help Friends see
connections where they might never have considered there to be any. In two branches of Christianity which differ significantly theologically, there are still commonalities which lead both to want to prevent the occasion for war and to work for peace and reconciliation. Yet one denomination is devoted to evangelizing in the belief that God will only save those who live out the light they are given and which corresponds most closely to the light provided by God via the Scriptures as understood by the SDAs. The other denomination is devoted to accepting people exactly where they are, realizing that there is some light in each person and in most religious beliefs; thus conversion is not a prerequisite to achieving union with God or to an afterlife.

Concerning ecumenism, there may be lines beyond which either party, individually or corporately, are not willing to go. One “line in the sand” I had not been willing to cross previously in my life was to engage with organized religion at all, especially Christianity—I believed that the Church was mostly evil and caused harm to great numbers of peoples throughout the world and throughout history. I crossed that line in my mid-to-late thirties when I began to attend Friends Meeting and to interact with the Episcopal Church. This more recent journey with the Adventists helped me to cross many other lines, in positive and healthy ways, resulting in much personal growth. Yet, I would not be willing to be baptized with water nor to participate in Communion, finding these antithetical to basic Quaker practice. And while Friends are often willing to visit other churches, both Christian and other, I don’t believe that SDAs would approve this practice for their members. It is important to discover where boundaries lie, and to respect them.

The characteristics which outwardly define a group as different from the society in which they live, e.g., clothing, language or vocabulary, day of worship, simplicity of lifestyle, lack of
adornment, refusal to swear oaths, all contribute to the sense of belonging to that group.

Generally, the greater the differences are from the majority of society, the stronger the commitment is to the in-group. This means that we cannot minimize the variations between denominations; we must honor the practices that distinguish us from each other.

My journey, then, is one depiction of how we might meet each other within Christianity and also across religions, crossing boundaries in order to learn about the other, but not violating the integrity of either practice. Ecumenism, in my mind, involves just this type of learning within Christianity, and also includes working together on projects of concern to both (or all) groups involved. It does not mean blending of theology and/or practice. Individuals may find themselves changing throughout such a process, but the aim might be personal spiritual growth, not merging. The goal is for people to get to know each other by intermingling, and to appreciate each other's practices, not to unify distinct and unique theologies.

I would not have missed or given up this experience for the world. It opened my heart, helped me learn to be more flexible, and brought me into community when I needed it. I learned to keep a time and space sacred. The experience also brought me a different view of marriage, and I think in general prepared me to enter into marriage (my partner Amy and I were married July 15, 2007, under the care of the Grand Rapids Friends Meeting; we married legally in California on June 30, 2008). I learned to trust more fully and to talk about difficult matters more gently.

My struggles with Seventh-day Adventism were with form: the forms of observing a day of rest, simplicity exemplified by not wearing jewelry, sacraments such as baptism and foot-washing, the hierarchy of a paid clergy who could only be male. My joys were also with some of
these: the peace which came from a day devoted to seeking God within, hymns and other beautiful music during the worship service, and studying the Bible with a small group of intellectual thinkers. Ultimately, it is the early Quaker testimonies which sustain me: the Light of Christ within, an emphasis on the equality of gender and sexual orientation in addition to race, simplicity lived out according to an individual perception of God’s truth, the radical devotion to principles of the Spirit rather than Old Testament law, and the insistence on a critical examination of the underlying causes of social problems and action to solve those at their core.

Now I wear jewelry only occasionally and choose it consciously; I do drink alcohol occasionally but never in much quantity; sometimes I will eat out or otherwise spend money on the Sabbath but mostly I try to keep it clear, though less and less so. As time passes, I feel less need for a 24-hour period of “grace” yet try to remain aware of the sacred on a daily basis. I have returned to attending professional conferences on Saturdays. With Friends, I can relax in how I dress for worship and I can express my political and social convictions without worrying about contradicting doctrine or offending fellow congregants and losing their companionship. I rejoice in being part of a community which recognizes and sanctifies loving same-sex relationships. Being able to publicly express my love for my wife brings a fierce joy into my life that wasn’t possible in the SDA community. Now I do not experience the heart-wrenching loneliness I felt when trying to live by Adventist rules that didn’t come from my experience of God and Christ.

George Lakey sums up my thoughts:
The experience of community, it turns out, is not primarily about doing, but rather about being. ... Quakers join other mystical traditions in knowing that spiritual union happens more through listening than talking, more through experiencing than formulating, more through surrender than control. ... That's what makes conflict such a powerful doorway to spiritual growth, a place where social science and spirituality come together. Conflict calls us to the moment and makes possible joyful membership in a powerful group that is deeply connected. For many of us it brings up our fears and desperate yearning for control, our wish for a procedural way around a confrontation that needs to happen. But if you want to grow, stop avoiding conflict and start embracing it.

Primarily I see my time with the Adventists as one chapter in a continuing installment of making myself available to God, committing to connection. Curiosity led me into conflict, discussions led into community, community into relationship. While trying to look for the sacred in each day of the week, sometimes I observe seventh day as “set apart from the world,” sometimes first day, sometimes part of each day. It all comes back to listening for the Spirit and following the whisperings I hear in my heart.
Appendix I

Grand Rapids Friends Meeting

April 1, 2007

Deb Wickering and Mark Post, Co-Clerks

Dear Friends,

The June 21, 2005 minute recording my ministry of ecumenism to study and worship with the Seventh-day Adventists need not be renewed. I feel that this ministry has been concluded; I no longer feel a compelling sense of being called into that church. What has been accomplished? A written comparison between the FGC Friends and the Adventists and a book-length journal of the journey; an openness to being in relationship with a faith group with views very divergent from my own and a new evangelical language learned; a willingness to have honest and sometimes difficult conversations about differences between our faiths and practices.

Probably part of the timing of this ending is a result of meeting Amy and entering into a serious relationship with her—I continued (and continue) to study the Sabbath School Bible lessons each week but went to Sabbath School less and less often, and a couple of months ago I had let the group know that I would not be able to attend regularly. They encouraged me to be present when I could and made sure I knew that I’d be welcome. Still, I feel less connected to the individuals than I did earlier and more detached from the church as a whole. Previously when I felt a sense of release, the compulsion to go back to the church returned after a short time; this time it hasn’t. I have a sense that this particular journey is completed.
What might be next in my faith journey? Recently I discovered a group called “Convergent Friends” (or Quaker 2.0) who are having conversations across the 4 branches of Quakerism—there are groups which meet in person (e.g., Marge Abbott, a member of Multnomah Monthly Meeting in Portland, Oregon, wrote a Pendle Hill Pamphlet *An Experiment in Faith: Quaker Women Transcending Differences* (1995) which describes how women from evangelical and liberal branches met together and had meaningful dialogues about their spiritual experiences, which also led to meetings at the Quaker Women’s Theological Conferences), at conferences like the FWCC Convergent Friends Workshop in March 2007 in Providence, RI, and via blogs. This continues an interest I’ve had which led me to invite Walt to visit the Battle Creek Evangelical Friends Church (a year or two ago?). This is a conversation/direction I’ll keep an eye on and will continue to ponder.
The official statement from Adventist.org entitled "Seventh-day Adventist Position Statement on Homosexuality" asserts that "sexual intimacy belongs only within the marital relationship of a man and a woman. This was the design established by God at creation. The Scriptures declare: ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh’ (Gen. 2:24, NIV).” Yet sex is a god-given impulse, not evil in and of itself. This verse isn’t prescriptive, meaning that all men must leave their families and be married, nor does it rule out other reasons to leave one’s parents’ home. It tries to describe why men and women are drawn together joyfully—as helpers, interdependent companions. It doesn’t say that other types of partnerships are prohibited!

However, the SDA official statement does go on to say that “Sexual acts outside the circle of a heterosexual marriage are forbidden (Lev. 20:7-21; Rom. 1:24-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-11).”

Within the cited Leviticus passage, verse 20:9 says that “All who curse father or mother shall be put to death” (NRSV). There are those who would argue that we cannot pick and choose which laws in Leviticus we obey and disobey, yet certainly we would not execute children who curse their parents. If we were to pick and choose which laws to obey/disobey, then this particular Levitical injunction, as with the wearing of mixed-fiber clothing, is no longer relevant to our society. However, the more compelling argument comes from Christ having superseded the Torah laws and ordinances. Rom. 10:6 “For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be
righteousness for everyone who believes.” Eph 2:15, “He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances.” Paul’s letter to the Galatians also speaks to blind obedience to the ordinances, especially 5:4, “You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from Grace.” Hebrews 10:1 states that “the law has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities.”

Romans 1:24-27 refers to those who do not honor or thank God and who make images of creatures to worship instead of worshipping the one God—and thus they do not love God or neighbor but express toward their fellow humans “acts of exploitative dominance or lust, not love” (Marston). That “God gave them up to degrading passions” (Rom. 1:26) concerns God’s abandonment of idolators, and should not be read as His cursing those who love and are committed to each other and God.

1 Cor. 6:9 addresses male prostitutes and sodomites—which indicates sexual abuse of children, the forcible rape of those who were foreigners or guests, and/or sex outside of committed relationships. Sodomy was also used to indicate copulation with animals. Forcible anal or oral-genital violation of an unconsenting person (be they child, woman, man, or animal) is wrong and is thus defined as illegal, as well as immoral.

Regarding 1 Cor. 6:9-11, reflect also on 1 Cor. 2:11-16. 1 Cor. 2:11 says, “For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God’s except the Spirit of God.” I was challenged sharply once when I stated that the nature of being gay or lesbian is “God-given.” The nature of lesbian/gay/bisexual (LGB) people isn’t yet truly understood by any of us; nevertheless, our spirituality is of God and I
don’t doubt that sexual orientation also comes from God, just as one’s spiritual nature does. My orientation seems to be a basic part of who I am, just as my contemplative disposition is.

As humans who can understand only a small part of what God is, who are we to decree that certain groups of people must not live out their connection to God and each other? 1 Cor. 2:15-16: “Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else’s scrutiny. ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’” Who would be so bold as to tell God that LGB people are not His? 1 Cor. 3:16 says, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” Yes, even those of us who are not heterosexual! Read 1 Cor. 4:5 on not judging others; “God will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God.” Each person can choose how to act based on his/her character and temperament, yet integrity requires acting in accord with one’s deepest self.

1 Cor. 3:17, “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.” This seems to me to be an exhortation to those who disfellowship and shun lesbians and gays who have entered into relationships, and try to nullify and change the basic integrity of LGB people! 1 Cor. 4:7 “What do you have that you did not receive?” Sexual orientation is a gift of God.

1 Cor. 5:9-11 exhorts us not to associate with immoral persons—yet if we don’t allow same-sex marriages, then we define immorality, instead of God. We judge and condemn, and thus will be condemned. Romans 10:11 “The scripture says, ‘No one who believes in him will be put to shame,’” i.e., God accepts all, and who are we to judge, shame and destroy our neighbors?
The SDA official statement also contains as justification: “Jesus Christ reaffirmed the divine creation intent: ‘Haven’t you read,’ he replied, ‘that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?’ So they are no longer two, but one’ (Matt. 19:4-6, NIV).” In this passage Jesus defines remarriage after divorce as being adultery—why is it taken out of context and interpreted as addressing same-sex relationships? As previously stated, it is neither prescriptive (meaning that each and every man will marry a woman) nor, since it addresses remarriage, should it be read as proscriptive regarding same-sex matrimony. More relevant is Heb 13:4, which says, “Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers.” Same-sex marriages should be held to the same standards regarding adultery, letting God be the judge. Yet not only “heterosexual” marriage should be honored by all. If we limit marriage to “one man and one woman” then marriage certainly cannot be revered by all, since all do not honor those who respect and wish to enter into the covenant.

The SDA definition of same-sex relationships as sinful forces people to behave in ways that deny their own integrity. But the real question is about how and why we fall in love with another person—and the answer seems to be derived from a mixture of elements including biochemistry, environment, and God. Authentic integrity can include living a life of deep commitment to another person. Same-sex relationships do include the healthy, consensual, physical expression of ongoing care and interest (i.e., sex).

At their best, romantic relationships are founded on spiritual connection—the two people connected with each other and with God. Sin is essentially about separation from God,
self, and others. Marriage is about the union of two people caring for each other in relationship to God. With this understanding, why would the marriage of gay or lesbian couples be sinful? That would be a contradiction in terms.

The way we see God is the basis for our response to others. If we understand God to be threatening, domineering, condemning, controlling, abusive, then we carry out these beliefs in our actions toward others. If we are faithful to a loving God, we will practice fidelity in caring not only for our neighbors but also in faithfully uniting with another person in a devoted, healthy relationship. Heb 13:1 “Let mutual love continue.”

Redemption is through faith alone, not works (which includes acts). But, faith in our salvation frees us up to do good works. We are instructed time and again to answer when called by God. When two people feel called together by God, an essential part of answering faithfully consists of defining a loving relationship. It would be sinful to ignore that calling, denying the truth of God’s vision for us and the strength of His will.

Most LGBT people I know are very spiritual, very cognizant of “that of God” within their lives. It is God who calls souls into community with Him. However, it is people who decide who may and may not be part of a particular religious community or take part in specific rites. Religion is the form in which groups define the way they reach out to God. It is also a way of codifying human behavior. As humans who can understand only a small part of what God is, who are we to decree that certain groups of people must not live out their connection to God and each other, in healthy, consensual relationships? Our predecessors denied the right of marriage to African-Americans because they were considered less than human. Until recently, our laws restricted marriage between people of different races. Our predecessors also believed
that left-handedness was sinful and persecuted those who insisted on using their dominant hand. Should we follow in the same direction? Again, let God judge, and let us not set ourselves above Him.

Ellen G. White wrote compassionate arguments for racial equality; many of them could easily be applied to equality for LGB people. “Caste is hateful to God. He ignores everything of this character. In His sight the souls of all men are of equal value….without distinction…” (White, Desire of Ages, 403). “You will always find Satan on the side of the oppressor. God does not oppress” (White, Manuscript 5, 47). Why not read her texts in The Southern Work on equal love, reward, salvation, destination, relations, responsibility, and priority?

The standard for Seventh-day Adventist Christian behavior is stated in the church’s Fundamental Belief No. 13, "Unity in the Body of Christ:"

In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation.

Meister Eckhart said that, “When God laughs at the soul and the soul laughs at God, the persons of the trinity are begotten. When the Father laughs at the Son and the Son laughs back at the Father, that laughter gives pleasure, that pleasure gives joy, that joy gives love, and that love is the Holy Spirit.” One soul laughing with God—no matter the sex, gender, or sexual orientation—or two souls laughing with each other and God—is that not also part of the Holy Spirit and Trinity?
Appendix II God-Given Nature

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[For additional, extensive exegesis of the Biblical passages cited by the SDA statements, see the Seventh-Day Adventist Kinship site at http://www.sdakinship.org/anotherpov/index.htm and Someone to talk to...for families of gays and lesbians, at http://someone-to-talk-to.net/.]
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In an intimate spiritual memoir, Ranger shares her reflections on a journey of self-discovery. Through a narrative written in diary format, she compares and contrasts the Religious Society of Friends and the Seventh-day Adventists and calls for better understanding of and bridges between liberal and conservative Christians. Seventh-day Quaker examines the role and practice of sabbath, silence, prayer, rites and rituals, evangelicalism, the Bible, Creationism, God's existence, and the call to ministry.

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