

Cover Sheet Request to Friends Foundation for the Aging

Date: September 15, 2025

Organization: School of the Spirit Ministry

TIN & Formal organization name: 81-2382067 School of the Spirit Ministry

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Amount requested: \$30,000

Project title: God's Promise Fulfilled: Encountering & Embodying Grace in the Shadow of Empire

Summary Description (maximum 25 words): A program mostly serving individuals over 55 seeks to create space for spiritual deepening and discernment in preparation for taking leadership in the world.

1) The Problem:

In *Station Eleven*, a post-apocalyptic novel by Emily St. John Mandel, a ragtag group of former orchestra musicians and actors organizes itself into a traveling Shakespeare company, performing by candlelight for widely scattered remnant communities. The motto painted on their caravan of salvaged sets, scores, and costumes is "Because Survival Is Insufficient." We recognize this same urgent need: a fulfilled and meaningful life needs more than physical or even mental sustenance; we need spiritual growth and connection as well to feed our souls and ready us for effective service. And from that need rise both our programming and this funding request.

As Friends, we have always known that our work in the world is more powerful when we partner with the Divine. The question is not just what the world needs; the question is what divine Love would have us do. As Fr Richard Rohr has said, we need both action *and* contemplation to be effective change-makers. It takes spiritual grounding to engage in the long struggle for justice; it takes trusted community to help us discern what work God has given each one of us to do; it takes practice and faithfulness to develop our spiritual senses so that we can hear the Inward Teacher clearly and not be co-opted by the forces of empire and injustice that seek to undermine the work we are called to.

Because of the extensive commitment involved in the School of the Spirit (SotS) programs, a large percentage of all our attendees are over 50 and retired, but our current cohort of seekers is unusually rich in elders: 94% are over fifty, 63% are over sixty, and 44% are over seventy. These individuals are preparing to give back to the world, putting to work the blessings they have received and the wisdom they have acquired. Our program is designed to help them do that in a Spirit-led way, with the spiritual and emotional grounding necessary for faithfulness. Especially in these times when "survival" needs are expanding exponentially, the chance to assist elders to become well-grounded resources and leaders is critical.

2) Our Solution:

The School of the Spirit Ministry develops and builds learning communities in which participants are invited first to deepen and expand their own connection to the Divine and then to live into what the Divine calls them to offer to the world.

The energetic and intentional current cohort have committed \$66,000 of their own resources to bringing to life “God’s Promise Fulfilled: Encountering and Embodying Grace in the Shadow of Empire,” the 2025-27 course offering. The SotS governance board intends to ensure that fees are modest enough that all who feel called to participate can do so, and therefore commits to raising the remaining funds from donors and grant sources. To date we have located all but \$30,000 and are requesting Friends Foundation for the Aging to consider filling that remaining gap.

Total two-year budget: 170,968

Participant fees	66,256 (39%)
Individual donors	31,635 (19%)
Organizations/grants	43,077 (25%)
Remaining gap: _____	30,000 (18%)

3) Actions we will take:

We have scheduled **four extended weekend residencies in each of the two program years** at three-month intervals (May, Aug, Nov, Feb). Residency 1 was held in May of 2025, and since Year 1 is fully funded, we are proceeding with planning for Residencies 2, 3 and 4 during 2025-26. Year Two (Residencies 5-8 during 2026-27) awaits full funding for its authorization. The two-year program can admit up to 24 participants; once authorized, we expect to enroll up to eight additional participants for Year Two.

The three-month stretch between gatherings is mitigated by **between-residency virtual gatherings**. Four-person **Spiritual Companion groups** remain consistent throughout the entire span and meet bi-weekly to develop a discipline of witnessing each other’s spiritual work. **Sacred Listening sessions** are scheduled bi-weekly as well; these are designed for drop-in attendance and offer a chance to practice the same skills with changing subgroups of the full cohort. Virtual **“meaning-making” half-days** occur at the six-week half-way point between residencies without new content, but rather to share how the work is playing out in our lives.

Our **residencies are hybrid**: During Year One, nine participants attend on-site and seven attend on-line. Cutting-edge remote learning techniques are being incorporated in a rigorous commitment to build a single, whole learning community across the technology divide: small-group work pairs on-line and on-site partners. Collaborative work apps allow shared contribution on documents that track our work. We also play games and make art together as a hybrid community. We believe mastering this ability is crucial for connecting in an era when fossil fuel will limit travel. We also celebrate the fact that this format has allowed us to welcome individuals with caregiving responsibilities and chronic health conditions that might otherwise prevent them from participating.

We **read together** between sessions as well. An interactive mind-map allows leaders and participants alike to add and review resources (blogs, video clips, audio selections as well as books) and each participant adds to the shared, core readings with customized additions that fit their interests. Google Group threads allow discussion.

Written **reflective “examens”** before each residency encourage self-awareness and let the teaching team know what is happening in Inner Work. The examens also gather qualitative data for the outcome analysis described below.

4) The population to be served:

The participants are Friends who are seeking to better understand and embody faithfulness, hope, and concrete purpose in a time when changes in technology, political realities, and our relationships with ourselves, our families, and our communities are challenging all our old assumptions. Participants seek to hear how God is calling, identify the traps and temptations that would lead us astray, and manifest our inner work in tangible ways in the outside world.

5) Partners/Collaborators ... Others who have tried our solution

A long-time **collaborator** with School of the Spirit programming is the Lyman Fund, a small grant-making organization that supports individuals to pursue their spiritual journeys. In addition, several Monthly, Quarterly, and Yearly Quaker Meetings have partnered financially to support members’ participation.

Friends with public ministries have joined School of the Spirit teaching teams as **one-time Guest teachers**. Current 2025-26 collaborators include Windy Cooler (convenor of the Friends Incubator for Public Ministry), Jon Watts (founder of the QuakerSpeak video project and the Thee Quaker media project), and Kristina Keefe-Perry (co-creator of the Jewels of Quakerism video series and one of the founders of the new Three Rivers Meeting). Past teaching collaborators have included Lloyd Lee Wilson, Nancy Bieber, Cynthia Bourgeault, Walter Sullivan, and Rebecca Mays.

Other organizations do serve Quakers and fellow seekers desiring to deepen spiritually. Friends General Conference, Yearly Meetings, and Pendle Hill all offer programs and retreats. We share a purpose with these other programs but see our contribution as being unique and critical.

Most other offerings are of shorter **duration** and more limited **focus** -- weekend retreats or weeklong events that introduce an aspect of spiritual nurture. Yearly Meeting-based spiritual formation models often frame a theme for a year that consists mostly of local small group work. Even extended programs like those at Pendle Hill usually cover only a term or quarter. Several current SotS participants were introduced to active spiritual deepening at Pendle Hill’s recent spring term. Nourished and intrigued, they found themselves ready to make a more sustained commitment and to join a longer-term community. The 1-2 year duration of God’s Promise Fulfilled gives them a chance to build sustained relationships with fellow seekers and grow with them toward maturing in their gifts and learning how to support themselves and each other as they turn their eyes toward ministering and nurturing others.

Another difference is our ability to **flex and integrate with daily life**. Even though institutions such as Earlham School of Religion offer on-site and distance learning opportunities on both a full- and part-time basis, many people are not well-positioned to take multiple years out of their working lives to devote themselves to academic, credential-seeking study. While God’s Promise Fulfilled demands commitment and sacrifice, it is more flexible and affordable than even a part-time degree program.

And finally, SotS programs use our extended time to help participants incubate a **sense of themselves as ministers** and build a solid foundation of self-care, boundaries, and supportive community that will allow sustainability for their calling. Some participants become spiritual nurturers – SotS alums are visible as Yearly Meeting general secretaries, retreat leaders, FGC conference clerks, and spiritual directors. Others

have found their ministry in tending to the world's "survival" needs through food pantries, homeless shelters, or reparations work. Still others work creatively to direct choirs, write for publication, or record chants. We understand "ministry" as a broad spectrum.

6) Impact/Outcomes

We have identified seventeen expected outcomes and will use the quarterly "Examen" writings to collect qualitative, descriptive data from participants about evidence for which ones have or have not taken place for them. Results from year one data will be used to shape agendas for year two. Our expected outcomes include these:

During the first year, participants will have:

1. Committed themselves to **living in God's Promise**,
2. Settled into a contemplative **rhythm** of resting/retirement and re-engagement,
3. Experimented with asking for and taking **guidance** seriously as a conduit for Life,
4. Tried a variety of **prayer** practices,
5. Surrendered to the disorientation of **unknowing** to open space for new growth,
6. Used **discernment** tools to separate guidance from enthusiasms/good ideas,
7. Acknowledged and stepped outside the **Domination System** to claim wholeness,
8. Begun to look at how their **shadow** selves affect faithfulness,
9. Invested in **spiritual community** robust enough to support contemplative growth,
10. Explored the rising urge to **creativity** in response to love of the Creator.

During the second year, participants will have:

1. Explored the wide **range of possibilities** that calls to ministry have taken,
2. Discerned **patterns in the guidance** they've received in contemplative practice,
3. Become able to name their own **gifts**,
4. Elevated **faithfulness** from aspiration to matter-of-fact self-expectation,
5. Asked for and experimented with concrete steps to embody **ministry** in the world,
6. Assembled a **ministry care committee** to elder their ongoing discernment,
7. Made themselves **visible to their faith community** as a person with a call to work in the world who asks prayer and support.

7) Program budget

	YEAR 1 2024	YEAR 2 2025	YEAR 3 2026	Year 4 2027	Multi-yr Totals	
	Recruitment	3 residencies	4 residencies	1 residency		
EXPENSES BY CATEGORY					4 YEAR TOTAL	
People	7,200	34,300	43,800	10,700	96,000	
Materials	200	200	0		400	
Facilities	1,500	19,712	29,584	10,012	60,808	
Travel/Tech	0	6,160	6,880	720	13,760	
TOTAL:	8,900	60,372	80,264	21,432	170,968	
PROJECTED SOURCES					4 YEAR TOTAL	
SotS scholarships/subsidy			16,637		16,637	10%
On site participant fees		24,000	24,000		48,000	28%
Remote Participant fees		9,128	9,128		18,256	11%
Individual donors		14,998			14,998	9%
Lyman Scholarships		16,347	20,000		36,347	21%
Other grants		6,730			6,730	21%
Foundation for Aging?			30,000		30,000	
YEARLY TOTAL SOURCES		71,203	99,765		170,968	

8) IRS determination letter

<https://www.schoolofthespirit.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/SotS-IRS-Determination-Letter.pdf>