

SouthEastern Yearly Meeting

Faith & Practice

Chapter 5

Queries & Advices

Friends have assessed the state of this religious society through the use of queries since the time of George Fox. Rooted in the history of Friends, the queries reflect the Quaker way of life, reminding Friends of the ideals we seek to attain. From the Christian tradition, Friends have taken as a standard the life and teaching of Jesus, not only as recorded in the New Testament, but even more importantly as revealed inwardly, as we seek God's truth and its expression through our lives today. Friends approach queries as a guide to self-examination; using them not as an outward set of rules, but as a framework within which we assess our convictions and examine, clarify, and consider prayerfully the direction of our lives and the life of the community.

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1998

The advices have served Friends for many generations in their search for a life centered in the Spirit. Arising from the experience and aspirations of successive generations of Friends, the advices are illustrations of how they seek to carry their faith into all aspects of life.

New England Yearly Meeting, 1985

SEYM Queries & Advices

First Section:

What is the state of our meetings for worship and business?

1. Meeting for Worship

Queries:

Are our meetings for worship held in expectant waiting for divine guidance, with a living silence in which we feel drawn together in the Light by the presence of God?

Do we respond to the Spirit's prompting to minister, whether in silence, through the spoken word, or through action after the meeting for worship?

Are we sensitive to one another's needs in meeting for worship?

Are the spiritual gifts within the meeting fostered and encouraged?

Are our meetings accessible and welcoming to everyone?

Are our meetings a source of strength and guidance for daily living?

Is the vocal ministry in our meetings exercised under the leading of the Spirit?



Advices:

Be prompt and diligent in attendance at meetings.

Come to meeting with expectant hearts and minds prepared for communion with God.

Be faithful, be patient, and persevere in our service as messengers of truth.

To everyone is given a share of the responsibility for the meeting for worship, whether through silence or through the spoken word.

Quiet our hearts and minds for worship prior to entering the meeting room, so the whole group can be knit together in spiritual fellowship.

Do not assume that vocal ministry is never to be our part.

Be ready to speak under the leading of the Light. Learn to recognize when a message felt within is from God and if it is a message intended for the group to hear.

Pray that our ministry may arise from deep experience of the Divine.

Let our spoken ministry be audible and free from unnecessary words.

Avoid speaking in a manner that brings a sense of discussion or debate.

Allow for a period of silence after a message has been spoken, so the group can reflect on what has been said and continue to be grounded in silent worship. Overly long or too-frequent messages can hinder the worship of others present.

Receive the ministry of others in a tender spirit.

Treat every newcomer as one sent by God.

SEYM Queries & Advices

First Section:

What is the state of our meetings for worship and business?

2. Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business

Queries:

Are meetings for business held in the spirit of meetings for worship?

In decision-making, do we promote a spirit of love, understanding, and patience as we seek unity on an appropriate course of action?

Do we keep our remarks simple and speak only as the Spirit leads?

Are we able to unite in good grace with the sense of the meeting when our personal desires tend in another direction?

Do we maintain respect for others, however strongly our opinions may differ?

Are meetings for business seen as positive opportunities for testing and practicing our spiritual life?



Advices:

As members, attend the business meetings and extend our support to the meeting's affairs so that the burden will not rest upon a few.

In meetings for business and in all duties connected with them, seek the leadings of the Light.

Avoid undue persistence. As we release our attachment to our ideas, the Light may reveal solutions none of us has considered.

Be willing to admit the possibility of being in error.

Remember that the foundation of a lasting decision lies in the search for unity—that is, a corporate seeking of the Light in an atmosphere of love, trust, and mutual forbearance.

Attendees are warmly invited to attend and participate in meeting for worship with a concern for business.

Have a sense of when to continue to labor on or to lay aside an issue.

SEYM Queries & Advices

First Section:

What is the state of our meetings for worship and business?

3. Harmony Within the Meeting Community

Queries:

Are love and unity maintained among us?

When differences arise, do we settle them in a spirit of love and humility?

Are we careful not to hold an idea too firmly, knowing that another may bring us closer to the truth?

Are we patient and considerate towards those we find difficult to understand or like?

Do we demonstrate a forgiving spirit?

Do we have concern and respect for the reputation of others?

When people are hurt, do we take care to hold them up with a tender heart?

Do we respect that of God in each person, though it may be expressed in unfamiliar ways or may be difficult for us to discern?



Advices:

Maintain love and unity by avoiding talebearing and detraction.

Settle differences promptly, in a manner free from resentment.

When we have a difference with another person, speak to them in private “in the love and wisdom that is gentle and pure.”

Be aware that verbal violence can be as destructive as physical violence.

Be careful that our language does not incorporate violence, consciously or unconsciously.

Listen patiently, and seek the truth another person’s expressions may contain for us.

Be willing to seek and willing to receive counsel and help from one another.

In our daily lives, seek to know one another in the things that are eternal and to enter with ready empathy and sensitive discretion into the joys, sorrows, and needs of each other.

Be mindful that everyone is included in the life and activities of the meeting.

SEYM Queries & Advices

Second Section: *How do Friends care for one another?*

4. Mutual Care

Queries:

How do we foster a spirit of community among the meeting's members and attenders?

How does the meeting keep in contact with all of the meeting's members and attenders?

How does the meeting assist couples and families to communicate, grow together, and rear children in a loving environment?

Does the meeting community nurture the meeting's children?

How does the meeting care for those who live alone, the sick, the aging, the widowed, the separated or divorced, and others with families affected by disruption?

Do we assist Friends in need as their circumstances require?

How do we labor with and care for those whose conduct or manner of living gives grounds for concern?

How are visitors to our meeting made to feel welcome?



Advices:

Be truthful and sincere, and thus encourage these qualities in others.

Through example and education, help each other to recognize and follow the voice of God both in our spiritual lives and in joyful and willing service.

Watch with tenderness over the opening minds of children. Seek to awaken in them the love and understanding of the life and teachings of Jesus and a sense of security in the love of God.

Remember that there is a unique potential in each human being as a beloved child of God and that the Holy Spirit may lead children to give wise counsel to listening adults.

Young people, too, have responsibility to care for the meeting and to participate in meetings both for worship and for business. Faith is needed as a vital part of our living.

SEYM Queries & Advices

Second Section: *How do Friends care for one another?*

5. Education

Queries:

Do we share our deepest beliefs and values with each other and with our children, while leaving them free to develop as the Spirit may lead them?

Does the meeting give the children loving care and promote their spiritual life through religious education and other activities?

Do we encourage our children's participation in the meeting's work and cultivate their desire for service to others?

How do we educate our members and attenders about the Bible (especially the teachings of Jesus), other spiritual literature, and the history, principles, and practices of Friends?



Advices:

Seek for ourselves and for our children the full development of God's gifts, which is true education.

Realize that education should continue throughout life and that all should share its opportunities and privileges.

Make time for regular personal prayer and worship and for reading the Bible, Friends literature, *Faith and Practice*, the queries and advices, and other sources of spiritual value.

Seek truth together in our families and among Friends in shared worship and discussion.

Teach by being teachable. Be open to new ideas and approaches.

Reach out to that of God in everyone, and endeavor to live out the testimonies of Friends in all the expected and unexpected circumstances of daily life.

SEYM Queries & Advices

Second Section:

How do Friends care for one another?

6. Home, Family, and Relationships

Queries:

Do we make our home a place where love, peace, happiness, friendship, and refreshment of spirit are found and where the presence of God is experienced?

Do all members of our family receive our affection and understanding?

Do we take care that responsibilities outside the home do not encroach upon the time and loving attention our family needs?

Do we acknowledge and support all relationships and families, whether conventional or not, that are based on love and commitment?

Does our family set aside First Day and other times for worship, service, rest, and refreshment of spirit?



Advices:

Live in love, and learn from one another. Try to live simply.

In our family life, encourage reliance upon God's guidance and help for each day's needs.

Remember the value of beauty in all its forms.

God's gifts are for all to enjoy; learn to use them wisely.

SEYM Queries & Advices

Third Section:

To what extent is our personal life in accord with Quaker principles?

7. Self-Discipline and Responsibility

Queries:

Do we attend meeting for worship regularly and punctually?

Do we participate in meeting for worship with a concern for business and support it financially and with personal service according to our resources and abilities?

Are we conscientious in fulfilling all obligations of state and society that are not contrary to our religious convictions?

Are we punctual in keeping promises, just in payment of debts, and honorable in all our dealings?

Do we choose recreations that strengthen our physical, mental, and spiritual life, avoiding those that may hinder others, our Earth, and ourselves?

Do we act responsibly concerning substances and behaviors that can become addictive?



Advices:

Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in our hearts, which are the leadings of God.

Bring the whole of our life under the healing and ordering of the Holy Spirit, remembering that there is no time but this present.

When tempted to do wrong or to despair, call upon God with an open heart, confessing our weaknesses and our needs.

Be mindful at all times of our connection with the Divine and others—avoid substances, behaviors, and activities which diminish this connection.

Be aware of the ill effects of mind-altering or habit-forming drugs, intoxicants, gambling, and other detrimental practices.

Choose recreations that increase our vitality, self awareness, and peace of mind and strengthen our will to create what is good.

Make thoughtful use of our time.

Guard ourselves and our children in our choice of print, electronic media, and other entertainments. Avoid those that promote violence and disrespect for human beings.

Friends, strive to be courteous and responsible while driving.

SEYM Queries & Advices

Third Section:

To what extent is our personal life in accord with Quaker principles?

8. Personal Integrity and Right Action

Queries:

Do we keep to simplicity and moderation in speech, manner of living, and vocation?

Do we make time in our day for silence, solitude, spiritual reflection, and the growth of our inner life?

Do we remind ourselves each day of our connections with people, other creatures, and all that sustains life?

Are we ready to live in the Spirit that heals estrangements that may arise from resentment, nagging fears, and alienation from others?

Do we listen to others, even beyond words, being sensitive to their personal needs and difficulties?

Are we free from the use of judicial oaths, thus affirming that our statement is only part of our usual integrity of speech?

Do we regard our possessions as given to us in trust, and do we part with them freely for the needs of others?

Are we careful to keep our jobs and social activities from absorbing time and energy that need to be given to spiritual growth and service to others?

Do we stay tender and open to the leadings of the Spirit?



Advices:

Use our capabilities and possessions as God's gifts entrusted to us to share with others in humility, courtesy, and affection.

Accept and encourage the creativity in others.

When we have a choice of employment, choose that which gives the fullest opportunity for the use of our talents in the service of others.

Be willing to seek and be faithful to God's will.

Remember that we are all one in God.

SEYM Queries & Advices

Third Section:

To what extent is our personal life in accord with Quaker principles?

9. Witness

Queries:

Do our lives reflect Quaker testimonies?

Are we open and responsive to continuing revelation, and do we incorporate it into our spiritual life?

Is our Quaker witness characterized by humility and a willingness to learn from others?

Do we recognize that the Spirit works in the world through us?

Does our witness lead us to the condition in which we “walk cheerfully over the earth answering that of God in everyone”?

Do we as a meeting try to share in the religious life of our wider community, availing ourselves of opportunities for worship and service with other local religious groups?



Advices:

Strive to keep true to the testimonies of integrity and simplicity.

Try to keep before us the essential truths, and test our life by them.

Endeavor to make our lives consistent with the high principles we profess. This involves the often-difficult discernment not only between good and evil but also between the better and the best.

Live adventurously. Let not failure discourage us.

Witness so that others can perceive the presence of God within us.

Be as good as people think you are. E. St. John (Jack) Catchpool

SEYM Queries & Advices

Fourth Section:

How do Friends meet our responsibilities to the community and the world?

10. Social and Economic Justice

Queries:

Do we seek to transform the world with our loving spirit?

Do we take an active interest in the social and economic conditions of our community?

Have we objectively considered the causes of discrimination, and are we ready to abandon old prejudices and think anew?

Do we as individuals and as a meeting do all in our power to end governmental, social, economic, and educational injustices in our community and to create equal opportunity for all?

How do we as individuals and as a meeting promote the welfare of those in need and work to secure a just distribution of the world's resources?

What are we doing as individuals and as a meeting to understand and remove the causes of war and violence and to develop the conditions and institutions of peace?



Advices:

Seek to understand the causes of social ills, and work toward their removal.

Be not content to accept things as they are, but keep an alert, sensitive, and questioning mind.

Understand and maintain Friends' witness for truth, simplicity, and nonviolence, holding up your personal life to these testimonies.

Encourage inclusiveness, and discourage discrimination.

Friends' belief in that of God in everyone should lead to reverence for all life and to personal integrity.

Encourage all efforts to overcome prejudices and antagonisms.

Cherish diversity.

Aid and comfort those afflicted or in prison that they may rebuild their lives.

Work for the abolition of the death penalty.

Let the way that we live contribute to the realization of a peaceable kingdom on earth.

SEYM Queries & Advices

Fourth Section:

How do Friends meet our responsibilities to the community and the world?

11. Care of the Natural World

Queries:

Do we live in harmony with nature? Do we live in keeping with the spirit of the unity, sacredness, and integrity of all creation?

Do we seek to minimize our consumption of the earth's resources? Do we encourage equitable and sustainable use of those resources?

Do we walk gently over the earth, seeing that of God in all of nature?

Do we seek to educate ourselves, our children, our meeting, and our community about how our lives can be more in harmony with the earth?

Does the meeting strive to bring all its practices in harmony with the natural world?



Advices:

Maintain in ourselves and encourage in others a sense of responsibility for the environment, both for the present and for future generations.

Avoid amusements that stimulate destructive emotions, are detrimental to the health or tranquility of others, or are damaging to the natural environment.

Show a loving consideration for all creatures, cherishing the beauty and wonder of all God's creation.

Share our sense of reverence and stewardship for the earth.

SEYM Queries & Advices

Fourth Section:

How do Friends meet our responsibilities to the community and the world?

12. Peace Testimony and Nonviolence

Queries:

Do we work for peace in the world? Do we nurture peace within ourselves?

Do we “live in the virtue of that life and power which takes away the occasion of all wars”?

Do we seek consistently to carry out this testimony for peace in all our relationships, including family, community, and work life?

Do we as individuals and as members of a meeting seek to take part in the ministry of reconciliation between individuals, groups, and nations?

Do we faithfully maintain our peace testimony?

Do we reject military training, preparation for war, and participation in war as inconsistent with the spirit of Christ’s teachings?

Do we as a meeting take a stand and do all we can to remove the causes of war and violence?



Advices:

War is contrary to the life and teaching of Jesus. Seek through God’s power and grace to overcome in our hearts the emotions that lie at the root of conflict.

Strive for nonviolent approaches to conflicts in all aspects of our lives.

Every human being is a beloved child of God and has that divine spark which claims our reverence. War is a denial of this truth.

Friends’ peace testimony is the positive exercise of good will calling us to lend our influence to all that strengthens the growth of international friendships and understanding.

Cultivate an active spirit of love and peace.

The first step to peace is to stand still in the Light... .George Fox, 1653