

PENDLE HILL

Wallingford, Pennsylvania 19086

MEMORANDUM:

TO: Staff

DATE: May 30, 1995

FROM: Dan

CC:

SUBJECT: Work/Community Expectations

At the last threshing session I agreed to try to formulate a statement clarifying the expectations we have regarding staff members' participation in such activities as daily jobs, Monday night lectures, and other community-related and work-related parts of Pendle Hill's life.

The attached effort is meant to be understood not as an official expression of Pendle Hill policy, but as a "let us see if this is what we think would work best" contribution to discussion. (Official Pendle Hill policy is outlined in the *Staff Handbook*; I assume that it is the unspoken and unwritten expectations that sometimes cause confusion). In any event, I have deliberately allowed myself to be provocative in one or two places to stimulate discussion. For example, I have maximized flexibility in some places where colleagues might legitimately feel we need more rigorously defined participation to make things work for the best. Since this is a preliminary effort, it should be assumed it will inevitably change as the thoughts of others are added to it.

In writing I have tried to generalize for staff as a whole. For example, I have suggested that attendance at Monday night lectures is optional, even though I think it is not optional for the Executive Secretary, the Dean, the Extension Secretary, and the full-time Teachers.

Since the text turned out to be somewhat more lengthy than I originally anticipated (four plus pages, rather than two), I have created a kind of short-hand, or abstract, for those who might find such an approach preferable.

I hope this is helpful.

ABSTRACT:

Expectations for Work and for Community Involvement by Staff

Essential:

Tasks in Job Description
Daily Jobs
Staff Meetings and Threshing Sessions

Special Category:

Daily Meeting for Worship
Individual Caring Acts

Important, But Flexible:

Work Morning
Monday Night Lectures
Ad Hoc Celebrations
Resident Program Community Meetings
Meetings for Healing
Prayer Meeting
Epilogue

Rough Draft Meant to Serve as a Talking Paper:

Expectations for Work and for Community Involvement by Staff

Human beings are by nature social creatures and cannot survive physically or spiritually unless in community with others. All spiritual movements seeking to uplift human life have recognized that community formation is an essential aspect of our growth as individuals and as a people gathered to enact a spiritual vision. Since living in society with others in a way expressive of a spiritual vision is essential for any religiously based movement, it follows that for a Spirit-led group the practice of community is not a frill, but is an essential part of the spiritual path.

There are some things which all communities have in common. There are other things which are legitimately unique to any particular community. Such uniqueness grows out of the spiritual vision a group espouses. Uniqueness may also grow out of the cultural context in which a community exists, and whether it seeks to be expressive of community values or whether it seeks to offer a contrast to the prevailing values around it. Various practical matters, such as the material conditions under which it operates, will shape a community, as will the work or mission which the community has been formed to undertake. Benedictine, Franciscan, Gandhian, Amish, and various Kibbutz and Quaker communities will all share some things in common, yet all will also be unique in many ways.

Pendle Hill, too, is a community which, while sharing things in common with other Spirit-led communities, also incorporates many dimensions which are utterly special to itself. It is not the purpose of the present reflection to survey these common elements or special characteristics, or to explore the underlying spiritual principles which give form and character to the Pendle Hill experiment. While such an effort is needed and overdue, the present consideration is confined simply to the practical matter of defining what work and what community-focused activities are expected of those people in that subset of the larger Pendle Hill community which is comprised of salaried employees.

Pendle Hill exists to be a center for study and contemplation which 1) nourishes the spiritual life as the basis for doing work which is an authentic service to others, and 2) which supports the Society of Friends and other people of faith in their discerning of God's will for a faithful witness to the Truth in contemporary history and affairs. Pendle Hill does this through its Resident Program, Extension Program, Publications Program and Issues Program. The animating value which draws staff members together into community is the

shared desire to apply their working energies to the accomplishment of this mission. Staff care for the maintenance of buildings and grounds, prepare and serve meals, keep auditable books, raise funds and undertake other forms of outreach, extend hospitality, design and operate program, recruit program participants, and provide supervision, leadership and general support for the enterprise.

The satisfaction staff members seek and receive is the satisfaction of being part of a community in which each person makes a vital contribution of labor to the accomplishment of this shared, purposeful undertaking.

Therefore, the first and most important contribution which each staff member makes to the spirit of community at Pendle Hill is the conscientious and creative carrying out of the tasks in her or his job description. For in an enterprise in which lavish spending is impossible, and where every dollar must be counted, there is no possibility of overstaffing or of padding with unnecessary functions. Therefore, each task that a staff member is asked to do is necessary and vital to Pendle Hill's well-being. The community would be seriously drained by mediocre work or inefficient habits on the part of anyone. In the case of some jobs, a failure to work wisely, creatively, productively and efficiently could compromise the very survivability of Pendle Hill itself. It is the confidence which each staff member has that her/his assigned tasks are a meaningful contribution to an overall goal expressing Quaker values which provides spiritual nourishment. It is the confidence that each has that the others are similarly engaged in a Pendle Hill-sustaining commitment of vital energy which is the source of the truest joys of community life among Pendle Hill staff members.

Many of the functions which need to be performed require some special learning and expertise -- either expertise gained from experience in the job itself or from education gained elsewhere. This specialization of function among staff members enhances the meaningfulness of community, since it offers a figuration of mutual dependence and of complementarity which is the essence of the community spirit. It is the way human communities partake in the mystery and wonder of the Creation itself, where all the classes of beings exist in systematic inter-relatedness to each other involving mutual dependence, and where they are upheld in an atmosphere of active sympathy by the self-same love on the part of the Creator which was moved to raise all things up from the formless dust.

Staff business meetings (including threshing sessions) are scheduled twice a month, as a rule, although they might occur more or less often depending upon the amount of business to be discussed. Faithful attendance at staff meetings, when they are scheduled, is essential, since it is in such meetings that the unity and complementarity-in-diversity comes to be realized as discussion and information-sharing helps to blend and optimize our work. Staff business meetings are not an end in themselves, however, but a means for achieving unity through shared work toward a common spiritual goal. Such meetings should be held no more often than necessary to accomplish this resilient collaboration. While it is

everyone's responsibility to be present when such staff meetings take place, to the extent that community spirit is strong, trust is high, and work modes of complimentary functioning have been worked out satisfactorily and need not be rediscussed, the ability of the staff to work productively with fewer business meetings can be a measure of the growing health of the Pendle Hill enterprise and of its community spirit. While a falsely motivated reduction in the number of staff meetings can sometimes occur out of disinterest, disengagement, evasion or alienation, a true reduction can reflect a desire for a right-ordered use of the time being paid for by contributors and fee-payers, and can be expressive of the successful accomplishment of useful modes of collaboration. Community spirit is not enhanced by inflexibly convening meetings of busy and hard-working people even if the needed coordination has already been realized. At the same time, care should be taken that staff gatherings do not become so rare that affirmation of the animating values supporting Pendle Hill's life, and eliciting the creative contribution of everyone in the task of realizing their application in evolving circumstances, is neglected.

While much of the work of Pendle Hill requires specialized knowledge and some experience to perform efficiently and well, some other work can be done by almost anyone who is concerned to see it accomplished. Because of the nature of Pendle Hill life, most of these simpler jobs occur around mealtimes, when for a short period of time the labor of many people is needed if things are to be accomplished in good order. So, in addition to doing their specialized jobs, Pendle Hill staff members work to ensure the community's viability by sharing the responsibility to do this simpler work which must be done on a daily basis. This work enhances the spirit and satisfactions of community in a way complimentary to that of the specialized jobs--through the joyous gathering for daily teamwork focussed on the provision of the bodily nourishment needed to sustain life in the community's members.

The conscientious carrying out of daily jobs and of the tasks described in each person's job description, and the mutual respect, rapport, and gratitude all feel for each others' help in advancing Pendle Hill's spiritual mission through this meaningful work is the basis of the essential satisfactions of community life at Pendle Hill.

There are other activities which can be undertaken which enhance the life of the community as a whole and which provide satisfaction for the people participating. These include worship, work mornings, community dining, Monday night lectures, ad hoc celebrations (showers, birthdays, strawberry festivals, and so forth), prayer meetings, healing meetings, Resident Program Community Meetings, and caring acts for other members of the community at inspired moments.

It is understood that staff members make a valuable contribution to the realization of Pendle Hill's mission and to its enactment of a Spirit-led community by participating as much as is feasible in these activities. But, in general, participation in these events is seen as a matter which can be approached flexibly, in the faith that fulsome participation will be

forthcoming without laying a burden on anyone. Only four of these activities require special mention: worship, work mornings, common meals, and individual caring acts.

Staff provide vital assistance in building community with each other and with students, sojourners and guests by participating in the common meals. Breaking bread together is an ages-old and very powerful community-building ritual. There can be some flexibility in the number of meals any staff member takes in the dining room. Staff are asked to be sensitive to the value of participating in common meals and avoiding an overly reclusive use of the "carry away" possibilities which Pendle Hill provides with respect to food service. Yet all can also realize that, depending upon personal temperament, one's family responsibilities, and the nature of one's work, quiet meals alone, or family centered meals, may offer a healthy respite. No one wishes to keep score regarding the numbers of meals eaten in the common dining room and elsewhere by different members of the community.

Participation in work morning is also a valuable community building exercise. Again, discretion is advised. There is no doubt that the more staff who participate in work mornings the more successful they are both in the accomplishment of the practical tasks the community needs to have done in order to survive, but also in building community among fellow staff members, students and sojourners. But this must be balanced against Pendle Hill's need to have staff members successfully accomplish the tasks outlined in their job descriptions. Continued application of one's energies to job description functions during work morning may be the most apt contribution some staff can make to community and to the overall physical and spiritual health of Pendle Hill. When in doubt about what is best for Pendle Hill as far as the application of energies on work morning, staff members should consult their supervisors.

Quaker worship cannot be made mandatory in an adult community. Yet worship is central to the Pendle Hill idea, for it is only by joining together in worship, by being open to the Divine Presence among us, that we can see our way forward clearly in fulfilling our true calling as individuals, as a community, and as a body organized to serve others. In seeking to help people find a spiritual basis for authentic service to others, and in seeking to support a faithful search for the guidance of the Holy Spirit with respect to contemporary issues and life, we counsel rootedness in the life of worship. It is hardly likely that we can teach this principle successfully if we fail to practice it. Therefore, in selecting individuals for the Pendle Hill staff, the Executive Board seeks persons for whom a way of life centered on daily worship elicits enthusiasm and commitment.

Any community, if it is to be real, will be nourished by personal caring acts extended by the members, each to the other, either spontaneously and without reason, or at times of recognized special need. While this aspect of community living is fundamental, it is one which cannot be defined or prescribed, but only recognized as partaking of that tenderness and truth which all Spirit-led communities exist to uphold. It is this dimension of community

which most makes it resemble an extended family. Individual staff members must be on guard not to expect such caring acts as an entitlement; it is, rather, a responsibility each seeks to carry out from a place of spontaneous, natural giving which is the essence of goodness within ourselves. Pendle Hill cannot officially ask or expect that this take place. Pendle Hill can, and should, be certain that the official demands of work

and community are not so excessive that the sabbath principle is violated or that the capacity of members spontaneously to give of themselves in such caring acts is undermined.

It is the combination of meaningful work done in a measured and balanced way and which expresses the mutual dedication to the spirit of Truth, the space for worship, solitude and silence, and the unmeasured and unmeasurable extension of spontaneous loving support for each other that enables a place like Pendle Hill, in spite of its unique aspects, to prefigure the balance, order, harmony and peace which is the natural destiny of the Creation as a whole.

Daniel A. Seeger
May, 1995

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