

# Episode 09: Gretchen Baker-Smith



## **Questions for Individual or Group Reflection**

**Q1.** Gretchen came to friends in College - after spending her life growing up in the Catholic Church . When did you come to Friends? How? Were you part of another religious community before you attended a Quaker Meeting? Is your family of origin still part of a different tradition? If yes, how does that play out in your life?

**Q2.** Gretchen described her experience of Quaker Meeting as “Communion without all the other stuff.” How does this description align with your experience?

**Q3.** When Gretchen and Buddy got married they blended the wedding traditions of the two faiths in their lives: Catholicism and Quakerism. Have you been to a wedding that blended more than one faith expression? What was that like for you?

**Q4.** While in the library, preparing for certification as an elementary educator, Gretchen had a profound experience of call: she heard a voice ask her, point blank: “When are you coming to work for me?” This call is profound and clear. Have you, or someone you know, had an experience like this? What was it like? If not, can you imagine what such an experience might be like?

**Q5.** Gretchen says that when she hears nudges from the Divine but, she has been known to act like “Isaiah in the wilderness” always wrestling with God - trying to do things more easily or her own way. The result, she says, were messy. How does this comment reflect your experience?

**Q6.** When Gretchen shared her sense of call with her husband his response was: “this was not our plan.” What do you think he meant by this? Do you resonate with this comment? Why and how?

**Q7.** Gretchen says her understanding of ministry is that it is “whatever you do or how you are, that lets the Spirit enter. It helps people be in that place, and so then it becomes much bigger than just vocal ministry.” What do you make of that statement? Does this sit well with you?

**Q8.** Gretchen is clear of a call of Ministry on her life. This clear call does not look like the traditional models of traveling ministry and itinerancy among Friends .How might we support people’s calls to Ministry that are less “public” or “charismatic?”

## **Additional Resources and References Mentioned in the Episode**

Gretchen came to Friends at [Friends Meeting of Cambridge](#). They are located near the heart of Harvard Square, MA.

Her husband, Buddy, was a member of [Adelphi Meeting](#), in [Baltimore Yearly Meeting](#).

The Section of Barclay’s Apology that was read, 13th Proposition, is [here](#).

Gretchen and her family now worship at [Westport Friends Meeting](#), MA.

Gretchen is the staff person for [New England Yearly Meeting Youth Programs](#), especially for elementary and middle school youth. You can read about her philosophy of youth ministry [here](#).

[Andover Newton Theological School](#) was the oldest seminary in New England until it closed in 2017.

## Episode Transcript

Callid: Hi, I'm Callid Keefe-Perry.

Kristina: And I'm Kristina Keefe-Perry.

Callid: And this show is on carrying a concern.

Kristina: Stories of friends in service.

Kristina: This week, I sat down with Gretchen Baker-Smith, who shared her experience of an overwhelmingly clear call that was laid on her entire life and how she has spent many years continuing to live into that call, one experiment at a time.

Callid: To provide some context for folks who don't know, Gretchen is the junior high and junior yearly meeting coordinator in New England Yearly Meeting, and she has worked with youth in that role as a staff person beginning as early as the late '80s, and she has been at home working the youth in the Yearly Meeting for such a long time that sometimes it's the case that she now is working with the children of youth that she was first working with in the early '90s, which is a source of joy for her and her work as she feels called to be a spiritual nurturer of children, teens, and the adults that surround them.

Callid: This is a great episode for thinking about the ways in which people can carry a concern for public ministry, but not feel called to formal, tradition style traveling ministry as often associated with vocal ministry and the gospel ministry. So what does it mean to be a public friend, but have it look different then, maybe, it would have in ye olde days.

Kristina: And it's also a great episode on the importance of community and the ways that our community shows up to help us to name and shape our ministry.

Callid: If you are new to the show, know that this is a long thing, and that's fine. It's broken up by music in each segment. If you want to, you can listen just to a segment and know that that theme is tied together. Transcripts of all the show are available on [ocacshow.org](http://ocacshow.org) under episodes, and along with those transcripts come questions for reflection which we encourage you to use both individually and in small groups, and links to additional resources for things that come up in the show, so please check that out if you're looking for additional content tied into the stuff we talk about. We would love to hear from you, if you're finding it useful or not, or if you've got a question or a challenge or something that you think is problematic in

the work that we're doing here, we'd love to hear from you and hope to connect for whenever it is that folks want to weigh in one way or the other.

Kristina: And now let's hear from Gretchen.

Kristina: The first question that we ask everyone is, how did you come to the Religious Society of Friends?

Gretchen: I came via my husband, Buddy. He grew up as a Friend at a Delphi meeting in Maryland.

Kristina: Oh, in Baltimore.

Gretchen: And we met at BU, in college. Very early on, I think we'd only been going out a month, and he took me to Cambridge meeting. I'd grown up as a Catholic, my family's very Catholic. By the end of that worship, I knew I was in big trouble. I started to cry, because it was mass, it was communion without all the stuff that I was struggling with. It was such a big deal for me to leave both my family's fold and this Catholic church, but it was pretty immediate.

Gretchen: So we had a Catholic/Quaker wedding. And then we straddled the most radical left-wing church in Boston we could find, Catholic church for a couple of years. Then we moved south and I became a member of Westport Meeting.

Kristina: And it was that apparent in that first meaningful worship, the point of worship, where the culmination of worship was communion?

Gretchen: Yeah, it was very intuitive to me, and I don't, it took me a little while to be able to verbalize that, but that sense of being in the presence of God, and everyone joining in that, was very much there. And I mean I was very Catholic. I mean, I looked at, I sent away for mail to various orders of nuns including cloistered ones when I was in high school. I had a tambourine in sixth grade so I could be part of the folk mass group. Like who does that?

Gretchen: But there was a ... all of the things by the time I was in college that I was struggling with from the male hierarchy to the wealth of the clothing, I mean just so many things. Here I was sitting, doing everything that was the most important to me and none of that's a problem.

Kristina: So how did you break it your family? This shift in your ...

Gretchen: Yeah that was hard. It was a slow one. It was a slow one for me too. The piece about, it was about three years between when Buddy, before Buddy and I got mar-

ried. So there was a fair amount of time to casually kind of say, I'm going to meeting. Or talk about what was going on somewhere. We didn't really have, we bounced between Bacon Hall and Cambridge, we were in college, we didn't really have a meeting.

Gretchen: When we got married we had, we held our ground, and it was something that in Dartmouth still shake their head about. That it actually happened, but we ... it was really important to us that a clearness committee from a Delphi meeting came up and we had a facing bench on the altar in the church and we had a wedding certificate. We had 22 minutes of silent worship with people who stood up in the church. The priest had a really hard time letting us do it, and kept saying no, no, no and my dad went over one night and sat down and talked to this priest. Who knows what they said, other than that he did tell us that he said that we were two people who were trying so hard to live up their lives faithfully with God of anybody he knew and couldn't there be a way to make this work? And things moved. I think holding the ground for all of that made it better.

Gretchen: It's always been hard for my mom that our youngest is not baptized. That's a really hard piece for her. But I think that over all of these years they have appreciated how it has worked. And I have this funny, there's a way now, my dad figures, has always called me the visiting minister, and I would say grace at meals all the time. And so it's kind of a puzzle but they kind of get it.

Gretchen: I think it's hard that, for some of my siblings, there isn't a formal faith community that works for them. And I think that's hard for my mom because of how much the faith community has always fed her. So you want that for your kids.

Kristina: Right. And it sounds like there's some way in which, at least your dad maybe your mom too, acknowledges that you are, you have taken up a vocation of ministry.

Gretchen: Oh absolutely. And there are times when my mom has actually, couple of different times when she has like almost pushed me out to say a prayer at a couple of funerals with Catholic priests who weren't super happy with me doing that but she would say you need to, you need to speak Gretchen. She totally, she's very supportive. There're some things that are just a puzzle, like the fact that either we're all ministers or there are none, depending on what she's looking at. There's just a lot of things about the structure that are a puzzle but I think she really does deeply, I think all my relatives do.

Gretchen: It was not a place that any of them, I don't think there's another Quaker anywhere in the vicinity of our clan. I'm just grateful to Buddy.

Kristina: So you came in college and stuck around, straddled both Quaker and Catholic world and moved into a deepening of just ... with the Religious Society of Friends when you moved after college.

Gretchen: Yep. After, Ben was a year and Katie was, Ben was just two and Katie was six months. We sent Buddy out into basically Sandwich Quarter looking for a meeting and he went off every Sunday he would go to a different meeting and he came back from Westport and said I found it. Yeah. It was quite instantaneous. At that point there were people like Jane Kennison and Ruth Holland and just people who weren't completely invested in supporting families with young children. When it was kind of the mecca years of youth at Westport Meeting. They had a group that remains very connected.

Kristina: Why have you stuck around in the Religious Society of Friends?

Gretchen: I love that question. Because it so works for me. The worship is, so much works. People who are trying to live so intentionally and faithfully are really wonderful people. I have such respect for so many individual friends that I have gotten to know over the years. This thing about trying to live all of your life faithfully is just so touching. And that whole concept of that of God in us and how we are trying to live out faithfully this leadings and nudges, and all of that, so resonates with me. And so given me a form and structure to understand my own experience.

Callid: Okay so. Let me just start off by saying, I love that young adult Gretchen Baker-Smith, oh she wouldn't have been married then.

Kristina: No not yet.

Callid: Oh, is she Baker or Smith? Do we know?

Kristina: Baker. I think it's Baker.

Callid: I like that young adult Gretchen Baker walks in a meeting for the first time.

Kristina: We should apologize in the event we've got it wrong.

Callid: Let's imagine it's Baker and if we're wrong, sorry Gretchen, or Buddy, or both. We're sorry to the both of you, that we don't know your maiden name.

Callid: Had this intuitive understanding that, I believe the quote is, it was the part I liked most communion, without all the other stuff.

Kristina: Right.

Callid: And she does say it took her some years to be able to articulate that, but I think that that's really fairly incredible and what's interesting is that's one of the key insights in terms of the elements. The bread, the actual physical bread, the physical wine and the way early friends understood that.

Callid: Can we do a quick early cut to the Barkley's apology?

Kristina: Sure. But I just want to add, she didn't just say communion she said it was the Catholic mass with communion. She got the pieces of the mass too.

Callid: Okay. So I think earlier and earlier every episode we should cut to Barkley so until we get to the last episode. We just read the Apology that's it. I'm kidding. I'm kidding everybody, don't worry.

Kristina: That would be a very long episode.

Callid: Don't worry everybody.

Kristina: So this section is called, "The Supper of the Lord is not Limited to the Breaking of Bread and Drinking of Wine".

Callid: And it is from the thirteenth proposition in the Apology.

Kristina: Thus, the supper of the Lord and eating with him, and partaking of his flesh and blood is by no means limited to the ceremony of breaking bread and drinking wine at certain times. It is truly and really enjoyed as often as the soul withdraws into the light of the Lord and feels and partakes of that divine life by which the inward man is nourished. This may be witnessed at any time by the faithful. Although it is especially so when they are assembled together to wait upon the Lord.

Kristina: That's it?

Callid: That's it. And Gretchen Baker and/or Smith got that as a, however old person, walking in for the first time with her husband to be. And I think that's a really great example of the ways, you don't need to read Barkley's apology in modern English or otherwise to know that. We should come to, if we're doing what we're doing the way we say we are, you should be able to in fact come to that understanding prior to needing some theory. You just experience it.

Kristina: Right.

Callid: For my part the reason to kind of be excited about it and care about things like Barkley's apology is because we could say maybe, our experience isn't really all

that different from the things that started this thing off a few hundred years ago. That we actually are part of that same living tradition, same experience. The fancier word sometimes but that power and that understanding, it traces through from back to the Southern England to the present in Cambridge.

Kristina: Cambridge.

Callid: That's neat.

Kristina: It is neat. And I think that it's notable that she shares that her Catholicism was something that was very dear to her. That she was, she took up a guitar so that she could be part of the folk mass. And that she as quite versed in all that stuff, with all the quotes around it. She was well prepared to perceive the similarities between the two.

Callid: And it doesn't sound she was particularly negatively oriented towards the Roman Catholic church.

Kristina: No. Just aware that there wasn't a place in it for her.

Callid: In ministry.

Kristina: Right.

Callid: And of course you name that there are lay ministers within the Catholic church, certainly.

Kristina: Right. And she wasn't happy with the hierarchy. But not, not put off by the liturgy of it, or the theology.

Callid: And I also, it's worth pointing out in terms of the fact that so many friends at least in North America, aren't raised in the tradition but kind of become convinced and enter the tradition. In ways that can be really challenging. And she mentions how hard it is for her, her mother her children are not.

Kristina: Her youngest is not baptized.

Callid: Are not baptized in the church. I was thinking around the fact that to this day, we don't know whether or not it's a joke or not but that my maternal grandmother says that when I had just been brought home from the hospital one of the times when my mom was taking a nap and my grandma was there to like watch after me, she kidnapped me and brought me to a Catholic church and had me baptized.

Kristina: Seriously?

Callid: And they joke about it but my mom doesn't know whether or not she really did it or not. It wasn't really kidnapping right, it was like taking me down the block. It wasn't with my parent's permission. I wasn't raised in the church. But my grandma was worried about what would happen if I wasn't baptized and so she took me away and had me baptized. I don't think it matters one way or the other but I think there is this fear.

Callid: The point I'm saying that is to say, I think as friends come in to the Religious Society of Friends, if they're really going to live in the fullness of it a lot of times it gets very disconcerting for family and friends who have different traditions or no traditions because the Religious Society of Friends is so different in its format, its leadership, its pay, its demands on you, the amount you can volunteer in it. While I think a lot of those things can be true for any denomination there are some particularities that emerge with the Religious Society of Friends that make it even more, incomprehensible to some folks. Including the lack of the physical elements in most ...

Kristina: I also really like the way that even though she left the Catholic church that her family was so much a part of she returned to the geography where her family lives. Both of her parents recognize that she's a minister. To the point where, I love this story where she says, my mom has pushed out at funerals and said Gretchen, you have to say a prayer here. That she recognizes the gift that her daughter carries.

Callid: Yeah and I think that's actually maybe both more accurate and more important. Not that they recognize that she's a minister in some kind of formal way, but that they recognize there's a giftedness and they have experienced the ways in which she has something to offer. I think that's, I don't know if her mom would say she's, you know that your daughter Gretchen is a minister. But clearly the experience of her mother is such that she knows that. And in some ways I think, a lot of people that we've heard interviews with, the people on the show and also the other episodes we listened to or did that weren't selected, that's really what it's about. Not so much whether someone calls them a minister with an M or not but whether people recognize that there's a giftedness that they're carrying that's of service to the community. That seems to be far more important.

Kristina: That's right.

Callid: Not that there isn't importance in naming in general, but that really, the emotional connection. I see you, your service.

Kristina: And that gift can be of service to the community, whatever community she happens to be in. It's not just reserved for her actions and presence in the Religious Society of Friends. If she's at a funeral with her family, which presumably is not going to be a Quaker event. A gift shines.

Callid: I think that just points out how important it is for us to have discernment as part of our practices so that we can know. Because it isn't just limited to a certain time when we may be called to be of service vocally or otherwise. To constantly be testing figuring out what is right, and what is just a random passing thought.

Kristina: Right.

Kristina: You use the phrase leadings and nudges. Have you experienced leadings and nudges?

Gretchen: Yeah.

Kristina: How might define them and what is the experience of having them?

Gretchen: Well. So my, my one big moment of the still small voice is in the library at U Mass Dartmouth. I was gone off to get certified in elementary ed because Buddy had found a way for me to do that, and we thought it would be a way for me to work with children and have summers off. SO I was in the library doing a assignment on language arts curriculum or something and all of a sudden there's this laughter. And then this voice that said when are you coming to work for me. And I looked up. There's nobody around. And I just knew, I knew who it was, and I knew what it was about because all those times before. Do I become a nun, do I ...

Gretchen: All these other times before I had been like yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, trying to figure out how to straddle things. How to straddle this deep, this like awareness of this sacred that I think I've always been blessed to have doses of. And so that when was terrifying to me because I knew, it wasn't like will you come and work for me, it's when! And all these other times I had been like yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm going to figure it out and I knew. I could keep saying no, but this thought was going to keep coming back. And so I just started. But there was so much love. You know it wasn't this like, it wasn't this like on high, it wasn't anger, it was just this, it was kind of like, dude what are you doing?

Gretchen: So I started to cry and I didn't tell anybody about it for a couple of weeks because I was like, this is going to so, I don't even know. Because it wasn't like I got a roadmap. I got this one question. It took a long time to figure out. Some of the people that I admire the most and learned the most from who are friends, and

these people who are incredibly gracious and bend easily and listen, and faithfully follow very calmly. I'm like constantly the Isaiah in the wilderness who's struggling and wrestling with God. It's like, and very publicly. I think I'm, I catch those nudges, and then I argue with them. And I try to find a way out that's more convenient, or that works better. Especially early on there were these really messy things.

Gretchen: I think over time I've gotten better at, at that bowing, and letting go sooner. You kind of go, this isn't guiding the way. We can do this now, or in three months.

Kristina: You said that you didn't tell anyone in two weeks, for about two weeks. Who did you tell? Did you turn to folks in your meeting and ask, seek sort of like a formal or informal clearness process or was it just turning to someone to say, can I tell you about this thing?

Gretchen: Well I had already started working JYM retreats quite regularly with Kevin Lee who was coordinator. And he's also from our meeting. He and his wife are long time friends of Buddy's and mine. Their kids babysat our kids. Kevin and Buddy were the people that I told first. And Buddy's response was to just be so puzzled, kind of blindsided, like this was not our plan. And at one point he said to me, I didn't think I was getting married in a triangle. That is was God and me and him. And I didn't have an answer to, so what are you doing and what are you going to do and what's the solution and how are you going to, are you always going to juggle three and four part time jobs around the kids and I didn't have an answer to any of those.

Gretchen: I haven't answered any of those. Kevin's response as the friend and friend could be to put it in context and go, "You're in trouble and you need a clearance committee." Over the years, there were various people that were put together. I went through the school, the spirit program, I was one of the earlier classes.

Kristina: The on being a spiritual nurturer?

Gretchen: Mm-hmm (affirmative) and spent a weekend at woman hill really early on to for people who within merging ministries that monthly meetings had named people and called them out. You had to write a letter of support and sent us all off to woman hill. That's where I met Caren Spruch and Tom Antonek both.

Gretchen: That next semester, so I finished that semester in elementary and in the next semester I went back, but I took one less class and I took a class at Andover Newton in the philosophy of religious education. It completely knocked my socks off and it was just this confirmation of like, oh, this is it, this is it. Ha! They tried to get me to

enroll in there MDiv program and they just didn't, I wasn't convinced that, it was not clear at all that, that's what I should do.

Gretchen: Getting a master's in religious education just seemed like as a Quaker it was like, why am I going to do that? That experience it and over was really also helpful for me to just say, "Oh yeah, there it is." That by the end of that semester I withdrew from the elementary ed program. Then tried to overtime just work things out, just try and leave space for how that ministry might unfold, what that would look like.

Gretchen: Then all my part-time jobs got focused around both my, not focused, but they had to work around not just my kids schedule, but then this being available for ministry.

Kristina: What does that look like? How do you, did you have criteria for what the part-time jobs were? Or you knew that you couldn't work on weekends or?

Gretchen: Yeah. Well, I have my resume of part-time jobs, so yours is just really, it's a real cross-section. I mean as everything from confirming doctors' appointments, which I mean it was really young and those years. He wouldn't like literally be dancing as a two year old on the table, while I was saying, "Hi, this is Dr Bobby. Bobby and I'm coming for your appointment three o'clock tomorrow morning."

Gretchen: I did things, there were things that, I was the office manager, production manager for a video production company. They did really high and television news work and I started out doing their bookkeeping. Then when they got too successful, got them to hire a real financial person. Then they had to production coordinating and that was funny, because we didn't even have a TV.

Kristina: Really what you do is, is you're ordering your life in a way?

Gretchen: Yeah.

Kristina: That you can be as available as possible?

Gretchen: Yeah, so that's really what we did. People would know that and so then they would start saying, "Gretchen, we need somebody to organize this. Can you come help me three hours a week?" I would go do that, so I've worked for Union Organizers and workers.

Kristina: This is the work stuff? Okay. Yeah.

Gretchen: It just kind of just kept all of that going, had one car. The kids and I used the New Bedford bus system more than anybody else in New Bedford, and made it work

and just were able to just say, "We just have to see how this plays out." In retrospect, it seems like it was it's such a clean story, but it was really hard for Buddy and I to figure it out.

Gretchen: We look back on those years with both of us wishing that if we could do it again, what we would do differently, but we just didn't know.

Kristina: What do you think you differently?

Gretchen: I think I would have, I was so afraid of having, of acting wrong, of having it be watered down from what my experience was at this call. There's a lot of things that times when I was afraid of Buddy's suggestions. I was more less trusting and more pushback with him, which only then made him feel home more outside.

Gretchen: His was, after his perspective he would say that, he'd never been this close to somebody, and neither had I, who had this really strong sense of call.

Kristina: Right.

Gretchen: He just didn't know what to make of it. He would say, he says now that, now he understands what he was looking at. He is, he and like our kids are, they are my best advisers and supporters really, now. He would have been then too if we'd both, but I don't think that the love [inaudible 00:38:15]. People, I think that we received more support than most, but I think it's still really hard for friends to know what to do to support, not just the person with the leading, but their partners and their families too.

Gretchen: If you're afraid to call anybody a minister and then you're really afraid to call anybody a minister's spouse. There just is not, we don't have any mechanisms for that, and so then we don't have any ... If this was more an ongoing dialogue with people when this first started happening to me, we would have said, "Well, that's what this is, and this is what we need." I think a lot sooner than we did.

Gretchen: I don't blame that on friends, I think it just is. This is the ongoing tension that we have, that I love this thing, that we're all ministers of the terror and what to do with people who have this experience of being so strongly called completely. I think we have to figure that out. It's like how other nudges where they were not this big thing.

Gretchen: After 9/11, for weeks on end at worship I would have this picture come into my being of handing over all these loaves of Hala to the people at the mosque in New Bedford. I'd never met them and I didn't even know where they met, but I would have this. That seems like such a crazy thing to do and I had no idea how to do it

or even where to find them. Took me a couple of months before I did it. Called them up, the Imam had no idea what to make of it either, but he said, "Sure, come over."

Gretchen: I handed all these loaves of warm bread. His wife and I hugged, said hello to the children. It was right after service and I left. Nothing ever came of that after that, but I was released from it. That to me is like the experience of like, okay, see, you follow this even though it doesn't make any sense. Those are the kind of things I think happen to all of us, are available to us all of the time, but there are different from this knowing that I have with huge humility. That I just called to be a minister of God.

Kristina: I think of the stories of early friends where they talk about how folks took up the plow, were heading to the field, felt the call, left the plow standing in the field. Walked away, and may or may not have told their family. Maybe the modern equivalent is walking down the walkway of the house to get the mail, the mail box and realizing that there's a call.

Kristina: I don't think people just hit the road, but we don't know what to do as friends. I think with people who have such a complete call, and I wonder if there's also some gendered stuff in there that it's because you're also a mom or you were a mom. You still are a mom. It might mean that the kinds of things that moms do in scare quotes, you might not be doing. Or you might ask for help from your partner or from a friend.

Gretchen: I think that, I mean those things were definitely a factor. My kids will definitely say that they fully support me and they get it, but they all would also tell you it would have been okay to have had more of me. I think one of the other things that I've always been aware of is that, my understanding of what's my work to do, looks a lot like mom. I really am a gardener and there are a lot of bridges between the two, that I really back and forth all the time.

Gretchen: Most of the trees in my yard are named after kids that have come through the youth programs. The model of the traveling minister, who preaches or gives these very vocal public testimony is not what my understanding of my work is. It's being present to people and listening to them so that they can hear within and building safe communities, because I believe that in those communities, your heart opens and you find God. You find unconditional love, which brings you back to God.

Gretchen: I love doing small group work, but there are all these things where even, we have people who have wanted to come and videotape like scopic meditations I do and things, and I say no, because it shifts what's happening in there. What I do is very

much where probably a lot of people would say is traditionally women's work. It's just so clear to me that it's what's my work to do that I really don't get into it a whole lot.

Gretchen: It does make it difficult when people are naming ministries. I kind of go, the pictures bigger than that.

Kristina: Then just to clarify, what I hear when you say people are naming ministries, that they're naming with kind of charismatic public out facing ministries, which is different than the building of safe space and the cultivation of spiritual people.

Gretchen: Yeah, and I don't think, it's not at all like I wanted to have a capital M in front of my name. I think what it helps me to know is that, at essence, I think my understanding of ministry is that it is whatever you do or how you are, that lets the spirit enter. Helps people be in that place, and so then it becomes much bigger than just vocal ministry.

Kristina: I'm connecting it to the beginning of the conversation, where you were saying that one of the things that was so compelling to you about friends, was this seeking to turn their whole life over. To live an intentional life, and that does seem much bigger than just vocal ministry, because that happens in our, or maybe two if there's a Wednesday night meeting for worship or something, couple hours a week, and then there's the rest of our life.

Gretchen: Right. I think, I'm so aware of that, there's ministry in the grocery store line, in the waiting room of medical places, at the bus stop. I mean it's everywhere and a sense of being able to help provide a connection that brings that a light into the other person's day even a bit. It's like there that is and that is so much the essence of friends that I think that that is as much why I stick around as you say. Yeah.

Kristina: When I asked her the question, if she would share her experience of leadings and nudges, I did not expect with such clarity and power the story of her call that she told. What you may hear as you listen to it, and was doubly evident in the room as she told it, was that the weight of the call and the power of it is as present today as it was however many years ago when she was sitting in the library and she hears that laughter.

Kristina: That when she told me that story and you can hear me go, it was just because it was so powerful and powerfully conveyed.

Callid: Yeah, I mean the word that keeps coming up is witness.

Kristina: Yeah.

Callid: That what she's doing is witnessing to God's motion in her life right, she's telling you the truth of a story, and as a result of her sharing the truth of that story, you feel some measure of the fullness of that power that she experiences maybe even still daily. It just keeps going back to how important it is for us to share these stories with one another. I think one of the things that is interesting about that story to me is that while it was a deeply personal experience kind of in wherever she was, a library or something.

Kristina: Right.

Callid: That wasn't the end of it, because then she got a loop through all these stories with these other people's stories and narratives and their discernment. Well not maybe initially a clearness committee for discernment of the call of God's laughter and the request, "When are you coming to work for me." There was a way in which she was practicing communal discernment, going through work with the various people in her lives that were connected to friends at that time.

Callid: The ways in which ordering happens right, the sense of Gospel order or right order in which you have to sometimes set some things aside to have other things have space, so she didn't immediately know that have a positive entry into her life, "This is what I'll do with all my hours." It became clear, it didn't make sense to be involved in early childhood anymore.

Kristina: Right, because to become certified and to take a job as a teacher, even though you have the summers off, did not have enough flexibility to be able to order her life so that she had space in order to listen and respond. That we've heard that over and over again in these interviews and just clearly in the last one that we put up with Angela Hopkins, where she really talks about the importance of space for the work of spiritual discernment and responsiveness.

Kristina: I really resonated with the, when she said it took her two weeks to tell someone and she told two people in her life. She told Kevin Lee and I'll bracket that off and we can talk about his response, but she told her husband Buddy. One of his reactions after being sort of saying, "This was not our plan," and I think that's a lot of people's reaction that a call, this was not my plan, was this understanding that their marriage was a triangle. It was Gretchen, Buddy and God in this relationship and that was not in the original plan.

Callid: Yeah. I found that, I mean personally really interesting in the sense that, like you and I would be married if unless that had been the deal right.

Kristina: Right.

Callid: There's no way our marriage would have survived or that we would even wanted to I think, if it weren't for the fact that we both are clear that our vocational service comes first. That our marriage is a ministry underneath that broader set of service.

Kristina: Right, and that's why I really resonated with that. We had the benefit of coming together after both hearing a very clear sense of call put on our lives, such that when we were doing the discernment ...

Callid: You mean as individuals?

Kristina: As individuals.

Callid: Yes.

Kristina: Yes, yes and so that when we were doing the discernment in clearness for marriage, we could articulate to each other and in the face of the clearness committee, that there was a different kind of ordering. That God was at the top and then our marriage came underneath it.

Callid: Yeah, and do you remember, I mean I remember there being, I haven't thought about this in a while. I don't know, we found some generic language for the certificate, the marriage certificate and we were clear that in integrity we couldn't live on there that we'll be married till death do us part.

Kristina: Correct.

Callid: We said, "Well, look, if we record friends in ministry or acknowledge or endorse ministry, but we don't do that permanently because the gifts might be rescinded, how in the heck can we know that we'll be married forever? What if that's rescinded?"

Kristina: Right.

Callid: If marriage is a ministry, and we don't know how long ministries are on you, why would we say something forever that we don't, and it was like, it was a totally weird thing. I think when most people are getting married, they're like, "Oh yeah, we'll do this forever." We were really ...

Kristina: They all talk like that.

Callid: They do definitely, everybody does, that's how I talk when I'm very excited about marriage. You rarely hear me talk that way. I think that there's a weirdness there..

I don't know if you remember, but the committee was like, "Wait, so you're not sure about this marriage?"

Kristina: Right, no I remember.

Callid: We're like, "No, no, we're pretty good, but we're also really clear that out of integrity how could we say this."

Kristina: Right, because the leading might be laid down right.

Callid: Right. I think it's an unusual way to think about it. I certainly have benefited from it and it sounds to me as if in a significant way, Gretchen and Buddy's family has kind of come under the weight of that eventually too.

Kristina: It sounds like it, yeah. It really sounds like she was able to, we talked about making the space, but she got the support of her broader community by providing her with the equivalent of her tent making jobs. Or her tailoring in the case of John Woman, the piece work that she could do, that she could then put down in a moment's notice or it was just short-term, so that she could continue to be open and responsive.

Callid: Right, and that she kept wrestling with it right, that she kept saying, "I don't really know what's going on here." She tried to go to Andover Newton to see if maybe she should do an MDiv and took a class on religious ed. Then was like, "No, I don't need MDiv, but I tried it," and so she's continually wrestling.

Kristina: Right. She realized she didn't need the MDiv, but she also realized that there was, that class was very powerful and that there's something about being there was like, "Oh I'm in the right place."

Callid: Yeah, and it's interesting because that feeling of rightness piece comes up again for Gretchen, because she says, she's talking about the fact that she feels like she's called to public ministry. That the public ministry she's called to isn't the kind of the normal vocal ministry that's associated with the traveling ministry.

Kristina: That's right.

Callid: She says, "I don't need that big M in front of my name," but that it might have been useful to know what it was that was going on. What she says is, it might have been useful to her to know what was going on, because if she had known what was going on, she could have said, "This is what this is? This is what I might need." I think that really is a huge powerful piece of the story to kind of fold over and bookmark. That the naming of rising gifts of ministry is less important.

Callid: The name of the naming gifts of ministry is less important than the potential consequences of it, so that we can better equip each other and support people in becoming able to more fully live into those gifts.

Kristina: In the realm of supporting people, I just want to lift up what she says about the support, the specific support that would have been useful to her, would have been support of her spouse and support of her family. That because we don't think of ministry sort of in the same way as other Christian denominations, we don't think of the minister's spouse and the minister's family needing support in the same way that someone would go take care, support the pastor's family.

Callid: Yeah, and I think you and I in particular is maybe sometimes missed that, because we've been working side by side for whatever, 15 years or something, 12.

Kristina: 12.

Callid: Right, but there are some folks for whom one part of the partnership is out and about, and the other one it's not.

Kristina: Right.

Callid: I think that is useful to keep tabs on.

Kristina: Right, and we've been able to construct some of that support by living in community, so we have people in our ...

Kristina: Instruct some of that support by living in community. So we have people in our house family who step in.

Callid: Yeah. And biological family. I think without my family able to do some of that, we wouldn't have been able to do some things.

Kristina: Absolutely.

Callid: So I don't know exactly what to say about this. However, it is particular enough that I want to kind of point at it and see if you've got something because I do feel like Gretchen's clarity, crystal clarity and the community's endorsement and support of her ministry, at the same time as a recognizing that it's not in the quote "traditional" model of vocal ministry or of traveling ministry, it's really worth noting because it's one of the examples that we have of the fact that the old models, while giving us a great kind of bounty of riches are not always fully encompassing of the ways that God continues to show up. This is one of the first times where you

hear a really clear call and also it doesn't not really look at all like what we have in our minds for what traveling vocal ministry would look like in itinerancy.

Kristina: I think that's right and I agree with you. I'm not sure what else to say except that it's notable.

Callid: Why?

Kristina: I wonder if it's because we might not do enough of recognizing and naming ministries that don't look like powerful vocal ministry. If there are listeners who listen to a Lisa Graustein, I think that she talked about the ministry that she felt called to, very called. Wasn't always seen by folks as ministry. That's an area where what she's doing was clearly perceived as ministry by her but not seen by her meeting.

Callid: Yeah, yeah, that's interesting and it goes along with the fact that Gretchen gives us this definition of ministry. She says it's whatever you do or however you are that lets the Spirit enter and helps other people be in that place where Spirit enters. There's an intentionality to it, so it isn't really that ministry's anything.

Kristina: Right.

Callid: It's that ministry can be anything done with this kind of prayerful attention that intended to allow Spirit to enter.

Kristina: Right.

Callid: I think that may be a useful platform or launching point for kind of broader conversations of public ministry, as opposed to presuming a default of traveling vocal ministry. I think more broadly like that.

Kristina: Well, if what we're about is living into the in breaking kingdom, the in breaking kingdom is a lot bigger than traveling vocal ministry among the religious society of friends. It is in the grocery line or at the bus stop.

Callid: And the test there is to kind of to continue to wrestle and wrestle and say, "What does it look like now? What does it look like now?" Both individually and corporately. What does it look like for you right now but then what does it look like for us to be finding and supporting something that we don't even know exactly what it might look like. Wrestle, wrestle, wrestle.

Gretchen: The longer I practice, the more I can flip those moments that seem like this is irritating or this isn't in my plan or whatever to huh, what's ... Yeah, the opportunity. What's the opening. Huh, what's this? And that's a much more interesting way to

be in the world and the more you do it, the more you kind of go, "Oh, yeah it is everywhere." It felt so much that it's how I should live my life, but I also am so aware of so much gratitude because when you create that space for someone else, you're creating it for yourself too and for we together. So how cool is it to ... I have this life where I'm blessed to feel so secure that I'm right where I should be. I have work that I love. I have people that so support me, so many of them and get so much back in the long-term view. There're people I've known for 30 years. I know their kids are sitting on my lap. How cool is that? So even at times like this when personally, I had so many personal losses, there's still this deep sense of gratitude that it's all going on all at the same time.

Kristina: Just because people who are listening won't know, when you refer to personal losses, you lost a parent.

Gretchen: Mm-hmm (affirmative), mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah after a really difficult medical series, long haul in a short period of time, and have had several dear friends and relatives die this year and I've got a sister with a couple of kinds of cancer and it's just a lot of personal heartache and a lot of being present to my family's heartache. Just enormous amounts of it this year, which I'm sure are opportunities for learning as well. Yeah, yeah. My friend Elaine talks about another expletive deleted growth opportunity.

Kristina: Yeah, John Calvi. I quote him all the time on that one. All the time. My mother even does 'cause that's such a great phrase.

Gretchen: It is.

Kristina: And even that, is a little bit of flipping.

Gretchen: It just, it shines a different light on a possibility.

Kristina: I want to just go back, part of the conversation where you had had this experience in the library. You had talked to some folks. Kevin Lee said you're in trouble. There's that piece and now you've just finished talking about the gratitude for doing work that you love, for being connected to people over this long term. As you look back, there was no roadmap, but how did you know which next step to take?

Gretchen: That's a good question. I think there were some times that were very obvious. The realization that it was mine to say yes to coordinating the junior high program when they didn't have a coordinator, which was also very unexpected. Happened driving down 128 underneath a big green exit sign and I was not expecting that one. There're other things like when all three of our kids were in college. I was

working full-time hours in a couple of different part-time jobs in order to help us get these kids financially through school. I just fatigue-wise just hit a wall and gave my resignation, at that point, youth program's committee, saying, "I can't do this anymore." And they refused to take it and that's when Karen Sanchez-Eppler and Edward Baker worked and created the position, that New England yearly meeting that I have and said, "No, we need to make this work." That was just a stunning ... Of them saying no, this is wrong that there's been this high school program for so long and we should have done this a long, long time ago that the junior high and the elementary program for so many years just were stipended and they said, "No, this is an error we need to fix."

Gretchen: I'd written that letter in December and my position was approved at yearly meeting in August. For Quakers that's like a hundred yard dash. Stuff just comes up like this past year, you've had this great new thing happen where Beth Kalaya heard that Joy Duncan, who works three hours a week for Illinois yearly meeting, doing their youth ministry work, was looking to mentor with someone and Beth hooked Joy and I up and Joy got a grant from the Lyman Fund and she's been flying out from Chicago to staff junior high retreats this year and we're learning so much from her and vice versa. There was some concern when that first came up of oh, it's just gonna be more work for you. You shouldn't do that. My beloved support committee that I love to pieces and they're so good for me and none of us knew how extraordinary it would be to have Joy. But it felt very lucky, very blessed to have so many people around who can help me figure that out. That's because of where I work and what I do. But how can we help people who are way newer on that path get that same kind of support and listening and really long-time relationships.

Gretchen: I have a lot of young adult friends who reach out to me to run things by me. So much of it is because they trust I know the essence of them over all these years and I trust their sincerity so I can take them really seriously that if this is something they're really thinking about this isn't this wacky thing. They know that if it sounds wacky, I'm going to say, "I think you should wait on that." That's relationships.

Kristina: It is amazing that those young adults have the longevity of relationship to be able to reach out and trust. I think I also hear you wondering if there's other ways that we can build relationships like that into how we are so that it doesn't have to just be you, but we could do that maybe for each other.

Gretchen: Yeah, very definitely. Yeah.

Kristina: You talked about your support and oversight committee. How long have you had this committee?

Gretchen: This particular crew? Bless them. I don't even know. It's got to be at least ten years.

Kristina: And are they all from Westport or-

Gretchen: No, no, no. They all staff though. Yeah, it's Ann Anderson and Dave Baxter and Marian Athern and then Kevin Lee has a role as my elder. Both the young friends coordinator and I have somebody who kind of has some of the clinical background that we can call up for guidance on things. So Lisa Groustein feels that for me and the young friends program. So there are times when I use Lisa as well. My support and oversight committee laugh that a lot of the times, they don't even have to meet or speak anymore because I've kind of internalized the what will they say, which is really helpful, right? There are times when people say, "Can you do", and I will think I can see Ann Anderson going, "No!" And I'll go, "No, I don't think so." I can hear Ann going, "No!" Yeah.

Kristina: That's great. It's like you have a discernment machine. No, not a machine but-

Gretchen: Yeah, no very definitely. And they would laugh. They would say, "Yeah. Totally works." Yeah and I am a really firm believer and we can't do this by ourselves faithfully. It's too easy for us to fool ourselves. Denial is not a river in Egypt. We need each other and we need each other in ways that are not always easy. My crew will tell you. There are times when I'm like, "I am not happy about this." And they will laugh and say, "We know." But I trust that process.

Callid: So there's not a lot here, I think, that needs us other than to say how sweet it is that community has showed up in this story and trust. I think community and trust both. Maybe trust is an ingredient in community too, but that seems like a big important part of this last section and in the small bit that comes after this, it really is about saying, "Look, we're not gonna get this all right. We don't all know what's going on. The things we learned aren't true for all time because I'm some great prophet." It's just we need to be able to talk to one another, connect more deeply, to share the wisdom that we've learned, the mistakes we've made so we can be there for one another.

Kristina: Right. She lifts up the primacy of relationships in relating her story and also in the observation that she makes that we can't do this work without each other, in the good parts and the hard parts and that there's almost ... I think this is in the section that follows this one but an injunction for those folks who have been at this for some time that it is important to be sharing stories, talking about the messes, mentoring people who are coming up in this work and in the world. So yeah, I agree, it pretty much speaks for itself. I think what we can take away, as listeners and those folks who are listening who have been doing this work for some time, is

her invitation to share our stories more broadly. That's part of why we do this and I guess maybe my hope is that in sharing these stories, it's then an invitation to people who listen to share their story.

Kristina: I think that that's one of the hard things about friends is that we are so much both about this listening to that of God within and following our light but that emphasis on the fellowship that holds us all towards this center doesn't get talked about as much.

Gretchen: Well, I'll tell you that anecdotally, if I was doing research, these conversations point to the importance of that, over and over again, that it is with a prayerful and prophetic and pragmatic and surprising support of other people that ministry comes into the world, or it seems, in our context. Maybe other denominations do it differently, but there's a real ... So I go back to the how can we help people who are newer to have that.

Kristina: Do you have any ideas?

Gretchen: Well, I'll tell you, my biggest response when I feel like there's somebody with a new leading that really is onto something, so I say, "Do you have a support committee? Do you have a clearness committee? Who can you get a hold of to help you do this?" That is my first response. I do also think that those of us who have been on this road longer, really have to keep making ourselves more available, that this mentoring that we need to get ourselves about both admitting where the mistakes and the messes have been as well as that it's okay to share the wisdom and the insights we have, that wisdom and insights are not pride. And so because this stuff is not ... It's so intuitive and yet you so need help figuring out what it is and there's this thing of when you coming to work for me but then how does that all play out, right? So what that looks like for people and how they do that and the specifics of the mom who needs to be able to worship or write and the 23 year-old that needs to be taken seriously and the 70 year-old who didn't really expect this at this time in their life.

Gretchen: I think just like I'm always floored by the number of young people who have never had anybody really seriously talk to them about how they center and worship and what's hard or about how they discern whether or not to give a message and how many times the response when I start those conversations is, "Wow, nobody's ever talked about this before." So we have a very large basket of things that we need to be willing to talk about, however un-eloquently or imperfectly it comes out.

Kristina: So we want to really thank Gretchen Baker-Smith so much for having this conversation.

Callid: And for approving of our lack of elegance.

Kristina: It was really a joy to sit down with her.

Callid: We want to give thanks across all of this project to Fresh Pond monthly meeting and of our committees of support, care and accountability.

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Callid: Obediah Brown Benevolent Fund.

Kristina: And Salem Quarterly meeting.

Callid: We also want to give thanks to Blue Dot Sessions and John Watts for their royalty-free music that we use on the show. Lots of thanks for that work.

Kristina: You can listen to On Carrying a Concern on iTunes, Google Play or directly on our website which is [ocacshow.org](http://ocacshow.org).

Callid: On [ocacshow.org](http://ocacshow.org), you can find all the transcripts of the shows as well as additional resources and things that were referenced and reflection questions that you can use either for yourself or in small groups, if you're doing that.

Kristina: And if you're using those reflection questions and want to leave us feedback about how they may or may not and maybe they're inelegant, working for you, leave us feedback either through the website or on our Facebook page.

Callid: We'd love to hear from you one way or the other and hope that things are well in your world. Until we connect again, I'm Callid Keefe-Perry.

Kristina: And I'm Kristina Keefe-Perry.