

The background of the cover features two tall palm trees on the left side, reaching towards the top of the frame. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds, creating a bright and airy atmosphere. The text is overlaid on this background in a dark green color.

**Southeastern Yearly Meeting
of
The Religious Society
of Friends**

**FAITH
AND
PRACTICE**

4th Edition 2013

**Southeastern Yearly Meeting
of
The Religious Society of Friends**

**FAITH
AND
PRACTICE**

4th Edition 2013

The Southeastern Yearly Meeting *Faith and Practice* is published by SOUTHEASTERN YEARLY MEETING PUBLICATIONS, under the auspices of Southeastern Yearly Meeting (SEYM) of The Religious Society of Friends, a nonprofit corporation founded in 1963.

Address: www.seym.org, publications@seym.org

© 2013 by SEYM. Permission is generously given to Quaker Yearly Meetings to copy and adapt text for the purpose of helping prepare their *Faith and Practice* revisions. Permission is given to quote content for the purpose of book reviews, newsletters, and Quaker periodicals, and to authors who wish to extensively quote with proper reference and source.

Content submitted by Faith and Practice Committee (F&PC); seasoned by SEYM affiliated Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups.

Content editing by F&PC; approved at Yearly Business Meeting Annual Sessions.

2011-2013 Editors: Phoebe Andersen, Carol Bechtel, and Harold Branam, F&PC.

Content layout and design by Phoebe Andersen, clerk, F&PC.

Copy editing: Eleanor Caldwell

© 2013 by SEYM, *February Sky*, artistic rendering by Lyn Cope of original photograph by Roger Little, 2013.

Cover design by Lyn Cope and Phoebe Andersen.

Title and text are set in WarnockPro™ designed by Robert Slimbach for Adobe Originals, U.S. Patent Des. 454,152.

Print masters provided by SEYM Publications.

Print on demand by Lightning Source, Ingram Content Group.

Digital eBook formats by Publishgreen.com.

Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Southeastern Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, 2013

Religion

Quaker, Society of Friends

Includes Index

Copies available through Quaker Bookstores, e-bookstores, or from SEYM.

Contact: www.seym.org—admin@seym.org—publications@seym.org—faith@seym.org

ISBN 978-1-939831-00-2 (paperback)

ISBN 978-1-939831-01-9 (eReader: MOBI)

ISBN 978-1-939831-02-6 (eReader: EPUB)

FOREWORD

**Southeastern Yearly Meeting
of the Religious Society of Friends**

FAITH AND PRACTICE
Fourth Edition 2013

We are not searching for a perfect book, but rather a serviceable book for our time. It is for our comfort and discomfort, a book which affirms the unities which we have found. We recognise and welcome diversity within Yearly Meeting. Still we feel the pain that has been caused by past and continuing failures to accept and value the experience of us all.

London Yearly Meeting, 2 August 1994

Southeastern Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends was established in 1962 and first met April 12, 1963 and comprised those Friends Meetings previously recognized by Friends World Committee for Consultation and loosely organized in 1950 as Southeastern Friends Conference. Southeastern Yearly Meeting is affiliated with Friends General Conference and Friends World Committee for Consultation.

Faith and Practice is an evolving record and guide, reflecting the growing experience of Friends in Southeastern Yearly Meeting as we seek to know and follow the Inner Light. This 2013 fourth edition reflects changes in the way Southeastern Yearly Meeting Friends have conducted their affairs over these years since the last revision, the third edition in 1987, which succeeded a second edition in 1979 of the original document created in 1963.

The Faith and Practice Committee has labored to create a clear and readable revision that Friends can also use as a text to teach basic Quakerism for adult religious education within our meetings. Members and attenders are urged to study, use, and evaluate this book in the Spirit of the Inner Light. The committee solicits your feedback as you study this book.

As you read through the *Faith and Practice* you will notice that each chapter contains several quotations from Friends, both early and contemporary. These quotations were chosen to add the voice of Friends' experience to each chapter's discussion. The Faith and Practice Committee asks Friends to read all of the text including the quotations as the whole of the guidance of the *Faith and Practice*.

Suggested changes which arise from individuals or committees are to be forwarded to the Faith and Practice Committee. After consideration, they are seasoned through the actions of monthly meetings, interim meetings and the Yearly Meeting. When Friends unite in the need to change practice, then the next revision of *Faith and Practice* will occur.

The Faith and Practice Committee is deeply indebted to all of the yearly meetings for the help of their published *Faith & Practice* in creating the text of SEYM's *Faith and Practice*. When we struggled for words to define and explain our faith, we found reading many of these "*books of discipline*" to be inspirational as well as instructive. In particular we are grateful to Baltimore YM Draft 2011; Britain (London) YM 1960, 1995; Canadian YM 1991; New England YM 1985; New York YM 2001; North Pacific YM 1993; Pacific YM 1985; and Philadelphia YM 1997.

For those Friends wishing to understand in full the detailed responsibilities of the yearly meeting clerks, officers, standing committees, and representatives to SEYM-affiliated organizations, in addition to the *Faith and Practice*, please consult the *SEYM Operational Handbook, Procedures, and Job Descriptions* available from SEYM Publications and QuakerBooks.org.

History of the Faith and Practice Committee

The Faith and Practice Committee was re-convened in 1996 and tasked with preparing the fourth edition of Faith and Practice. The committee has been made up of several Friends who have since served one or more terms on the committee: Phoebe Andersen, Carol Bechtel, Harold Branam, Vicki Carlie, Lyn Cope, Jan Dahm, Doris Emerson, Cathy Gaskill, Gay Howard, Gerry O’Sullivan, Connie Ray, and Neil Andersen (adopted member). Additionally, we remember the service of those Friends who have had their service on the committee truncated due to death: Ed Bertsche (clerk of the third revision), Beverly Bird, Heather Moir, Christine O’Brien, and James Weston.

The Southeastern Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice was first adopted in 1963, revised in 1979, 1987, and revised section by section from 1998 through 2011, comprising the fourth edition.

Advices

In 1656 the elders of the Meeting at Balby, near Doncaster, in Yorkshire, England, drafted the earliest known letter of advices on Christian practice issued by any general body of Friends. The most remembered of those advices is the following postscript:

Dearlly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all, with the measure of light which is pure and holy, may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.

Balby Postscript, 1656

Modern Friends still aspire to use *Faith and Practice* with this attitude in mind. In 1954 Jan Palen Rushmore spoke similarly, but in a different metaphor:

The teachings of our Quaker forefathers were intended to be landmarks, not campsites.

Jan Palen Rushmore, 1954

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. Foreword to the 2012 Fourth Edition and The Balby Postscript, 1656 and others 3
- II. Table of Contents 7

Friends' Faith and Spirituality in Southeastern Yearly Meeting

- 1: The Light Within and the Meeting for Worship 13
 - A. Friends' Experience of the Meeting for Worship 13
 - B. The Light Within 16
 - C. Worship 18
 - D. The Corporate Meeting for Worship: the Spiritual Heart of the Monthly Meeting 19
 - E. Communion and Communication 23
- 2: SEYM Friends' Statements of their Religious Experience 27
- 3: Concerns, Leadings and Testimonies 35
 - A. Concerns and Leadings 35
 - B. The Meeting's Response 37
 - C. Testimonies 40
 - D. Testimony of Integrity 43
 - E. Living the Testimony of Integrity 46
 - F. Testimony of Equality 49
 - G. Living the Testimony of Equality 53
 - H. Testimony of Peace 54
 - I. Living the Testimony of Peace 57
 - J. Testimony of Simplicity 58
 - K. Living the Testimony of Simplicity 61
 - L. Concerns Arising From Multiple Testimonies 64
 - M. Friends' Experience of Living the Testimonies 72

4:	Blessed Community: Quaker Faith, Testimonies and Practice	75
	A. Community as Quaker Faith and Testimony	75
	B. The Individual in Community	77
	C. Quaker Social Order (Gospel Order).....	79
	D. The Practice of Community	81
	E. Responsibilities of Friends	81
	F. Responsibilities of Meeting	82
	G. Pastoral Care	84
	H. Conflict Resolution and Peacemaking	86
	I. Advices on Community	91
	J. Maintaining Unity	92
	F. Queries on Community	93

Friends' Spiritual Practices in Southeastern Yearly Meeting

5:	Queries and Advices: The Relationship of the Individual and the Monthly Meeting	97
6:	The Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business	111
	A. Decision-making	112
	B. The Religious Basis of Our Decision-making	113
	C. The Goal of Friends' in Decision-making.....	114
	D. Expectations of Participants	116
	E. Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business	117
	F. Seasoning	118
	G. The Role of the Clerk	119
	H. The Role of the Recording Clerk.....	121
	I. The Good Order Among Us	123
	J. The Meeting In Conflict	124
	K. Moving Forward in Unity	125
	L. Queries for a Meeting in Conflict	126
	M. Queries on the Meeting for Business	127

7:	Membership in the Religious Society of Friends	129
	A. The Meaning of Membership.....	129
	B. Initiating the Membership Process	130
	C. Response to the Application for Membership	132
	D. Membership of Children in the Meeting	134
	E. Recording the Membership.....	137
	F. Transfer of Membership	137
	G. Sojourning Members	139
	H. Dual Members.....	140
	I. Laying Down Membership	140
	J. Queries on Laying Down Membership.....	142
	K. Clearness for Membership Queries	143
8:	Marriage and Commitment	147
	A. Introduction	147
	B. A Chronological List of Common Marriage and Commitment Practices	149
	C. The Clearness Process	151
	D. Topics Suggested for Discussion During the Clearness Process.....	153
	E. Suggested Vows	156
	F. Sample Certificate	157
	G. Arrangements Committee	158
	H. Traditional Friends Ceremony.....	160
	I. Meeting's Care for the Relationship	161
	J. Marriage or Ceremonies of Commitment Outside the Care of the Meeting.....	162
	K. Remarriage.....	162
	L. Separation and Deciding to Divorce.....	162
	M. Divorce.....	164
9:	Dying, Death and Bereavement	167
	A. Preparing for Death	168
	B. As Death Approaches	169
	C. Dying.....	170
	D. Arrangements after Death.....	170
	E. Adjustments after Death.....	171
	F. Responsibilities of the Meeting	171

G. Queries for the Individual.....	173
H. Queries for the Meeting and Caregivers.....	174
I. References and Advice for the Monthly Meeting ...	174
10: Clearness Committees.....	177
A. Committees on Clearness for Personal Concerns..	177
B. Committees on Clearness for Issues Requiring Meeting Action.....	179
C. Queries for Those Asked to Serve on a Committee on Clearness	180
D. Advices for Members of a Committee on Clearness.....	180

Friends' Structure in Southeastern Yearly Meeting

11: The Monthly Meeting	183
A. Development of Monthly Meetings.....	183
B. Organization of the Monthly Meeting.....	185
C. Clerks and Officers of the Monthly Meeting.....	187
D. The Work of Committees	190
E. The Committee on Worship and Ministry	193
F. The Care and Counsel Committee	196
G. The Nominating Committee.....	201
H. Finance Committee and Trustees.....	204
I. Hospitality Committee	206
J. Volunteers and Paid Staff.....	209
K. Traveling Friends.....	209
L. Annual or Biennial Queries for Monthly Meetings.....	211
12: Establishing New Friends' Meetings	215
A. Establishing Friends' Worship Groups.....	216
B. Establishing Friends' Preparative Meetings.....	218
C. Establishing Friends' Monthly Meetings.....	220
D. The SEYM Visiting Committee of Care	220
E. Queries for the Preparative Meetings and the Visiting Committee of Care.....	221

F. Special Circumstances	223
G. Advices for a Friends' Worship Group	224
H. Advices for a Friends' Preparative Meeting	226
I. Advices for the Committee of Care of the Monthly Meeting and the Visiting Committee of Care of Southeastern Yearly Meeting.....	228
13: The Yearly Meeting, Interim Business Meeting, Yearly Meeting Committees and Yearly Meeting Representatives.....	231
A. The Yearly Meeting.....	232
B. The Yearly Meeting Clerks and Officers	235
C. Yearly Meeting Responsibilities	238
D. Yearly Meeting Process between Annual Sessions: Interim Business Meeting: Function and Responsibilities	239
E. Queries for Participants of Yearly Meeting and Interim Business Meetings.....	241
F. Committees of the Yearly Meeting.....	242
G. <i>Ad Hoc</i> Committees.....	248
H. Appointees – ProNica Board	249
I. Consultants	250
J. Yearly Meeting Representatives to Wider Quaker and Religious Fellowships.....	250
K. Observer – Friends United Meeting	252
L. Employees	253
M. Trustees	253

Friends' Revision Process

14: Formation and Revision of SEYM's Faith and Practice	255
--	-----

Friends' History

15: Quakers in the Southeast	259
------------------------------------	-----

Friends' References

16:	Appendices	263
	A. Gainesville Monthly Meeting's Process for Recognizing Gifts of the Spirit and Recording Ministers	263
	B. Gainesville Monthly Meeting's Testimony of Stewardship of Economic Resources.....	268
	C. Nominations to Services Within SEYM.....	272
	D. Nominations to the Wider Quaker World	273
	E. Suggested Form Letter for Dual Membership.....	274
	F. Suggested Form Letter for Certificate of Transfer .	275
	G. Monthly Meeting Membership Record	276
	H. Dying, Death and Bereavement Forms	278
	I. Recommended Reading Reference List	293
17:	Glossary of Terms	311
18:	Index.....	329

THE LIGHT WITHIN AND THE MEETING FOR WORSHIP

Friends' Experience of the Meeting for Worship

Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts, and then thou wilt feel the principle of God to turn thy mind to the Lord God, whereby thou wilt receive his strength and power from whence life comes, to allay all tempests, against blusterings and storms. That is it which molds into patience, into innocency, into soberness, into stillness, into stayedness, into quietness, up to God, with his power.

George Fox, 1658

When you come to your meetings . . . what do you do? Do you then gather together bodily only, and kindle a fire, compassing yourselves about with the sparks of your own kindling, and so please yourselves, and walk in the "Light of your own fire, and in the sparks which you have kindled?" . . . Or rather, do you sit down in the True Silence, resting from your own Will and Workings, and waiting upon the Lord, with your minds fixed in that Light wherewith Christ has enlightened you, until the Lord breathes life into you, refresheth you, and prepares you, and your spirits and souls, to make you fit for his service, that you may offer unto him a pure and spiritual sacrifice?

William Penn, 1678

As iron sharpeneth iron, the seeing of the faces one of another when both are inwardly gathered into the life, giveth occasion for the life secretly to rise and pass from vessel to vessel. And as many candles lighted and put in one place do greatly augment the

light and make it more to shine forth, so when many are gathered together into the same life, there more of the glory of God and his powers appears, to the refreshment of each individual.

Robert Barclay, 1671

On one never-to-be-forgotten Sunday morning, I found myself one of a small company of silent worshipers, who were content to sit down together without words, that each one might feel after and draw near to the Divine Presence, unhindered at least, if not helped, by any human utterance. Utterance I knew was free, should the words be given; and before the meeting was over, a sentence or two were uttered in great simplicity by an old and apparently untaught man, rising in his place amongst the rest of us. I did not pay much attention to the words he spoke, and I have no recollection of their import. My whole soul was filled with the unutterable peace of the undisturbed opportunity for communion with God, with the sense that at last I had found a place where I might, without the faintest suspicion of insincerity, join with others in simply seeking His presence. To sit down in silence could at least pledge me to nothing; it might open to me (as it did that morning) the very gate of heaven.

Caroline E. Stephen, 1890

Our worship is a deep exercise of our spirits before the Lord, which doth not consist in exercising the natural part or natural mind, either to hear or speak words, or in praying according to what we, of ourselves, can apprehend or comprehend concerning our needs; but we wait, in silence of the fleshly part, to hear with the new ear what God shall please to speak inwardly in our own hearts, or outwardly through others, who speak with the new tongue which he unlooseth and teacheth to speak; and we

pray in the spirit, and with a new understanding, as God pleaseth to quicken, draw forth, and open our hearts towards himself.

Isaac Penington, 1661

How does a Quaker Meeting work? Its foundation is the conviction that God is not a distant remote being but a living presence to be discovered in the deep centre of every human being. . . . The Quaker experience is that, in the silence, as we are open to one another in love, we help each other by sharing our strengths and weaknesses. The Quaker conviction is that as we go deeper into ourselves we shall eventually reach a still, quiet centre. At this point two things happen simultaneously. Each of us is aware of our unique value as an individual human being, and each of us is aware of our utter interdependence on one another.

George Gorman, 1982

I have never lost the enjoyment of sitting in silence at the beginning of meeting, knowing that everything can happen, knowing the joy of utmost surprise; feeling that nothing is preordained, nothing is set, all is open. The Light can come from all sides. The joy of experiencing the Light in a completely different way than one has thought it would come is one of the greatest gifts that Friends' meeting for worship has brought me.

Ursula Franklin, 1979

As I silence myself I become more sensitive to the sounds around me, and I do not block them out. The songs of the birds, the rustle of the wind, children in the playground, the roar of an airplane overhead are all taken into my worship. I regulate my breathing as taught me by my Zen friends, and through this exercise I feel the flow of life within me

from my toes right through my whole body. I think of myself like the tree planted by the “rivers of water” in Psalm 1, sucking up God’s gift of life and being restored. Sometimes I come to meeting for worship tired and weary, and I hear the words of Jesus, “Come unto me, all that labour and are weary, and I will give you rest.” And having laid down my burden, I feel refreshed both physically and spiritually. This leads me on to whole-hearted adoration and thanksgiving for all God’s blessings. My own name, Tayeko, means “child of many blessings” and God has surely poured them upon me. My heart overflows with a desire to give Him something in return. I have nothing to give but my own being, and I offer Him my thoughts, words, and actions of each day, and whisper, “Please take me as I am.”

Tayeko Yamanouchi, 1980

The Light Within

The Light Within is the fundamental and immediate experience for Friends. It is that which guides each of us in our everyday lives and brings us together as a community of faith. It is, most importantly, our direct and unmediated experience of the Divine.

Friends have used many different terms or phrases to designate the source and inner certainty of our faith—a faith which we have gained by direct experience. The Inward Light, the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Spirit of Truth, the Divine Principle, the Christ Within, the Seed, Inward Teacher, Presence, and the Inner Light are examples of such phrases. George Fox’s Journal refers to “that Inward Light, Spirit, and Grace by which all might know their salvation” and to “that Divine Spirit which would lead them into all truth.” Fox wrote, “There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition” and encouraged Friends “to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.” Many Friends interpret “that of God” as another designation for the Light Within.

The Light Within is not the same as the conscience or moral faculty. The conscience, a human faculty, is conditioned by education and the cultural environment; it is not, therefore, an infallible guide to moral practice. It should nevertheless be attended to, for it is one of the faculties through which the Light shines. Friends are encouraged to test their leadings by seeking clearness through direct communion in the meeting for worship, through the clearness process (see Chapter 10, Clearness Committees), and through other ways. Such testing enhances and clarifies insight so that the conscience may be purged of misconceptions and become more truly obedient to the Light Within. When conscience has been transformed by experiencing the Light, it gives more reliable guidance even though it may seem to point in an unexpected direction.

Friends' experience is that following the Light Within brings a release of the spirit and a state of peace that are independent of the tangible results of the action taken. Spiritual power arises from living in harmony with the Divine Will. George Fox and others often spoke of the power they experienced in times of need and of the relationship between that power and the Light. For instance, Fox writes that "the power of God sprang through me," and he admonishes us to "hearken to the Light, that ye may feel the power of God in every one of you."

Continuing obedience to the Light increases our gratitude for God's gifts. Among these gifts are an awareness of enduring values, the joy of life, and the ability to resolve problems in accord with divine leading, as individuals or as a meeting. Under the guidance of the Light, the monthly meeting is enabled to use and transform the aspirations and judgments of its members. This waiting on the Light helps the meeting make decisions and face undertakings in a spirit detached from self-interest or prejudice. Fundamental Quaker testimonies such as equality, simplicity, peace, integrity, and community have arisen from a deep sense of individual and corporate responsibility guided by the Light Within.

Recognizing "that of God" is in every person overcomes our separation and our differences from others and leads to a

sympathetic awareness of their needs and a sense of responsibility toward them. Friends believe that the more widely and clearly the Light is recognized and followed, the more humanity will come into accord. “Therefore,” writes George Fox, “in the Light wait, where unity is.”

Worship

Life grows from freely adopted self-discipline maintained by prayer, persuasion, the guidance of the Spirit and the motions of love.

T. Canby Jones, 1972

Worship is our response to what we feel to be of ultimate importance. Worship is always possible, alone or in company, in silence, in music or speech, in stillness or in dance. It is never confined to place or time or form, and it is open to everyone.

When Friends worship, we reach out from the depths of our being to God, the giver of life and of the world around us. Our worship is a search for communion with God and the offering of ourselves—body and soul—for the doing of God’s will. The sense of worship can be experienced in the awe we feel in the silence of a meeting for worship or in the awareness of our profound connectedness to nature and its power. In worship we know repentance and forgiveness by acknowledging God as the ultimate source of our being and feel the serenity of accepting God’s will for our lives. Individual leadings are often made clearer by reference to the life and teachings of Jesus and by the transforming power of the Inner Light. From worship there comes a fresh understanding of the commandment to

... love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.

Luke 10:27 NRSV

Careful listening to the Inward Teacher can lead to fresh openings: an in-pouring of love, insight, and interdependence. True listening can also bring the worshiper to new and sometimes troubling perceptions, including clear leadings that may be a source of pain and anxiety; yet it can also bring such wholeness of heart that hard tasks can become a source of joy. Even when we worship while torn with our own pain or that of another, it is in worship that we discover new strength for what faces us in our everyday lives.

Each experience of worship is different. There is no one right way to prepare for spiritual communion, no set practice to follow when worship grows from expectant waiting in the Spirit. Vital worship depends far more on a deeply felt longing for God than upon any particular practice.

Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Matthew 7:7 NRSV

And one of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Mark 12:28-32 NRSV

The Corporate Meeting for Worship: the Spiritual Heart of the Monthly Meeting

The meeting for worship is the heart of the monthly meeting and of the Religious Society of Friends. It draws us together in the enlightening and empowering presence of God, sending us forth

with renewed vision and commitment. Its basis is direct communion with God. The meeting for worship is the only Quaker practice which has existed from the beginning of the Religious Society of Friends. Meetings for worship are held at established times, usually once a week; appointed or “called” meetings for worship are arranged by the monthly meeting at the time of marriages, memorial meetings, or other special occasions.

Friends find it useful to come to meeting with hearts and minds prepared for worship by a practice of daily prayer, meditation, and study. Some find help through Bible study in the Quaker manner (such as that described by Joanne and Larry Spears in the pamphlet *Friendly Bible Study*), through thoughtful reflection, listening to the Inward Teacher, and through the experiences of others in daily life and service. We thereby deepen our awareness of the wonder of God and of God’s love and acquire the words with which to understand and express that awareness as we worship.

Such preparation helps us to set aside our preoccupation with ourselves and our affairs and, as Friends arrive for meeting, to settle into worship.

The first that enters into the place of your meeting . . . turn in thy mind to the light, and wait upon God singly, as if none were present but the Lord; and here thou art strong. Then the next that comes in, let them in simplicity of heart sit down and turn in to the same light, and wait in the Spirit; and so all the rest coming in, in the fear of the Lord, sit down in pure stillness and silence of all flesh, and wait in the light. Those who are brought to a pure still waiting upon God in the Spirit are come nearer to the Lord than words are; for God is spirit and in the spirit He is worshipped.

Alexander Parker, 1660

The first thing that I do is to close my eyes and then to still my body in order to get it as far out of the way

as I can. Then I still my mind and let it open to God in silent prayer, for the meeting, as we understand it, is the meeting place of the worshiper with God. I thank God inwardly for this occasion, for the week's happenings, for what I have learned at His hand, for my family, for the work there is to do, for Himself. And I often pause to enjoy Him. Under His gaze I search the week, and feel the piercing twinge of remorse that comes at this, and this, and this, and at the absence of this, and this, and this. Under His eyes I see again—for I have often been aware of it at the time—the right way. I ask His forgiveness of my faithlessness and ask for strength to meet this matter when it arises again. There have been times when I had to reweave a part of my life under this auspice.

I hold up persons before God in intercession, loving them under His eyes—seeing them with Him, longing for His healing and redeeming power to course through their lives. I hold up certain social situations, certain projects. At such a time I often see things that I may do in company with or that are related to this person or this situation. I hold up the persons in the meeting and their needs, as I know them, to God.

Douglas V. Steere, 1937

Worship in meeting may thus begin with stilling of the mind and body, letting go of tensions and everyday worries, feeling the encompassing presence of others, and opening oneself to the Spirit. It may include meditation, reflection on a remembered passage from the Bible or other devotional literature, silent prayer, thanksgiving, praise of God, consideration of one's actions, remorse, request for forgiveness, or search for direction. Even in times of personal spiritual emptiness, Friends find it useful to be present in meeting for worship.

Worshipping together strengthens the sense of the corporate body and deepens the act of worship itself. Such communal worship is like a living organism whose individual but interdependent members are essential to one another and to the life of the greater whole. It is like the luminous unity and individual fulfillment that arises when musicians, responding to the music before them, offer up their separate gifts in concert. Friends sometimes use Paul's image and speak of the meeting for worship as a "body whose head is Christ" (taken from "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" [I Cor. 12:27 NRSV] and "And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" [Ephesians 1:22-23 NRSV]). The gifts and participation of each member are important in maintaining and enriching the spiritual life of the meeting for worship. Corporate worship is distinct from individual worship. There is a power that can often be experienced in the group that is much greater than that within an individual alone.

There is a renewal of spirit when we turn away from worldly matters to rediscover inward serenity. Friends know from experience the validity of Jesus' promise: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Matthew 18:20 NRSV). Often we realize our hopes for a heightened sense of the presence of God through the cumulative power of the worship of the group, communicated in silence as well as in vocal ministry. When we experience such a profound and evident sense of oneness with God and with one another, we speak of a "gathered" or "covered" meeting for worship.

Friends gather for worship in quiet waiting upon God. We come together out of our care for one another and out of our shared hunger to know God, to follow the leading of the Spirit, to feel with clarity our shortcomings and the reality of forgiveness, to give voice to our anguish, faith, praise, joy, and thanksgiving. At the close of the meeting for worship, we shake or hold hands, in acknowledgment of our commitment to one another and to God, and go forth with renewed trust in the power and reality of God's grace and love.

In a truly covered meeting an individual who speaks takes no credit to himself for the part he played in the unfolding of the worship. . . . For the feeling of being a pliant instrument of the Divine Will characterizes true speaking "in the Life." Under such a covering an individual emerges into vocal utterance, frequently without fear and trembling, and subsides without self-consciousness into silence when his part is played. For One who is greater than all individuals has become the meeting place of the group, and He becomes the leader and director of worship. With wonder one hears the next speaker, if there be more, take up another aspect of the theme of the meeting. No jealousy, no regrets that he didn't think of saying that, but only gratitude that the angel has come and troubled the waters and that many are finding healing through the one Life. A gathered meeting is no place for the enhancement of private reputations, but for self-effacing pliancy and obedience to the whispers of the Leader.

Thomas Kelly, 1945

Meeting for worship can be more than just an occasion on which one's private religious needs are satisfied. Silent devotion should lead to an awareness that the meeting is less and less a place we choose ourselves, and more and more a place to which, out of love, God has called us. To understand this is to sense the meaning of those lovely phrases about the community of faith being the body of Christ.

John Punshon, 1987

Communion and Communication

One day, being under a strong exercise of spirit, I stood up and said some words in a meeting; but not keeping close to the Divine opening, I said more

than was required of me. Being soon sensible of my error, I was afflicted in mind some weeks without any light or comfort, even to that degree that I could not take satisfaction in anything. I remembered God, and was troubled, and in the depths of my distress he had pity on me, and sent the Comforter. I then felt forgiveness for my offense; my mind became calm and quiet, and I was truly thankful to my gracious Redeemer for his mercies. About six weeks after this, feeling the spring of Divine love opened, and a concern to speak, I said a few words in a meeting, in which I found peace. Being thus humbled and disciplined under the cross, my understanding became more strengthened to distinguish the pure spirit which inwardly moves upon the heart, and which taught me to wait in silence sometimes many weeks together, until I felt that rise which prepares the creature to stand like a trumpet, through which the Lord speaks to his flock.

John Woolman, 1740

Direct communion with God is a wholeness that transcends mere communication, and it constitutes the essential life of the meeting for worship. Into its living stillness may come leadings and fresh insights that are purely personal, not meant to be shared. At other times they are meant for the meeting at large to hear. It is incumbent on the Friend receiving the message to make the sometimes difficult discernment whether the message is meant for the meeting as a whole or for the individual.

When a leading is to be shared, the worshiper feels a compelling inward call to vocal ministry. The very name “Quaker” is by tradition derived from the evident quaking of early Friends witnessing under the power of the Spirit. Ministry today may sometimes be accompanied by such outward signs, and many feel the inward quaking. Vocal ministry may take many forms, such as prayer, praise of

God, song, teaching, witnessing, and sharing. These messages may center upon a single, vital theme; often apparently unrelated leadings are later discovered to have an underlying unity. Such ministry and prayer may answer the unrecognized or unvoiced needs of other seekers.

When someone accepts the call of the Spirit to speak, fellow worshipers are likewise called to listen with openness of minds and hearts. Reticent and tender spirits should feel the meeting community's loving encouragement to give voice, even if haltingly, to the message that may be struggling to be born within them. Friends whose thought has been long developing and whose learning and experience are profound serve the meeting best when they, like all others, wait patiently for the prompting of the Inward Teacher. Anyone moved to speak should first allow others time to absorb and respond inwardly to what has already been said.

Friends should not put obstacles, including their own feelings of unworthiness, in the way of the call to speak. Deciding in advance to speak or not, or feeling a duty to speak to provide some balance between silence and the spoken word, interferes with the guidance of the Spirit. Even if not a word is spoken, a meeting for worship can be profoundly nurturing.

All present should be mindful that spiritual opportunities entail responsibilities as well, including attention to the time of assembling and consideration for those already settled. Speaking carried on in a spirit of debate, lecturing, discussion, or news reporting is destructive to the life of the meeting for worship and of the meeting community. Friends' experience has shown that it is not helpful to answer or rebut what has been said previously during meeting for worship. Also, any who habitually settle into silent reading or sit in inattentive idleness cut themselves off from their fellow worshipers and from the Spirit. If hindrances to worship occur within a meeting for worship, members of the worship and ministry committee or others as appropriate should move quickly and in love to provide counsel.

Friends moved to vigorous support of causes need to voice their insights outside of meeting for worship in brief and sensitive ways. Similar sensitivity should be practiced by those who bring material to be posted or shared with the meeting community.

I think it's extremely important that we learn to listen. Listening is a lost art. And when I say learn to listen I mean listen to our spouses, listen to our children, listen to our fellow believers in our communities of faith. But I also want us to learn to listen to God. I know from personal experience that God speaks through the Scriptures. He speaks through preaching. He speaks through friends. But He also speaks directly. We can know that, but we must make time and space and silence in our lives if we are to learn this in real ways and be the beneficiaries of His leading and His guidance directly. We are told in the 46th Psalm, "Be still and know that I am God." In another translation it says, "Stop fighting and know that I am God." Let's take time to listen to God.

Kara Cole Newell, 1982

It is unfortunate that much formal training in ministry does not even recognize that . . . inward preparation exists. In our world of degrees, exams, and training programs, it is easy to forget that ministry is not primarily a task; it is a way of being in the world. It is living in relationship with God and being a witness to God. Ministry is being able to listen to the Word of God and thereby have a word of life to share with others. Fundamentally, we do not do ministry. We are ministers.

Sandra Cronk, 1991

THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES OF SOME SEYM FRIENDS

Love is like light; it enters wherever there is a crack or door ajar in one's heart. If you don't love yourself, then you maybe find that you love one other person; then maybe you find that you love another person. And, if you don't love another person, then perhaps you love a work of art or an animal or a mathematical formula or a sweater. You begin somewhere and practice loving. And, once you open your heart to loving one thing, then another, you may eventually find yourself enjoying how loving makes you feel. If we love others only as much as we love ourselves, then perhaps we feel God's love for us only as much as we feel our love for ourselves.

Wendy Clarissa Geiger, 2008
Jacksonville Meeting

Surely you know that you are God's temple, where the Spirit of God dwells.

1 Corinthians 3:16
Revised English Bible

Out of my experience comes the sense of a loving and sustaining presence in whom I am grounded and overshadowed. God, with infinite patience, draws from me love, trust and worship as my response, and service as I come to recognize the presence at work in the lives of my sisters and brothers. God cares about the way I respond and does not ask to be defined, and thus limited, as one or three or male. In this awesome mystery are hidden my source and my goal, and God is growing in me now.

Robert Allenson, 1987
Gainesville Meeting

I believe in one Supreme Being who I call God. I believe that God is within me and without, and that every single thing is God. I also believe that God is too complex and incomprehensible to be described. Naturally, I don't go along with the sole divinity of Jesus Christ as I believe that there is that of God in all of us. Nor am I still awaiting a Messiah. We all have the potential for being a Messiah; some of us use it, some of us don't. My belief in the power of prayer is very strong, whether it's the verbal intercessory request or the non-verbal swelling of the heart in gratitude. I believe in miracles and magic and that we have gifts we haven't even used yet. I believe that whatever you believe is true and that if you don't believe it, that's OK, too. And that the greatest sin we can commit is not to enjoy life fully. I subscribe to the following quotations, the first from the Talmud, which Jesus of Nazareth probably read, and the second from Anthony de Mello, a contemporary Roman Catholic priest living in India:

On Judgment Day, a man will have to give account for every good thing which his eye saw and he did not enjoy.

Palestinian Talmud, Kiddushin

*I am fortunate indeed!
I have been granted
the wealth
of another day of life.*

Anthony de Mello, Wellsprings

You might say I'm a practicing Hedonist, but cursed at birth by three wicked witches: "Protestant Work Ethic," "Jewish Guilt," and "Twentieth-Century Anxiety." They curse me daily and stand in the way of my wholehearted delight in the utter beauty of the Florida sky and the enjoyment of love for my fellow man. When I learn how to get rid of the wicked witches who live on my shoulders and shout in my ears, I will have become the person I want to be. However, I believe God loves me anyway, witches and all, because He/She/It has given me multiple blessings, and today I am very, very grateful!

Marie Stilkind, 1986

Miami Meeting

I'm a Lutheran minister's daughter—therefore I'm a Christian Quaker. Due to my husband being a C.O., we were invited to become members. All I can say is—I love my Bible, my various devotionals, including one put out by Quakers, "Fruit of the Vine," and of course our journals. I have that Inner Peace. All in all, it gives me the knowledge of what God expects of me. I'm thankful that I have the strength and joy in my commitments to our Meeting and am thankful for my family of Friends. Being a Quaker is a challenge! I love challenges. Religion and art is my thing.

Hildegard Herbster, 1986
Miami Meeting

At this moment in my spiritual journey I pause to try to make a statement of my faith. I know that I am only a child in this journey and that today's statement is different from the one I would have made a year ago and from one I might make a year from now. From my experience this far in my journey I believe that God is love and that this spirit of love is within me and at the same time envelops me. This spirit is caring and steadfast and, as I become more awake and aware, is increasingly persistent, teaching me that I must pay constant and careful attention to this inner guide. I know that when I am obedient, getting my self out of the way as far as it is possible for me to do so, I feel a deep joy. More and more, God becomes the single reality of my life, and my goal is to become whatever God would have me be.

Without understanding or needing to understand how this can be so, I believe that God is in each person and each particle of creation, and encompasses not only all that we know of the universe but even more than we can possibly imagine. I believe that God wills only good for us and that we are all one in God.

Dorothy Ann Ware, 1986
Clearwater Meeting

I am drawn to the Society of Friends for a number of reasons. For me, the most important is that I feel at home in the silence of Meeting for Worship. It satisfies my heart's longing for peace and I think enables me to live my life in a way that is more integrated, more whole.

My observations and readings lead me to think that I am also in harmony with Friends around the following:

As a group Friends seem to live what they believe and I am trying to do that too.

It appears that Friends are a more open system, allowing for a range of thoughts and beliefs which is a position that I also work to maintain.

I am a seeker of truth and divine guidance and I have faith in continuing revelation as do Friends.

I hold that simplicity, honesty, equality, and peace are important principles to live by.

Conceptualizing God as Inner Light is consistent with what I believe about the nature of spirituality.

Finally, I think that the structure of Friends Meeting for Worship, Business, etc., is one that provides for two natural forces that exist in humankind—a need for closeness with others and an equally important need to be autonomous persons.

**Alice Wald, 1986
Charleston Meeting**

My faith rests in an uncomprehendable God.

I have experienced God both within and without.

The record of the life and teachings of Jesus, in the Bible, has been one of the guides in my quest to reach God.

Knowing people of God and imitating them is another guide. I know I am becoming more in the Light, the more I work at establishing a constant relationship with God.

**Cathy Gaskill, 1987
Winter Park Meeting**

I see the Quaker experience as incorporating three spheres: spiritual, political, and social. Of course, these overlap. For instance, our dealings with others may be guided by our Spirituality. And, because of individual interests and personal needs these are balanced differently in each person. For some, the social aspect of meeting is important to the degree that the meeting becomes an extended family. For others, the spiritual component is pivotal because it gives them strength for their political commitments.

Recently I heard a Quaker woman in Texas tell a group of refugees that while Quakers believed in peace there was an increasing movement within the Friends which averred that the violence done to individuals by evil governments, such as the depriving of food, was equal to acts of violent self defense. I was appalled. It does not matter that one violence equals another, what matters is that it is in addition to the other. We are fundamentally a peace church and I have heard this echoed repeatedly in SEYM. Peace and our silent meetings are cornerstones of the uniqueness that is Quaker faith.

We are tolerant, and we are brave because of our tolerance. That is, we have the courage to face our own hidden bigotries. The early Quakers did it when they loved individuals who happened to be black while the masses despised the negro, and we are doing it today when we love individuals who happen to be gay when the masses treat them with contempt.

**India Aditi, 1986
Winter Park Meeting**

*If I am not God,
 what am I?
If Thee is not God,
 what is thee?
If Here is not Infinity,
 where is it?
If Now is not Eternity,
 when is it?*

The above expresses my current state of awareness. However, the following intimates my prediction of future states:

*on that final day
how shall I know I am dead?
I'll stop Becoming.*

Kenneth C. Leibman, 1987
Gainesville Meeting

I have come to believe that all life is holy, for there is nowhere that God is not. We “swim” in God. We “live and move and have our being” in God, who is “nearer to us than we are to ourselves.” God is life and the life energy is love permeating the universe.

I believe that our sense of being separate one from another and from God is our misperception, and this false sense of separateness is the source of fear and of every evil (error or ignorance).

I believe we all walk our own path (like the prodigal son) toward self-realization of our spiritual reality and oneness. And though we may be in different places, we are where we should be for growing into that reality. We teach and we learn from one another, and as we give we receive.

I tend to believe in reincarnation because it makes of this earth experience a fair and a just one, and places the responsibility for our actions and our consequences squarely on ourselves, and that feels right.

I feel—in prayer and meditation and silent worship—that God’s healing love is channeled: And I find that in the silence I feel a connection with that spirit of God within me, and the more aware I am of that holy presence the more peaceful I am, the more harmony I feel around me.

Finally, I believe that life (consciousness) is ongoing, that all life is tending toward wholeness, and love, and forgiveness will bring it into being.

Mary Dee, 1987
Palm Beach Meeting

As I look back over my life, I find that it has been gradually drawing closer to God. I have always felt the nudge of Spirit to go into a certain path. Sometimes I would follow the nudge and grow closer to God. Other times (most of the time) I have been absolutely certain that I can handle the crisis and ignored the spiritual nudge. As a matter of fact, I got very good at ignoring the nudge. Then, I had a Biblical "Job" experience. At age 46, I lost my job, my reputation, and had to move back home with family. After the shock wore off, I was humbled and heartsick. I finally asked God for a measure of his everlasting and healing Love. I was embraced by the Spirit, lifted up and transformed. I was filled with Love, Light and Trust. I understood that God is always present with us but I had spent most of my existence dwelling on past hurts and slights or worried about the future or, even worse, absorbed in busy-ness. If I could stand still in the present, I would find God present and His Love for me manifest. From this experience, Love has called me closer and closer to God. I am filled to overflowing with God's love for everyone and all of creation. I have tried to let Love be the first motion in my life and have humbly ministered as way opened, and learned to accept that Love and ministry from wherever it comes to me.

I was fortunate a few years ago to participate in an ad hoc committee charged to come to some clarity regarding an item of great concern for the yearly meeting. As the committee convened it was clear we needed to try another approach to come to clarity on this great concern. It was also clear that none of us were called to clerk this committee. We settled into worship to find clarity. After a while, we stayed worshipful and shared our Light with each other. The worship felt right-ordered, so we continued in worship. After a period of time, we felt clear that this worship time was the way forward, letting the Inner Light be our Guide and our clerk.

In worship, we lost track of time and experienced a gathering into God's love for all of us, all of his creation. It became clear over time and several meetings that we were blessed with both new understandings and openings. We were reminded that we could not focus on the "wrongs" of the "other" without looking at our own behavior and our tendency to judgment, moral outrage and "other-izing" (my

words for us vs. them). We struggled to find ways to be a loving witness. Participating in this process of extended worship and worship sharing opened us as a group. Our openings were both simple and deep. They were:

- **Love God and love one another.**
We are each called to Love God with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength, and we are called to love everyone, especially those with whom our measure of the Light may differ.
- **Avoid judgment; seek forgiveness.**
We are called to be mindful of judging others and rather seek their forgiveness instead. We are called as well to be forgiving of those who judge us.
- **Listen and seek healing.**
We are called to be about the process of listening to and helping Friends heal who are hurt by discrimination and division, as well as called to promote spiritual healing of all Friends through deep listening, forgiveness, and love.

These openings that we received from the Spirit on the surface offered no particular guidance on the resolution of the yearly meeting's great concern. However, continued prayer and discernment by the committee brought clarity that following these openings were where God had called us to do our work.

The ad hoc committee had done its work and reported back to the yearly meeting. However, the openings we received have stayed with me. Through continued prayer and discernment, I am called to the greater action of love, forgiveness and healing, as well as the challenge to avoid judgment. This is a difficult and rewarding calling. It is extremely hard to avoid judgment; however, it is easy to listen and forgive, even easier still to love as I am loved by God.

**Phoebe Biers Andersen, 2012
Tallahassee Meeting**

CONCERNS, LEADINGS, AND TESTIMONIES

For Friends the most important consideration is not the right action in itself but a right inward state out of which right action will arise. Given the right inward state, right action is inevitable. Inward state and outward action are component parts of a single whole.

Howard Brinton, 1943

Friends are sometimes called “practical mystics” or “prophetic Christians” because Quaker worship has been a wellspring for service in the community and world that arises out of the ongoing revelation of the Light experienced in worship. An old story relates the whispered question asked by someone attending meeting for worship for the first time and puzzled by the absence of overt activity: “When does the service begin?” The response: “When the meeting for worship ends.”

Concerns and Leadings

A concern is God-initiated, often surprising, always holy, for the life of God is breaking through into the world. Its execution is in peace and power and astounding faith and joy, for in unhurried serenity the Eternal is at work in the midst of time, triumphantly bringing all things unto Himself.

Thomas Kelly, 1941

Leading and being led: the words are simple enough. But for Quakers they have their most profound resonance as defining religious experience. Friends speak variously of being drawn to an action,

feeling under the weight of a concern, being called or led to act in specific ways. We speak of being open to the leadings of the Light, of being taught by the Spirit or the Inward Christ. Extraordinary claims lie embedded in those phrases. They say that it is not only possible but essential to our nature for human beings to hear and obey the voice of God; that we can be directed, daily, in what we do, the jobs we hold, the very words we say; and that our obedience may draw us to become leaders in all spheres of human life—in the professions, arts, and sciences, but also in discovering the ethical, political, social, and economic consequences of following the will of God.

Paul Lacey, 1985

A Quaker social concern seems characteristically to arise in a sensitive individual or very small group. ... The concern arises as a revelation to an individual that there is a painful discrepancy between existing social conditions and what God wills for society and that this discrepancy is not being adequately dealt with. The next step is the determination of the individual to do something about it—not because he is particularly well fitted to tackle the problem, but simply because no one else seems to be doing it.

Dorothy H. Hutchinson, 1961

A concern is an interest deeply rooted in the Spirit, which may move an individual and the meeting to action. A leading is an inner conviction that impels one to follow a certain course of action under a sense of divine guidance. Modern Friends sometimes use the words interchangeably. Our testimonies were initially leadings inspired by the Spirit in an individual, tested by the individual Friend and later by the meeting, and accepted as a concern of the meeting. Continued discernment over time by ever wider bodies of Friends eventually led all to come to unity with the concern, and thus the concern was transformed into a testimony.

The impetus for service is often a concern, which, as Friends use the word, is a quickening sense of the need to do something or to demonstrate sympathetic interest in an individual or group, as a result of what is felt to be a direct intimation of God's will. A concern as an impetus to action arises out of Friends' belief that the realm of God can be realized here and now, not just in another place or time. A concern may emerge as an unexpected insight from prayerful study of a problem or situation, such as a concern to support national policies which promote international peace. It may also grow from an anxious interest in the welfare of a person or group, which may result in inquiries or practical support.

When it initially arises, a concern may not yet be linked to a proposed course of action but may simply be a troubled sense that something needs attention. A leading is a sense of being drawn or called by God in a particular direction or toward a particular course of action. Friends speak of "feeling led" or "being called." The leading may be short-term and specific in its fulfillment, or it may involve transformation of one's life and even the life of the meeting.

Friends have long believed it important that leadings be tested before action is taken. The process of testing is a form of spiritual discipline for Friends. A Friend's concern and consequent leading may be an individual matter—something which one person is called to attend to without requiring assistance. In many cases, however, a Friend may receive guidance, aid, and encouragement from other members of the meeting. Therefore, it has long been the practice of Friends to inform and consult with their meeting when they feel a leading resulting from a major concern laid upon them.

The Meeting's Response

"Concern" is a word which has tended to become debased by excessively common usage among Friends, so that too often it is used to cover merely a strong desire. The true "concern" [emerges as] a gift from God, a leading of his Spirit which may not

be denied. Its sanction is not that on investigation it proves to be the intelligent thing to do—though it usually is; it is that the individual . . . knows, as a matter of inward experience, that there is something that the Lord would have done, however obscure the way, however uncertain the means to human observation. Often proposals for action are made which have every appearance of good sense, but as the meeting waits before God it becomes clear that the proposition falls short of “concern.”

Roger Wilson, 1949

The meeting’s responsibility is to give serious consideration to requests from those seeking unity for a proposed course of action—and the meeting may not always approve. Its worship and ministry committee or other designated committee may appoint a clearness committee (see Chapter 10, Clearness Committees) to help such persons gain clarity on whether to act upon a concern. Such a committee may also provide longer-term support, including ongoing testing and reevaluation. Sometimes just testing a leading in a clearness committee is all the action that is needed for a particular concern. In other instances, the concern needs to be brought to the meeting for business for seasoning by the whole meeting. In cases where meeting approval is given to a proposed course of action which may result in allowing the Friend to be released to follow a leading, the meeting often takes responsibility for providing financial assistance and family support and continues to give oversight until the leading is fulfilled or laid down.

When a meeting fails to unite with a member’s concern, the member is asked to reconsider the concern very carefully, perhaps setting it aside and waiting for further Light. Sometimes the individual and meeting agree that the concern should be dropped, and the member may feel released from responsibility for action since the concern has been laid on the meeting. Occasionally, the meeting may be able to encourage the member to go forward even when the meeting is unable to participate in furthering the witness.

Where the concern cannot be furthered without meeting

unity, and a member does not feel right about dropping it, the process of discernment continues. Often this process involves the formation of a small group, which includes Friends who come to the matter at hand from different perspectives. The concern, perhaps with a modified proposal for action, may be brought to the meeting many times before unity is reached either in support or nonsupport of the concern.

Submitting the concern to the discernment of the meeting is of value. The meeting may be enlightened by the insights of those who bring concerns, and these Friends may be helped, through the sympathetic consideration of the meeting, to clarify their leadings. The meeting's care for its members causes it to take interest in all concerns felt by its members, even when it cannot unite with them or may feel obliged to admonish members against "running ahead of their Guide" (see Chapter 17, Glossary of Terms).

Depending on the nature and scope of the concern, the monthly meeting may wish to lay it before the Fall or Winter Interim Business Meeting and the Southeastern Yearly Meeting through a Minute accompanied by personal presentation where possible. A meeting may also request that a concern, brought by a member and deemed significant by the meeting, be considered at a threshing session during the annual sessions of the yearly meeting.

Individuals also may bring concerns to yearly meeting committees. After testing such a concern, a committee may or may not include it in its reports to the yearly meeting, either through interim business meeting or at the annual sessions of yearly meeting.

When a concern is thus presented, the yearly meeting may reach a decision or may provide for further consideration of the matter. Deep sensitivity to divine leading and to the insights of others is required on the part of both individuals and meetings when controversial concerns are considered. Concerns involving intensely personal witness or public policy demand a special degree of forbearance, and unity may not always be reached.

Testimonies

Ever since I first came among Friends, I was attracted to the testimonies as an ideal. I wanted to belong to a church, which made the rejection of warfare a collective commitment and not just a personal option. I admired simplicity, a devotion to equality, and a respect for others, which reflected what I already knew of Christ. In a deceitful world I warmed to those who did not swear oaths and strove to tell the truth in all circumstances. But this was a beginning in the spiritual life. The seed that was sown in my mind and my politics struck root in my soul and my faith.

The choice of the word “testimony” is instructive. The testimonies are ways of behaving but are not ethical rules. They are matters of practice but imply doctrines. They refer to human society but are about God. Though often talked about, they lack an authoritative formulation. . . .

A “testimony” is a declaration of truth or fact. . . . It is not an ejaculation, a way of letting off steam, or baring one’s soul. It has a purpose, and that is to get other people to change, to turn to God. Such an enterprise, be it in words or by conduct and example, is in essence prophetic and evangelical.

John Punshon, 1987

Since the 1650s, Friends have acted upon shared concerns through practices which historically have been distinctive and definitive. While the specifics of Friends’ practice have varied as times have changed, Friends today continue to have concerns and underlying beliefs similar to those of past generations. Primarily, we testify that God is active in the world today, and there is that of God in everyone.

The term “testimonies” is used to refer to this common set of deeply held, historically rooted convictions and modes of living in the world. They are based on “openings,” or revelations experienced by Quakers beginning with George Fox, who preached that “Jesus Christ has come to teach his people himself.” He also taught that “There is one, Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition.”

Testimonies bear witness to the Truth as Friends in community perceive it, Truth known through relationship with God. The testimonies are expressions of lives turned toward the Light, outward expressions reflective of the inward experience of God’s leading, differently described by various Friends and in changing eras. Often in the past the testimonies were defined specifically, such as the testimony against taking oaths; recently it has become customary to speak of them more generally, as in the testimony of integrity or simplicity. Through the testimonies, with that measure of the Light that is granted, Friends strive for unity and integrity of inner and outer life, both living with ourselves and each other and living in the world. Trusting strongly in the Holy Spirit to guide sincere seekers, Quakers today refrain from placing on each other particular outward requirements.

Let all nations hear the sound by word or writing. Spare no place, spare no tongue nor pen, but be obedient to the Lord God; go through the world and be valiant for the truth upon earth; tread and trample all that is contrary under. . . . Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them. Then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone; whereby in them you may be a blessing, and make the witness of God in them to bless you.

George Fox, 1656

We are a people that follow after those things that make for peace, love, and unity; it is our desire that

others' feet may walk in the same, and do deny and bear our testimony against all strife and wars and contentions. . . . Our weapons are not carnal, but spiritual. . . . And so we desire, and also expect to have liberty of our consciences and just rights and outward liberties, as other people of the nation, which we have promise of, from the word of a king. . . . Treason, treachery and false dealing we do utterly deny; false dealing, surmising or plotting against any creature on the face of the earth; and speak the Truth in plainness and singleness of heart; and all our desire is your good and peace and love and unity.

Margaret Fell, 1660

The Cross of Christ . . . truly overcomes the world, and leads a life of purity in the face of its allurements; they that bear it are not thus chained up, for fear they should bite; nor locked up, lest they should be stole away; no, they receive power from Christ their Captain, to resist the evil, and do that which is good in the sight of God: to despise the world, and love its reproach above its praise; and not only not to offend others, but love those that offend them.... True godliness doesn't turn men out of the world, but enables them to live better in it, and excites their endeavors to mend it; not hide their candle under a bushel, but set it upon a table in a candlestick.

William Penn, 1682

Every degree of luxury of what kind so ever, and every demand for money inconsistent with divine order, hath some connection with unnecessary labor. . . . To labor too hard or cause others to do so, that we may live conformable to customs which Christ our Redeemer contradicted by his example in the days of his flesh, and which are contrary to

divine order, is to manure a soil for propagating an evil seed in the earth.

John Woolman, c. 1763

Love was the first motion, and then a concern arose to spend some time with the Indians, that I might feel and understand their life and the spirit they live in, if haply I might receive some instruction from them, or they be in any degree helped forward by my following the leadings of Truth amongst them. . . . Afterward, feeling my mind covered with the spirit of prayer, I told the interpreters that I found it in my heart to pray to God, and I believed, if I prayed right, he would hear me, and expressed my willingness for them to omit interpreting, so our meeting ended with a degree of Divine love. Before our people went out I observed Papunehang (the man who had been zealous in laboring for a reformation in that town, being then very tender) spoke to one of the interpreters, and I was afterward told that he said in substance as follows: "I love to feel where words come from."

John Woolman, 1763

These testimonies are presented as a reference to actions Friends may be called to take. It is just as likely, however, that we will be challenged in different ways to live according to such key Quaker testimonies as equality, peace, simplicity, and integrity. Our testimonies are our guides as we seek to apply George Fox's advice in a world that is beyond his imagining, yet which offers myriad opportunities to be "valiant for the Truth." For Friends, faith and practice are inseparable.

Testimony of Integrity

The call for honesty lies at the heart of Quakerism. It is a testimony rooted in the Quaker respect for truthfulness. . . . Respect for this kind of integrity

calls for a correspondence between what one professes and how one translates that into action in real life.

Wilmer Cooper, 1990

Integrity was in a sense the first of the Quaker testimonies. Ever since Friends embraced Jesus' challenge to "Be ye perfect," the basis of our personal living has been laid deeper than mere respectability, deeper than the observance of some moral minimum based on the old law of "Thou shalt not." Friends are called to live with integrity Jesus' teachings and example in obedience to the Holy Spirit. This way of living causes a transformation in the fabric of our lives. A simplicity of purpose arises to live in the present in the Truth and order one's life so as to help bring about the realization of God's kingdom of heaven here on earth.

Integrity, essential to all relationships between one and another and between one and God, has always been a basic goal of Friends. Friends have been concerned to interact with integrity, to make our words and actions fit the Truth as we understand it. We endeavor to speak and act honestly and forthrightly, speaking plainly from our own experience of the Light in our lives. Friends strive to make their statements as accurate as possible, without exaggeration or omission. Thoughtful listening is as important as speaking and is a necessary part of communication. If we listen attentively to the expression of the Spirit, in ourselves and in others, words and action can become a means of knowing God. It sometimes takes courage to live according to our faith that God's power operates in us. As we attempt to conform our lives to the leadings of the Spirit, to integrate our beliefs and our actions, and to become more honest and authentic, we receive the strength and courage to follow our religious principles.

Friends regard the custom of swearing oaths as not only contrary to the teachings of Jesus but as implying the existence of a double standard of truth. Early Quakers were persecuted for refusing to take judicial or loyalty oaths. On all occasions when special statements are required, it is recommended that Friends take the opportunity to make simple affirmations, thus emphasizing that

their statements are only a part of their usual integrity of speech.

“However, I say to you do not swear at all. . . . Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No.’”

Matthew 5:34-37 (NRSV)

People swear to the end they may speak the truth, Christ would have them speak the truth to the end they might not swear.

William Penn (1644-1718)

Another by-product of truth-telling was the establishment of the one-price system of exchange. Prior to the introduction of this method by Friends, the price of goods and services was always haggled over and bartered until agreement was reached between buyer and seller. Often merchants had one price for the nobility and a different, sometimes higher, price for the commoner. With the one-price system of trade, people knew they wouldn't be taken advantage of by a Quaker merchant.

At the first convincement, when Friends could not put off their hats to people, or say You to a single person, but Thou and Thee; when they could not bow, or use flattering words in salutations, or adopt the fashions and customs of the world, many Friends, that were tradesmen of several sorts, lost their customers at the first; for the people were shy of them, and would not trade with them; so that for a time some Friends could hardly get money enough to buy bread. But afterwards, when people came to have experience of Friends' honesty and truthfulness, and found that their Yea was yea, and their Nay was nay; that they kept to a word in their dealings, and that they would not cozen and cheat them; but that if they sent a child to their shops for anything, they were as well used as if they had come themselves; the lives and conversations of Friends did preach, and reached to the witness of God in the people.

George Fox, 1653

Living The Testimony of Integrity

[Excerpted from *The Testimony of Integrity in the Religious Society of Friends* by Wilmer A. Cooper.]

The testimony of integrity can be articulated and practiced by Friends in four distinct ways.

- *The first is truth-telling, or simply not telling lies. This is the most obvious place to begin to live out the testimony of integrity. Friends have always been known for truthfulness and honesty in their relationships and dealings with others. This standard of truthfulness was grounded in Jesus' and James' Biblical injunction not to take an oath or to swear that one will tell the truth (Matthew 5:33-37; James 5:12). Friends were very conscientious about this, not only because taking oaths and swearing was forbidden by the Scriptures but because it implied a double standard of truth, thus suggesting that when not under oath it is all right to lie. Friends' concern was that followers of Christ should be known for telling the truth all the time and not just when called before a judge and sworn to tell the truth.*

... Many Quakers suffered persecution and imprisonment because they refused to exercise a double standard before judges in courts of law. Early Friends were thrown into jail more often for refusing to take the oath than for any other reason. Anybody who didn't like the Quakers could make a charge against them, have them arrested and brought before a judge, whereupon they were automatically thrown into jail, guilty or not, because they refused to swear that now they would tell the truth. ... The testimony of integrity calls for truth-telling under all circumstances and at all times.

- Second, integrity calls for authenticity, for genuineness, and for veracity in one's personhood. It calls us to be truly who we are and not be two-faced by trying to be something or somebody we are not. ...

The opposite of integrity of course is hypocrisy, which means phoniness, sham, and deception. Jesus has some scathing words for hypocrites in Matthew 23. He declares seven woes against the religious authorities of his time, the Scribes and Pharisees, who were hypocrites and pretenders of virtue and piety. We are all tempted to become pretenders in this way. The tendency to misrepresent our true selves is a common shortcoming we all have, but we do not always realize that we are violating our integrity every time we respond this way.

- Third integrity calls for obedience or, if you prefer, faithfulness to conscience illumined by the Light Within. For Quakers this is the seat of religious authority and, therefore, the touchstone of our faith. Here Quaker truth and integrity take on an existential quality. It is truth which may well have objective validity, as I believe it does, but if it is not truth which is internalized in each of us, and for which we take ownership, then it is not truth which is valid and binding for us. But once it lays hold of us, it is truth that will not let us go until we have acted upon it. This kind of truth is new and fresh and therefore vital. It is not grounded in dogma, creeds, abstract philosophical ideas, or theological affirmations. It is not to be found in religious textbooks or Quaker books of discipline, but it is grounded in a living faith and experience of the present moment. It is the basis for the Quaker testimonies – the testimonies which are a living witness to the inward leading of the Spirit of God in our lives.

• Fourth, the root meaning of the word “integrity” calls for wholeness. The word comes from the Latin “*integritas*,” which refers to a state or quality of being complete, that is, a condition of wholeness. The word “integrity” and the mathematical term “integer” all have a common meaning. When we look at this common meaning of “*integritas*,” or “integrity,” it points to a unity, which, when applied to persons, we call community. Integrity creates a sense of togetherness and belonging when applied to persons in community. Integrity forms the basis for a covenant relationship in which persons exercise a sense of responsibility and accountability toward one another. Individualism, which is preoccupied with doing one’s own thing, often with little concern for how it affects other people, dominates much of our behavior in Western society, and in our American culture in particular, and it affects the Religious Society of Friends as well. Thus, we need to recover the testimony of integrity, to balance this other attitude (individualism) when applied to wholeness in the corporate life of persons where there is a sense of responsibility and accountability toward one another. . . .

*Integrity in its root meaning and search for wholeness leads to an even deeper sense of community than we have described so far. This level of wholeness goes beyond the community of persons to a spiritual community with “the ground of our being,” to use the words of Paul Tillich. Here we need to associate integrity with the religious concept and experience of salvation. Now that may seem strange, because the word “salvation” is not fashionable anymore, except among radio and television evangelists and a few Fundamentalist church folk. But according to Paul Tillich the root meaning of “salvation” can be derived from the Latin *salvus* (or*

salus), which means “health” or “wholeness.” Surely all of us hope for health and wholeness in our lives, both physical and spiritual. If the wholeness aspect of integrity leads to a sense of community of persons, likewise it can lead us to an experience of spiritual wholeness in our relationship with God. This comes very close to what Saint Augustine meant when he prayed: “Thou hast created us for Thyself [Oh God], and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.”

Wilmer A. Cooper, 1990

Testimony of Equality

The testimony of human equality before God is one of the earliest Quaker social testimonies and is a cornerstone of Friends’ belief. Quaker equality does not imply equality of ability or economic resources but is based on the concept that there is that of God in every person and therefore that each person is due equal respect. This has led to a conscious effort to eliminate negative words and behavior that arise from distinctions in class, race, gender, sexual orientation, social status, age, or physical attributes.

It was opened to early Friends that God does not distinguish between priesthood and laity. Within the meeting, there are no positions of privilege. We are all responsible for the spiritual life of the meeting and the practical aspects of continuing and strengthening the community of Friends. All may be called to ministry and service according to their gifts.

As the Quaker movement became more organized through the establishment of regular local and regional gatherings for the care of Friends (monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings), questions arose regarding church authority. Unity emerged through listening closely to the Spirit, particularly in the leadings of more experienced Friends.

*And thus the Lord Jesus hath manifested himself
and his Power, without respect of Persons; and so*

let all mouths be stopt that would limit him, whose Power and Spirit is infinite, that is pouring it upon all flesh.

Margaret Fell, 1666

In the highly stratified English society of the seventeenth century, Friends' adherence to this testimony outside the meeting often made them seem rude or ill mannered. Quakers refused to use titles of honor or salutations implying superiority. It was common among English society at that time to address superiors in the royal plural "you" and familiars or inferiors in the singular "thee" or "thou."

This way of speaking proceeds from a high and proud mind . . . because that men commonly use the singular to beggars and to their servants; yea and in their prayers to God—so hath the pride of men placed God and beggars in the same category.

Robert Barclay, Apology, 1678

In keeping with this testimony Friends also refused to practice "hat honor," the taking off of one's hat in the presence of superiors or magistrates as a mark of respect. Even before Friends became pacifists, they were dismissed from the army for refusing to treat officers as superiors.

Friends pioneered in recognizing the gifts and rights of women. Women were members and leaders of their early meetings, listened to, and respected.

And may not the spirit of Christ speak in the female as well as in the male? Is he there to be limited? Who is it that dare limit the holy one of Israel? For the light is the same in the male and the female, which cometh from Christ, he by whom the world was made, and so Christ is one in all and not divided; and who is it that dare stop Christ's mouth?

George Fox, 1656

In 1671 George Fox urged the monthly meetings to set up parallel men's and women's meetings for business. A significant aspect of early Friends' organization was separate regular meetings of women, which arose to free women from customary social restraints on women's self-expression.

Women shared in the work of Quaker ministry as well as taking the lead in caring for the poor and for imprisoned Friends. The first person that George Fox convinced was Elizabeth Hooten, an English General Baptist minister, who shortly afterward became one of the first Quaker ministers. She preached in the public places, wrote pamphlets, and penned letters to King Charles II professing the innocence of Quakers. This Quaker grandmother traveled in the ministry to the New World and died in Jamaica on her second missionary trip traveling with George Fox.

As much as George Fox is credited with the vision that gave rise to the movement, Margaret Fell must be recognized as the nurturing spirit that helped sustain Friends through years of persecution and for establishment of the practical groundwork of our religious community. She had the gift of organization and concern for Friends in need. She wrote letters to struggling Friends encouraging them in their witness, pamphlets in support of women's public preaching, and letters to King Charles II petitioning for the release of George Fox and other imprisoned Friends. She provided a safe haven at Swarthmoor Hall for Friends to recuperate after prison or persecution. She visited Friends in prison and was herself imprisoned for her public witness.

And now also some ancient women-friends did meet together, to consider what appertained to them as their most immediate care and concern to inspect the circumstances and conditions of such who were imprisoned on truth's account, and to provide things needful to supply their wants. And what did or might more immediately concern men-friends, the women would acquaint them therewith. These women did also inquire into, and inspect the wants

and necessities of the poor, who were convinced of the truth. And they sat not still until the cry of the poor came to their houses.

William Crouch, 1712

How healing to come into the Religious Society of Friends, whose founder saw clearly that the Light of God is not limited to the male half of the human race. Membership and participation have helped me grow toward wholeness, as I have followed my calling into a ministry that embraces all of life. Though I believe deeply in women's liberation, I cannot put men down, or I join in consciousness-raising activities that foster hatred of everything masculine. I have loved the men in my life too deeply for that kind of betrayal.

As women gain rights and become whole human beings, men too can grow into wholeness, no longer having to carry the whole burden of responsibility for running the affairs of humankind, but in humility accepting the vast resources, as yet not very much drawn on, and the wisdom of women in solving the colossal problems of the world.

Elizabeth Watson, 1975

Friends believe that everyone is a "child of God" and should relate to one another in those terms. Everyone is regarded as of infinite worth and must be treated as a person who can be drawn by love to live a full and worthwhile life, which manifests respect and consideration for others. When Friends are at their best, that love leads to unity in their meetings. It can also be effective in relations among all people.

There is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave nor free, there is no longer male nor female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28 NRSV

Friends came more slowly to recognize the evil of slavery and of discrimination in general, and some have been guilty of the prejudices of the broader society. In recent years, however, most have taken increasingly clear stands against all forms of discrimination. As we continue to seek the Light, habits and attitudes of a less sensitive past must increasingly give way to new understandings that affirm the value of all human beings.

Living the Testimony of Equality

Social Justice

Friends have worked in a variety of ways to further social justice. Historically, Friends have worked for the abolition of slavery, improvement of conditions in prisons and mental health hospitals, and women's right to vote, among other concerns. Today some Friends work with groups who have been victimized by prejudice or exploitation. Friends should recognize that prejudices are very prevalent even within the Religious Society of Friends and that the problem of prejudice is complicated by advantages that have come to some at the expense of others. Exploitation impairs the human quality of the exploiter as well as of the exploited.

Enunciation of the principle of equality of human beings in the sight of God is important and necessary, but it is not sufficient. Realization of equality involves such matters as independence and control of one's own life. Friends seek to bring to light structures, institutions, language, and thought processes which subtly support discrimination and exploitation. Therefore, Friends are led to aid the efforts of the exploited to attain self-determination and social, political, and economic justice and to change attitudes and practices taken for granted.

Racial Equality

What began as an understanding that all men were equal, and was first manifested in Quaker practices that denied class and

social distinctions, was expanded over time to recognition of gender equality and later to racial equality as well. John Woolman's long witness—from approximately 1745 to his death in 1772—against slavery put many Friends at the front of an ongoing effort against racial bigotry. Today, we are brought to a new consciousness of the continuing need for that self-examination and witness by various Quaker committees on racism.

It is a simple truth to say that if we would cast out racism we must “love one another as Jesus has loved us,” yet most need more detailed instruction. The goal of good human relations is a community in which each individual and each group can feel sure of opportunities for self-development, full realization of potential, and rewarding relations with others.

If one begins with presumptions of moral and mental greatness founded upon body color, the conduct and conclusions flowing there from will be erroneous. If one begins with prayer and intellectual honesty, profound consideration of the Queries together with a sharing of truthful—if embarrassing—answers will prime our spiritual pumps so we may start to reverse the descent from grace and begin to move towards spiritual wholeness.

Almanina Barbour and Walter Sullivan, 1984

Testimony of Peace

All human beings are children of God; thus Friends are called to love and respect all persons and to seek to overcome evil with good. Friends' peace testimony arises from the power of Christ working in our hearts. Our words and lives should testify to this power and should stand as a positive witness in a world still torn by strife and violence. In explaining his unwillingness to serve in the army, George Fox said of the Commonwealth in 1651:

*I told them . . . that I lived in the virtue of that life
and power that takes away the occasion of all wars.*

George Fox, 1651

To early Friends, pacifism flowed so inevitably and directly from other more fundamental principles that little was said about it until Quakers were accused of plotting to overthrow the English government. In 1660, a few Friends were arrested in the belief that they were involved with a group called the “Fifth Monarchy.” This group tried to seize London by force in preparation for the second coming of Christ. In response George Fox and other Quaker ministers stated the position of the Religious Society of Friends clearly in the following declaration to Charles II (1660):

*We utterly deny all outward wars and strife, and
fightings with outward weapons, for any end, or
under any pretense whatsoever; this is our testimony
to the whole world. . . . The Spirit of Christ, by
which we are guided, is not changeable, so as once
to command us from a thing as evil, and again to
move us unto it; and we certainly know, and testify
to the world, that the Spirit of Christ, which leads
us into all truth, will never move us to fight and war
against any man with outward weapons, neither
for the Kingdom of Christ nor for the Kingdoms of
this world. . . . Therefore, we cannot learn war any
more.*

Friends Declaration to King Charles II, 1660

The Religious Society of Friends is a historic peace church. Since Friends’ first allegiance is to a loving God, we are called to obey God rather than human law when this allegiance is challenged by the demands of the state. We support those who oppose war by performing work as conscientious objectors and those who resist any cooperation with the military. We hold in love, but disagree with, those of our members who feel that they must enter the armed forces. We recognize that the entire military system is inconsistent with Jesus’ example of love. We work toward the day when

armaments and conscription will no longer be tolerated and we can live in the peaceable kingdom.

Our historic peace testimony is nothing if not also a living testimony as we work to give concrete expression to our ideals. We would alleviate the suffering caused by war. We would refrain from participating in all forms of violence and repression against people. We would make strenuous efforts to secure international agreements for the control of armaments and to remove the domination of militarism in our society. We would seek to be involved in building interpersonal skills and local, national, and transnational institutions to deal with conflict nonviolently. We seek to model to others the path of love and non-violence in the face of the horrors of warfare so that all can come to understand that war is not the way.

O that we who declare against wars, and acknowledge our trust to be in God only, may walk in the light and therein examine our foundation and motives in holding great estates. May we look upon our treasures, the furniture of our houses, and our garments, and try whether the seeds of war have nourishment in these our possessions?

John Woolman, 1763

The most basic task of our peacemaking is to fill the spiritual void in our world by replacing the fear which cripples human efforts with faith in the power of God's love. We look beyond the evil we oppose to the establishment of the "blessed community." Lifelong, sacrificial efforts in peacemaking require us to acknowledge our inability in a complex society to disengage ourselves completely from it. Each Friend has the responsibility to seek and to live the full personal implications of the peace testimony. This is a spiritual and very practical challenge. Following God's promptings, the Inward Christ roots out that which is selfish and impels us to share each other's suffering in that which brings unity and peaceful relationships. Our hope lies in the power of God's peace moving through our meetings, small devotional groups, and wider associations.

Living the Testimony of Peace

The Individual and the Peace Testimony

In our individual lives, the peace testimony leads us to accept differences as an opportunity for loving engagement with those with whom we disagree. That love can often be expressed in creative, nonviolent resolution of the disagreement. When we encounter people of sincere religious conviction whose views are profoundly different from our own, that love can also be manifested by acknowledging the sincerity of the other while faithfully expressing our own convictions.

The peace testimony also leads us as individuals to consider seriously our employment, our investments, our purchases, our payment of taxes, and our manner of living as they relate to violence. We try to become sensitive to the covert as well as the overt violence inherent in some of our long-established social practices and institutions. Friends wish to avoid, for example, benefiting not only from the manufacture of arms or the excessive use of natural resources but also from company practices that do violence to employees, consumers, or the natural world.

Friends and Military Activity

We support those who do not cooperate with conscription and those who oppose war by performing work as conscientious objectors. While counseling against military service, we hold in love our members who feel they must undertake it. Some Friends have decided to serve in the military as noncombatants.

Friends work as we are able to alleviate the suffering caused by war. We acknowledge the contribution that military forces have made in some situations to the relief of suffering, but we are troubled by the use of agents of destruction for such purposes and by the failure of nations to support the creation of nonviolent groups to undertake humanitarian missions.

Alternatives to War

The almost unimaginable devastation that results from modern war makes ever more urgent its total elimination. We work for greater understanding at all levels, from the kindergarten to the United Nations, of proven techniques for the nonviolent resolution of conflict. We would promote and assist programs of conversion to peaceful uses of facilities built for war. Friends are led to support the Peace Tax Fund, the World Court, and the United Nations as alternatives to war.

World Order

Friends in America since William Penn have sought to promote institutions of peace. In this era we promote a vision of global living that recognizes the essential unity of a human family sharing a fragile planet. We prefer governing institutions that work face-to-face within small communities. But we acknowledge the need for governing institutions at all levels, both as supportive, coordinating bodies and as courts of appeal from the arbitrary actions of lesser jurisdictions. We are deeply distressed by a world dominated by heavily armed nation-states. We apply our gifts—of spirit, of intellect, of time and energy—to work for a new international order, within which our communities will be able to redirect their resources from dependence on the manufacture of arms to human needs and the preservation of the earth.

Testimony of Simplicity

Simplicity, also called simple living, has long been a testimony of Friends. A life of simplicity is one that is centered in God and focused on core values and faith. It need not be cloistered and may even be a busy life, but its activities and expressions should be correlated and directed toward the simple, direct purpose of keeping one's communication with God open and unencumbered. Simplicity is cutting away all that is extraneous. Simplicity is being without sham and is based in the right ordering of one's priorities in placing devotion to God at the center of life. When sought intentionally,

simplicity, like the other testimonies, is not something one should be driven to achieve. It is in essence a free gift of God's grace.

It's a dangerous thing to lead young Friends much into the observation of outward things, which may be easily done, for they can soon get into an outward garb, to be all alike outwardly, but this will not make them true Christians: it's the Spirit that gives life. I would be loath to have a hand in these things....

Margaret Fell Fox, 1698

My mind through the power of Truth was in a good degree weaned from the desire of outward greatness, and I was learning to be content with real conveniences that were not costly; so that a way of life free from much Entanglements appeared best for me, tho' the income was small. I had several offers of business that appeared profitable, but saw not my way clear to accept of them, as believing the business proposed would be attended with more outward care & cumber than was required of me to engage in. I saw that a humble man, with the Blessing of the Lord, might live on a little, and that where the heart was set on greatness, success in business did not satisfy the craving; but that commonly with an increase of wealth, the desire for wealth increased. There was a care on my mind so to pass my time, as to things outward, that nothing might hinder me from the most steady attention to the voice of the True Shepherd.

John Woolman, c. 1744

I wish I might emphasize how a life becomes simplified when dominated by faithfulness to a few concerns. Too many of us have too many irons in the fire. We get distracted by the intellectual claim to our interest in a thousand and one good things, and before we know it we are pulled and hauled

breathlessly along by an over-burdened program of good committees and good undertakings. I am persuaded that this fevered life of church workers is not wholesome. Undertakings get plastered on from the outside because we can't turn down a friend. Acceptance of service on a weighty committee should really depend upon an answering imperative within us, not merely upon a rational calculation of the factors involved. The concern-oriented life is ordered and organized from within. And we learn to say No as well as Yes by attending to the guidance of inner responsibility. Quaker simplicity needs to be expressed not merely in dress and architecture and the height of tombstones but also in the structure of a relatively simplified and coordinated life-program of social responsibilities. And I am persuaded that concerns introduce that simplification, and along with it that intensification which we need in opposition to the hurried, superficial tendencies of our age.

Thomas R. Kelly, 1941

For some there is a danger that care for the future may lead to undue anxiety and become a habit of saving for its own sake, resulting in the withholding of what should be expended for the needs of the family or devoted to the service of the Society. The temptation to trust in riches comes in many forms, and can only be withstood through faith in our Father and his providing care.

London Yearly Meeting, 1945

Simplicity consists not in the use of particular forms but in avoiding self-indulgence, in maintaining humility of spirit, and in keeping the material surroundings of our lives directly serviceable to necessary ends. This does not mean that life need be poor and bare or destitute of joy and beauty. All forms of art may aid in the attainment of the spiritual life, and often the most simple lines,

themes, or moments, when characterized by grace and directness, are the most beautiful.

Living a simple life can take forms as diverse as the people we are and requires listening to the Inward Light for guidance in making choices. Considerations involve all aspects of our lives, including what material possessions we acquire, how much and what kind of activities and relationships we engage in and how we nurture our spiritual lives. Do we choose what is simple and useful? Do we take joy in our commitments?

Living the Testimony of Simplicity

Walking Gently on the Earth

Poverty [Simplicity] does not mean scorn for goods and property. It means the strict limitation of goods that are for personal use. It means the opposite of the reckless abuse and misuse of property that leaves our country spotted with the graveyards of broken and abandoned machinery. It means a horror of war, first because it ruins human life and health and the beauty of the earth, but second because it destroys goods that could be used to relieve misery and hardship and to give joy. It means a distaste even for the small carelessnesses that we see prevalent, so that beautiful and useful things are allowed to become dirty and battered through lack of respect for them. We have in America in this day the strange spectacle of many comely and well-equipped small homes kept in a state of neglect and disorder that would shock peasants anywhere.

Mildred Binns Young, 1956

We recognize that the well-being of the earth is fundamentally a spiritual concern. From the beginning, it was through the wonders of nature that people saw God. How we treat the earth and

its creatures is a basic part of our relationship with God. Our planet as a whole, not just the small parts of it in our immediate custody, requires our responsible attention.

As Friends become more aware of the interconnectedness of all life on this planet and the devastation caused by neglect of any part of it, we have become more willing to extend our sense of community to encompass all living things. We must now consider how to combine the belief that we humans are called to act as stewards of the natural world with the growing view of human actions as the major threat to the ecosystem.

Friends are indeed called to walk gently on the earth. Wasteful and extravagant consumption is a major cause of destruction of the environment. The right sharing of the world's remaining resources requires that developed nations reduce their present levels of consumption so that people in underdeveloped nations can have more and the earth's life-sustaining systems can be restored. The world cannot tolerate indefinitely the present rate of consumption by technologically developed nations.

Friends are called to become models and patterns of simple living and concern for the earth. Some may find it difficult to change their accustomed lifestyle; others recognize the need and have begun to adopt ways of life which put the least strain on the world's resources of energy, clean air, water, and soil.

Rapid population growth leads to famine, war, and destruction of natural resources. In simplifying our own lives we may find it difficult to limit the number of children we have. Voluntary restraint in procreation along with simplicity in living hold the promise of restoring ecological balance.

Recreation

Recreation can promote spiritual well-being; it may bring a needed balance into life and contribute to the wholeness of

personality. Simplicity directs the individual to choose those forms of recreation that rest and build up the body, that refresh and enrich mind and spirit. Consideration needs to be given to the proper expenditure of time, money, and strength and the moral and physical welfare of others as well as oneself. Healthful recreation includes games, sports, and other physical exercise; gardening and the study and enjoyment of nature; travel; books; the fellowship of friends and family; and the arts and handicrafts, which bring creative self-expression and appreciation of beauty. Recreations in which one is a participant rather than merely a spectator are particularly beneficial. Also, Friends find that simplicity involves refraining from excess in general, including avoiding the addictive use of alcohol, drugs, tobacco, gambling, and even a compulsive engagement in work, causes, or hobbies. Such excess can lead to a life harmful to health, loving relationships, and spiritual experience.

In 1755 London Yearly Meeting issued this query on alcohol:

Are Friends careful to avoid the excessive use of spirituous liquors, the unnecessary frequenting of taverns and places of diversions and to keep to true moderation and temperance on account of births, marriages, burials and other occasions?

Implicit in the above reference to “places of diversions” is the Friends’ testimony against gambling:

Gambling by risking money haphazardly disregards our belief that possessions are a trust. The persistent appeal to covetousness . . . is fundamentally opposed to the unselfishness which was taught by Jesus Christ and by the New Testament as a whole. The attempt, which is inseparable from gambling, to make profit out of the inevitable loss and possible suffering of others is the antithesis of that love for one’s neighbor on which our Lord insisted. Moreover, we must consider the moral and spiritual plight of those who by indulgence in gambling become possessed of large

financial resources for which they have rendered no service to the community.

London Yearly Meeting, 1959

Concerns Arising From Multiple Testimonies

Unity in the Community

One of the queries in longest continuous use asks, “*Are love and unity maintained among you?*” (1682). Early Friends did not consider themselves a sect, an institutionalized permanent minority, but rather part of a great movement that would soon sweep the world. Unity and mutual care within the Quaker community in the face of persecution demonstrated as a witness to the world the working of Christ among his people. Without formal church membership, doctrine, or creed, early Quakers relied on the movings of the Spirit, seeking God’s will in the “sense of the meeting” and the leadings of “weighty Friends.” The process of individuals submitting themselves to the corporate revelation of God’s truth forms the basis of Friends’ approach to Christian unity.

The way is one; Christ the truth of God; and he that is in the faith, and in the obedience to that light which shines from his Spirit into the heart of every believer, hath a taste of the one heart and of the one way, and knoweth that no variety of practices, which is of God, can make a breach in the true unity.

Isaac Penington, 1659

True unity may be found under great apparent differences. This unity is spiritual, it expresses itself in many ways, and we need divine insight that we may recognize its working. We need forbearance, sympathy, and love, in order that, while remaining loyal to the truth as it has come to us, we may move forward with others to a larger and richer experience and expression of the will of God.

London Yearly Meeting, 1916

Stewardship of Economic Resources

All that we have, in our selves and our possessions, are gifts from God, entrusted to us for our responsible use. Jesus reminds us:

*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth.
... For where your treasure is, there your heart will
be also. ... You cannot serve God and mammon
[wealth].*

Matt. 6: 19-24 NRSV

Stewardship is an outgrowth of our major testimonies. To be good stewards in God's world calls on us to examine and consider the ways in which our testimonies for integrity, peace, equality, and simplicity interact to guide our relationships with all life.

In a world of economic interactions far more complex than George Fox or John Woolman could have imagined, Friends need to examine their decisions about obtaining, holding, and using money and other assets to see whether they find in them the seeds not only of war but also of self-indulgence, injustice, and ecological disaster. Good stewardship of our resources consists both of avoidance of those evils and of actions that advance peace, simple living, justice, and a healthy ecosystem. Good stewardship also requires attention to the economic needs of Quaker and other organizations that advance Friends' testimonies.

Right Sharing

Friends worldwide have accepted the idea that the testimony of equality implies a commitment in the economic realm to the right sharing of the world's resources. Friends in comfortable circumstances need to find practical expression of the testimony of simplicity in their earning and spending. They consider what economic equality and simplicity mean for their own lives and what level of income is consonant with their conclusions. They should consider likewise what portion of that income could be shared beyond the immediate family. That decision entails balancing the

social value of self-sufficiency against the social value of greater help for those more needy. It also requires judgments about what expenditures are essential and what are discretionary and about the values that will underlie discretionary expenditures.

Civic Duties

As a part of our witness to what society may become, Friends may be called to participate in public life as voters, public officials, or participants in community groups or professional societies. As private citizens in the public arena, Friends bear witness by respect for others, flexibility, reconciliation, and forgiveness in difficulties, as well as faithful persistence in pursuit of their leadings. In public office, Friends have an opportunity to bear witness to the power which integrity, courage, respect for others, and careful attention to different points of view can exert in creating a just community. Where there is a conflict between loyalty to God and a seeming necessity for action as a public official, a prayerful search for divine guidance may lead to a suitable resolution of the conflict or to a decision to resign. Our primary allegiance is to God.

Criminal Justice

Many early Friends were victims of an arbitrary and unreasonable legal system. Knowledge of that experience has opened many later Friends to that of God in convicted persons. Friends continue to undertake work in prisons by ministering to the spiritual and material needs of inmates. Believing that the penal system often reflects structural and systemic injustice in our society, Friends seek alternatives. Friends have acted out of the conviction that redemption and restorative justice, not retribution, are the right tasks of the criminal justice system. We strongly oppose capital punishment, finding it contrary to the teachings of Jesus and the principle of “that of God in every person.”

Seeking to heal the wounds of criminal actions, Friends are called to many different kinds of service in the criminal justice system. Prison visiting, victim support services, conflict resolution

training for staff of correctional institutions and offenders, and work to abolish the use of the death penalty are typical of these services. Such service is undertaken in order to restore the victim, the offender, and the community to the greatest extent possible. The healing love, and the trust in divine leading that such disciplined service requires, can greatly assist the rebuilding of broken lives.

Civil Disobedience

From their earliest days Friends have counseled obedience to the state except when the law or ruling involved has appeared to be contrary to God's leading. The state has no claim to moral infallibility. Primary allegiance is to God.

If the state's commands appear to be contrary to divine leading, Friends take prayerful counsel before responding. This usually also involves testing one's proposed action by the judgment of the meeting. When the decision is to refuse obedience to the law or order of the state, in accordance with the dictates of one's conscience as revealed in the Light, Friends act openly and make clear the grounds of their action.

If the decision involves incurring legal penalties, Friends generally have suffered willingly for the sake of their convictions. Friends not personally involved in such actions can strengthen the meeting community by supporting their fellow members with spiritual encouragement and, when necessary, with material aid.

Membership in Secret Societies

Friends' testimony against membership in secret societies has some of its source in the opposition in England to the Quaker Act of 1662 and the Conventicle Acts of 1664 and 1670. These acts forbade attendance at Friends' meetings (Quaker Act) and later at any other nonconformist religious services (Conventicle Acts). While Quakers continued to meet openly and publicly, others of the "separated peoples" (separated from the Church of England) began to meet in secret for fear of the resulting persecution. Quakers have

noted the inherent ethical and moral problems of groups who meet in secret. The 1953 edition of the discipline of Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) states:

The Society of Friends bears testimony against membership in any secret organizations. While some of these are less objectionable than others, wherever the obligation to secrecy exists, Friends should not join. We believe no one has any moral right to pledge obedience by oath or affirmation to the dictates of another and thus surrender independence of judgment. Secret societies are capable of producing much evil and incapable of producing any good, which might not be effected by safe and open means.

And more specifically from New England Yearly Meeting, 1930:

We especially admonish our younger members against college societies whose proceedings are hedged with secrecy. . . . The exclusiveness of secret societies gives to the fellowship which they promote a flavor of selfishness.

Sexuality

Quakers, like others, in recent years have experienced a growing understanding and appreciation of human sexuality and its important role in our lives. In the words of the British Friends who wrote Towards a Quaker View of Sex,

Sexuality, looked at dispassionately, is neither good nor evil—it is a fact of nature and a force of immeasurable power. But looking at it as Christians we have felt impelled to state without reservation that it is a glorious gift of God. Throughout the whole of living nature it makes possible an endless and

fascinating variety of creatures, a lavishness, a beauty of form and colour surpassing all that could be imagined as necessary to survival.

In contrast to this recognition of vibrancy and beauty, there are lingering misunderstandings and ignorance about sexuality, especially in relation to our sexual needs and urges. This can be harmful to people of all ages. Fuller knowledge and understanding are sorely needed. Sex education is therefore important for everyone. Readily available information and open discussion of human sexuality are to be encouraged for both children and adults.

People experience their sexuality from the beginning of life and need to learn what this means to them. Parents and the meeting can encourage children in their learning about this meaning by constructively supporting the child's natural interest in his or her own sexuality and in that of others. Parents teach their children primarily by the example of their lives together. Ideally they demonstrate mutual love, affection, consideration, and trust in a lasting relationship that includes sexual gratification and joy.

We are challenged to discipline our sexual behavior in the light of our growing awareness of overall sexuality. This concept includes keeping sexual behavior in the context of the total interpersonal relationship rather than treating sexual activity as an end. Casual, exploitative, or promiscuous sexual behavior can produce emotional and physical suffering. In dealing with sexual matters, care and concern for others is no less important than care and concern for one's self.

The mystery of sex continues to be greater than our capacity to comprehend it, no matter how much we learn about it. We engage in it, in often too frantic efforts to enjoy it but, more subtly, also to try to fathom its ever recurring power over us. Surely this power and its mystery relate to the mystery of God's relationship to us. The mistake we have made

throughout the ages has been to load onto sex the incubus of success or failure of marriage, to look upon sex as a resolution, an ending. In reality it offers us, if we could only see it, a fresh beginning every time in that relationship of which it is a part.

Mary S. Calderone, 1973

Sexual Preference

We are concerned with the quality of relationships, not with their outward appearances. This insight has brought increasing light to our views of those who are in nontraditional relationships, both gay and straight, and we are looking anew and without judgment at, for example, committed relationships outside of marriage and the choice to be a single parent.

Now more aware of the socially-inflicted suffering of people who love others of the same sex, we affirm the power and joy of non-exploitive, loving relationships. As a Society and as individuals, we oppose arbitrary social, economic, or legal abridgement of the right to share this love.

Pacific Yearly Meeting, 1972

In a world which hears vitriolic statements against homosexuals made by elected officials and religious persons, we who proclaim a concern for equality and our love for all are called to act. In our Religious Society, the call may not find unity in expression, yet it exists. We work to create and sustain a loving, affirming, safe community within the Society of Friends where all committed relationships can be honored, nurtured, and celebrated in the manner of Friends. We are called to love “that of God” in the world’s peoples and strive to bring about this same loving, affirming, and safe community worldwide.

Home and Children

Parents are the child's first teachers. It is in the home that Friends' principles first become practices. The home is founded upon love and depends constantly upon loving sympathy, understanding, and cooperation. Love binds the family together and yet allows freedom for each member to develop into the person he or she is meant to be. Loving guidance that is constructive, and not authoritarian or possessive, will help children discover their potential and their interests. Love reaches further than words and is understood long before words have meaning. The love of parents for God, for each other, and for their children brings stability and security. This outpouring of the Spirit contributes to the religious atmosphere of the home.

Hospitality in the home is a vital force in spiritual nurture. The contacts of parents with their children's companions and the children's association with adult guests are important influences. Parental attitudes toward neighbors and acquaintances are often reflected in the children. Family conversation may determine whether or not children will look for the good in the people they meet, and whether they will be sensitive to that of God in everyone.

The organization of the business of living so that there is time for companionship, for sharing the beauty and the wonder of small, everyday happenings, is an important responsibility of parents. A home that is not cluttered with too many possessions, where there is orderliness without a sense of constraint, and where there is time for the family to enjoy one another will help to develop well-integrated lives.

The home provides an opportunity for devotional reading and prayer. Many parents feel the need for regular times of daily worship. Children may not consciously feel this same need, but in everyday happenings, they are often keenly aware of the closeness of the Holy Spirit. Family worship is especially appropriate in hours of joy, sorrow, or special difficulty.

I have seen much advantage to children, and indeed to whole families, from the practice of a solemn pause at meals. It learns children stillness, decency, and reverence; and where it is done in a feeling manner, with minds rightly turned to feel after God, and experience his blessing, and is not practiced in a slight formal manner, it tends to season and solemnize the minds of young and old. I am morally certain, that I have many a day gone through the cares and concerns of life, with much more composure, stability, satisfaction and propriety, for the strength and assistance I have found in drawing near to God in solemn silence in my family; and I wish the practice of reverently adoring him in this way, may increase more and more.

Job Scott, (1751-1793)

Friends' Experience of Living the Testimonies

The promise of the Holy Spirit was to a group. We need one another to strengthen each other's will to goodness. The concern of an individual should be laid before the worshipping group, so that corporate guidance may be given by an expression of unity or disunity. The life and teachings of Jesus, seen not so much in detail as in totality, provide another check, which should be employed in seeking guidance.

Friends World Conference, 1952

Our testimonies arise from our way of worship. Our way of worship evokes from deep within us at once an affirmation and a celebration, an affirmation of the reality of that Light which illumines the spiritual longing of humanity, and a celebration of the continual resurrection within us of the springs of

hope and love; a sense that each of us is, if we will, a channel for a power that is both within and beyond us.

Lorna M. Marsden, 1986

A Quaker testimony is a belief that stems from our fundamental understanding of religious truth. It is a corporately held belief about how we should individually act. In practicing them, we witness to our understanding of the very nature of God's spirit of love and truth.

Jonathan Dale, 1996

BLESSED COMMUNITY: QUAKER FAITH, TESTIMONY, AND PRACTICE

Community as Quaker Faith and Testimony

. . . for when I came into the silent assemblies of God's people, I felt a secret power among them, which touched my heart, and as I gave way unto it, I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up, and so I became thus knit and united unto them, hungering more and more after the increase of this power and life, whereby I might feel myself perfectly redeemed.

Robert Barclay, 1678

For the first generation of Friends the testimonies were a prophetic challenge to what they perceived as a vain, unrighteous order around them. To be a prophetic challenge meant to follow the examples of the Hebrew prophets, who, following a direct leading from God, called society to righteousness and articulated what must change for the people to be able to live in justice, mercy, and love.

Sandra Cronk, 1991

The Quaker meeting is a faith community, grounded in the shared experience of God's guidance and grace felt in our meetings for worship, our meetings for worship with a concern for business, and our fellowship. We are a diverse group of individuals who have been drawn together by the Spirit. At some point in each of our spiritual journeys, a longing to find a faith and community that could speak to our condition brought us to Quaker meeting. Many Friends describe the experience of their first visit to meeting as "coming home." It is only with God's Spirit that such a diverse group of individuals can realize and embody the kind of unity, belonging, and community that answers to that of God within us.

The Quaker meeting is meant to be a blessed community—a living testimony to a social order that embodies God’s peace, justice, love, compassion, and joy, and is an example and invitation to a better way of life. Like our other testimonies, community can be a prophetic call to the rest of society.

From their earliest beginnings, Quakers have witnessed to their experience of the wholeness that God intends for us in this lifetime on earth. The Spirit calls us to live in a loving relationship with God, with each other, and with all of creation. George Fox showed us a way that was to be found not only through individual pursuit but especially in a worshipping community. Early Quakers identified their experience of God’s presence among them with the Biblical message about living as a “people of God”—a community living under God’s guidance embodying peace, justice, joy, wisdom, and all the fruits of the Spirit.

We hold the calming peace of the Presence in our being, yet Friends today may feel overwhelmed with the many needs and injustices we see in our society and the world. Some may point to the loss of community as a reason that these problems are multiplying—and to the need for reclaiming and building community in order to solve the world’s problems.

Living in blessed community requires a shift in our thinking as the Light shows us our interdependence and increases our empathy with all creation. We come to understand that building compassionate and healthy relationships with others and with all creation is what God asks us to do. Our spiritual growth depends on it.

Because of this emphasis on interconnectedness and compassion, living in blessed community can be a vital part of our witness for peace, social justice, and care for the earth.

Our inability to get along with each other threatens all life on this planet. . . . I think our meetings become Blessed Communities by becoming places

where we can engage in learning how to get along with each other, where we consciously learn by doing. Our meetings are the place we can experiment and experience, the place where we can make mistakes and then learn from our mistakes.

Marty Walton, 1994

If there is to be a religious solution to the social problem there must also be renewed in a disintegrating society the sense of community, of mutual-ity, of responsible brotherhood for all . . .

American Friends Service Committee, 1955

The Individual in Community

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works, and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Matt. 5: 14-16 NRSV

Each of us has unique and creative contributions to make as we allow the Light to shine through us. A meeting community needs the God-given leadings and spiritual gifts of each of its members. Individuals, in turn, need the meeting community to be a safe place to explore whether their leadings are from the Light and to exercise their gifts and abilities. This individuality and diversity of gifts can develop and be celebrated because the unity of the group resides in the Spirit through real connections and commitments to God and to each other, not in outward conformity.

The spiritual understanding of individuality stands in sharp contrast to the “rugged individualism” which is rampant in our culture. For generations, people have abandoned traditional forms of community—small towns and extended families—for various

reasons, among them the pursuit of personal economic mobility, “progress,” and wealth. Individualism has become a value system in which the rights of the individual are often believed to be in conflict and competition with the needs of the community and the environment.

Our meetings are living entities, not theories. . . . We can't nurture our spirits in isolation from all the other ways we relate to each other—our spiritual lives can't be separated out. Whether we want it to be this way or not, we inevitably find that our whole being is engaged in spiritual growth.

Marty Walton, 1994

. . . Here in the United States we put great value in our individual freedom, in our right to choose, and we hold very tightly to that right. But it grieves me that so little is trumpeted about our responsibility to choose wisely. . . .

People have come to believe it is our right to act however we wish, without looking at the consequences to either the human or wider community in which we are embedded. This is a big current battle zone: individual rights versus responsibility and the taking into account of long-term consequences. . . . If Quakers have nothing else to offer the wider world it might be this: our practice of using corporate discernment to determine what is best for the body as a whole, balancing the needs of the individual with the good of the community.

Lisa Lofland Gould, 2002

Our Gracious Creator cares and provides for all His Creatures. His tender mercies are over all His works; and, so far as His love influences our minds, so far we become interested in His workmanship and feel a desire to take hold of every opportunity to lessen distresses of the afflicted and increase the

happiness of the Creation. Here we have a prospect of one common interest from which our own is inseparable, that to turn all the treasure we possess into the channel of Universal Love becomes the business of our lives.

John Woolman, 1772

Community is the context in which people come to understand their relatedness.

Parker Palmer, 1977

Quaker Social Order (Gospel Order)

. . . [A]nd keep the gospel order . . . so that in all your men's and women's meetings, see that virtue flow, and see that all your words be gracious, and see that love flows, which bears all things, that kindness, tenderness and gentleness may be among you, and that the fruits of the good spirit may abound. . . . For you have the light to see all evil, and the power to withstand it, and to see that nothing be lacking.

George Fox, 1671

Another aspect of our Quaker testimony of community also requires a shift in our thinking as we learn to live in a new social order. Friends' experience is that the creative power of the Spirit empowers us to recognize our interdependence and to live in a cooperative relationship with others. Gospel order is a traditional Quaker term for the social order the Spirit desires for us.

Living in gospel order, also known as good order or right order, requires giving up our reliance on those social structures that are based in power over others. Friends' experience is that a social order based on hierarchies and privilege inevitably leads to injustice and war. In gospel order we learn to rely on God's power and guidance in building a non-hierarchical social order which values equality and peacemaking.

Our Quaker organizational structures of monthly meetings and yearly meetings, committees, and affiliations with other Friends organizations embody a non-hierarchical order. All of our Quaker practices help to keep us organized according to our discernment of how the Spirit is leading us forward.

. . . living in Gospel Order means living in the power of God, in the organizing and harmonizing power of God. Dozens of times in his Journal Fox wrote "The Power of God was over all." He and early Friends saw this as a power which can bring forth the words and organizational arrangements which are appropriate in a given situation.

William Taber, 1994

Organization is a good servant but a bad master; the living fellowship within the Church must remain free to mould organization into the fresh forms demanded by its own growth and the changing needs of the time.

William Charles Braithwaite, 1905

One might say that gospel order is the vessel, which contains (and therefore shapes) the Quaker edition of the Christian gospel, giving the Quaker message its particular flavor. Gospel order is not God or any aspect of the Trinity, but it is an organizing principle by which Friends come to a clearer understanding of our relationship to God in all of the divine manifestations and the responsibilities of that relationship. An attention to gospel order enables the meeting faith community to perceive and accept the spiritual gifts, which God offers, as well as to develop and exercise those gifts as God desires. Finally, gospel order is both a distinctive aspect of Quaker witness and testimony and the means by which Friends come to understand how they are to witness to the world.

Gospel order is pervasive; it is the order and harmony that characterizes every part of creation when that part is functioning according to the divine will—the shining of stars as well as the making of bread. It has been the experience of Friends that no part of their lives as individuals or as a faith community is separate from their vision of gospel order.

Lloyd Lee Wilson, 1993

The Practice of Community

Responsibilities of Friends

And Friends, meet together, and know one another in that which is eternal. . .

George Fox, 1657

The way that Jesus lived among men shows us the way that God lives among men and the way in which we are to live with one another. It was a way of fellowship. And fellowship, as Jesus understood it, was not mastery, but a living comradeship which respected the freedom of others and safeguarded instead of crushing out the growth of their personalities.

William Charles Braithwaite, 1921

God guides us to a place of empathy, care, and joy in each other's company. Fellowship in the Spirit has a distinctive liveliness, openness, mutuality, and ease.

The more we grow in the Spirit, the more we care about the spiritual growth of others and learn to do the work of love. Friends listen, are patient, respect each other's viewpoints, accept differences, and work through difficulties. Here, love is more than a feeling. It is action arising out of our faithfulness to the Light. To be faithful means to make a conscious effort to pay attention to the choices we make and how our behavior affects others.

William Penn said of George Fox that he was “civil beyond all forms of breeding.” Courtesy, considered not as a formal code of good manners, but as a supple and sensitive pattern of response to other people’s needs, moods, and desires, has marked the lives of many Friends. Even in his last illness, John Woolman was “exceedingly afraid from the first of giving needless trouble to any . . .”

London Yearly Meeting, 1959

Community is a place where the connections felt in the heart make themselves known in bonds between people, and where the tuggings and pullings of those bonds keep opening up our hearts.

Parker Palmer, 1977

Responsibilities of the Meeting

The meeting has responsibilities for cultivating our relationships and building community. Time needs to be set aside for open fellowship, group discussion, and education, and fun. Community-building activities such as shared meals, workdays, committee work, retreats, workshops, and community service projects are recommended. The meeting is responsible for seeing that the work of the group is shared and that members are not unduly or unnecessarily burdened. Friends of all ages need to be included in activities as appropriate.

The group is responsible for recognizing and encouraging spiritual gifts among its members. The meeting community is the place where an individual can find help in testing leadings, clearness for personal decisions and difficulties, and support for leadings and witnesses of conscience.

A meeting that cultivates a strong sense of its Quaker identity, practice, and testimonies, as well as a sense of mission and service to the wider community, will find that its unity and fellowship are strengthened as well.

Group discernment is vital for ensuring that activities, responsibilities, and commitments the group takes on are leadings from God. Our meetings can become overcommitted when we try to live up to imposed expectations of what the meeting “should” be doing. This is destructive of community. If we consciously allow space in our time and emotional energy for the Spirit to lead us, we will not be overburdened with work.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Romans 12: 9-18 NRSV

Keep up your meetings for worship, and your men and women’s meetings for the affairs of truth, both Monthly and Quarterly. And after you are settled, you may join together and build a meeting-house. And do not strive about outward things; but dwell in the love of God, for that will unite you together, and make you kind and gentle one towards another; and to seek one another’s good and welfare, and to be helpful one to another; and see that nothing be lacking among you, then all will be well. And let temperance and patience and kindness and brotherly love be exercised among you, so that you may abound in virtue, and the true humility; living in

peace, showing forth the nature of Christianity, that you all may live as a family.

George Fox, 1676

Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand.

Isaac Penington, 1667

Over-busyness is one of the diseases that has infected Quakerism, not only here, but throughout the Society of Friends. . . . Too many of us too often find ourselves caught in a merry-go-round of activities and responsibilities, and we do not take adequate time to get centered or sufficient time to nurture ourselves. . . . The world of the spirit is real, and our journey into wholeness has to include time for us to be consciously aware of the life of our spirits.

Marty Walton, 1994

. . . One common dilemma in Friends meetings today is the inability to hear when God is asking us not to take on more committee work, more projects, attendance at more gatherings.

Sandra Cronk, 1991

Pastoral Care

The spiritual welfare of a meeting is greatly helped if its social life is vigorous, and its members take a warm personal interest in one another's welfare. The pastoral work of the Society is specially committed to the overseers [also known as the Care and Counsel Committee], but our members generally should not allow themselves to feel that they are relieved from responsibility. In the greater events

of life, such as marriage, birth of a child, illness or death, it is our duty and privilege to share in one another's joys and sorrows; and sympathy thus shown is a potent means of binding us in closer fellowship.

London Yearly Meeting, 1925

“Pastoral Care” is a traditional term for the many ways the faith community extends aid and concern for the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical well-being of all its members. All of us from time to time need someone to confide in, a listening ear to help us in working through personal life changes, dealing with loss, coping with circumstances, and making wise decisions.

While much of this care for each other flows spontaneously as all Friends listen and help one another, the meeting may appoint a Care and Counsel Committee (see Chapter 11, The Monthly Meeting) to provide leadership and to carry the more formal aspects of this work on behalf of the meeting. The work of this committee is best served if it functions with dedication, tact, and discretion—the ability to listen, to “speak the truth in love,” to maintain confidentiality, and to listen with empathy without giving advice unless asked and without making judgments. Gifts of insight, experience, and emotional maturity are most helpful.

The Care and Counsel Committee seeks to maintain humility in carrying out its work, particularly in acknowledging its limitations in abilities and resources and in recognizing when an individual or the community could best be helped by finding expert assistance from other Friends or from outside the meeting. The Care and Counsel Committee needs to be able to recognize when an individual's difficulties require professional counseling. It needs to feel empowered to make that recommendation, even if it may not be well-received; the sincere desire to help someone takes precedence. It is not compassionate to enable someone's mental illness or to allow destructive behavior.

The work of facilitating the resolution of conflicts within the meeting community is usually given first to the Care and Counsel Committee.

Conflict Resolution and Peacemaking

Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy times seven."

Matthew 18:21-22 NRSV

Our meetings can be where we practice making life heaven on earth. . . . [I]f we engage wholeheartedly, we'll find areas of disagreement, differences of approaches, even differences in values. How we handle those differences is critical. To make our meetings Blessed Communities, we have to be willing to face issues, we have to be willing to tell our truth, and we have to be willing to hang in there in the difficult times. There are few things as destructive to a meeting community as keeping your truth hidden, or leaving when things don't go your way. And the extent to which people in the meeting make it safe for each other to tell their truth and safe to disagree will determine the all-over health of the meeting, and its possibility of being, for the people who are part of it, a living example of heaven on earth. Heaven on earth doesn't mean "no problems." It means the full reality, the loving creative spirit at work in all our lives together, and in the spaces between our lives.

Marty Walton, 1994

It has been the experience of this Yearly Meeting in the past to know that Friends have met in division and uncertainty, and that then guidance has come, and light has been given to us, and we have become finders of God's purpose. This gives us ground for confidence. We shall not be held back by the magnitude of the questions which are to come before us, nor by a sense of our own unworthiness.

London Yearly Meeting, 1936

The peaceful resolution of disagreements and conflicts that arise in our meetings is vital if we are to carry our testimonies of peace, community, and integrity to the wider world. Friends' experience is that disagreement is inevitable in any community where people are honestly engaged in dealing with important issues. Sometimes conflict erupts in our Meetings despite our best efforts to prevent it. Friends' experience is that we need not despair when conflicts arise, but rather face our difficulties with courage and faith that the Light will guide us.

The foundation for peacemaking needs to be laid long before conflict arises. Peacemaking is grounded in how we relate to God and each other in meeting for worship, meeting for worship with a concern for business, fellowship, and service. Understanding of our Faith and Practice, knowledge gained from Friends' writings, and regular practice of our spiritual disciplines are important if Friends are to be equipped with the spiritual maturity and guidance to be peacemakers. The development of skills in resolving differences peacefully is acquired over time as we walk in the Light, learning how to handle differences and disagreements with love and forbearance in everyday conversation, committee meetings, and meetings for business. Friends need to feel that their meeting is a place where it is safe to disagree and that when they express themselves they will be listened to because they are valued.

It is often hard to discern when a disagreement between Friends "crosses the line" and becomes a battle of wills. Yet it is important that we learn to recognize the symptoms of conflict and begin our peacemaking quickly. We can more readily identify when discord begins if we understand where it comes from. George Fox often used this paraphrase of James 4:1

What causes war and fightings among you? Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you?

George Fox paraphrase of James 4:1

to illustrate how conflict comes from our desire to have things our way, to get what we want without due regard for others. We

invite conflict into our lives when we value our own judgments and desires more than seeking God's guidance and the shared Light of the group.

The peaceful resolution of conflict requires a covering of prayer and true humility. True humility is not about "being a doormat" or stifling one's light but means accepting ourselves for who we are, acknowledging our limits and our need for others and for God. It depends upon our understanding that self-respect and respect for others go hand in hand.

A process for conflict resolution may proceed in different ways according to who brings forward the concern and who is involved or affected. Friends' practice, in general, is to try to maintain confidentiality and care for the reputation of others as much as is possible while also considering the need to prevent further hurtful behavior.

When individuals carry a concern for the difficulties between them, they are advised first to try to work out their differences together, with or without the help of others as they may mutually agree. If this fails, they may take their concerns to the Care and Counsel Committee, which can work with them in confidentiality, separately and/or together, to continue to engage with both parties while taking care to avoid even the appearance of taking sides.

So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, then come and offer your gift.

Matt 5:23-24 NRSV

The Care and Counsel Committee is entrusted and empowered by the monthly meeting to initiate a response to conflict when it is recognized. The committee works with those involved, in confidentiality, to solve the problem using resources such as a clearness committee for each participant in the conflict, or outside

professional help. If they are not successful, they may bring the matter to the monthly meeting for worship with a concern for business for discernment and direction.

If a conflict is brought to meeting or already involves the group as a whole, the monthly meeting must pay attention to the matter promptly. They may ask the Care and Counsel Committee or Friends from another meeting or the yearly meeting to provide the impartial leadership and facilitation required for the next steps in a group process. Some form of structured and facilitated listening for the group is recommended, such as threshing sessions or worship sharing, along with continued private dialogue with individuals as necessary. It is recommended that Friends also pay close attention to the group's need for closure and healing.

Each difficult situation a meeting faces is unique. There is no set process for Friends to follow in dealing with conflict. We turn to the Spirit and to the gathered group for insights and leadings to guide us. Nevertheless, we can identify some important ingredients of peaceful resolution, at any or various points in the process:

- Friends may need to be reminded lovingly of their commitment to peaceful reconciliation and to acknowledge together that their difficulties are shared. In community, it is a fact that we are all in this together, and blaming one another for a problem only works to prevent us from solving it.
- Friends are advised neither to deny their feelings nor to become ruled by them. While it is normal to have strong feelings at times, Friends are advised to learn to recognize them and to avoid any sense of acting out of crisis or anger. Strong emotions can become hurtful, irrational, and overpowering. Where a group of Friends have come together to listen to each other and God, anger can prevent centering down and the exercise of love and patience. When this happens, Friends are urged to enter into worship in the silence for a time, to allow the group to re-center.

- Friends are asked to set aside agendas, the desire to control outcomes, and any attempts to convert others to their point of view. We are asked and expected not to engage in gossip, make or take sides on an issue, or use other attempts to manipulate others. These behaviors not only show profound disrespect for others but are also a departure from the Quaker path of seeking God's guidance and unity in the Light.
- Friends are encouraged to strive to dispel confusion and misconception by practicing reality-testing and information-sharing. Recognize how different issues are interwoven and seek clearness in identifying them.
- Friends are urged to practice compassionate listening, compassionate speaking, and nonjudgmental language.
- Friends are asked to consider what true forgiveness is and what it is not and to attend to closure and healing.

The Inner Light does not lead men to do that which is right in their own eyes, but that which is right in God's eyes. As the Light is One, so its teaching is ultimately (though not superficially) harmonious. In actual experience, it is not found that souls truly looking to the Inner Light as their authority will break away from each other in anarchy.

Ellen S. Bosanquet, 1927

And be it known unto all, we cast out none from among us; for if they go from the Light and the Spirit, in which our unity is, they cast out themselves. And it has been our way to admonish them, that they may come to that spirit and light of God which they are gone from, and so come into the unity again.

George Fox, 1669

Advices on Community

Maintaining Gospel Order and Good Order

. . . Remember that the Lord never lays work upon His people that He does not give them strength or ability to perform . . .

Joseph John Armistead, 1913

Life in Christ is not the imposition of a system of "oughts" and "shoulds." George Fox wrote: "Take heed of getting into a form without power; . . . for that will bring deadness, and coldness, and weariness and faintings."

Sandra Cronk, 1991

Our Religious Society endures as a community of Friends who take thought for outward society by first taking care of one another. Friends are advised to strive to maintain love and unity, to avoid tale-bearing and detraction, and to settle differences promptly and in a manner free from resentment and all forms of inward or outward violence. Live affectionately as friends, entering with sympathy into the joys and sorrows of one another's daily lives. Visit one another. Be alert to give help and ready to receive it. Bear the burdens of one another's failings; share the buoyancy of one another's strengths.

Remember that to everyone is given a share of responsibility for the meeting for worship, whether through silence or through the spoken word. Be diligent and prompt in attendance at all meetings and in inward preparation for them. Be ready to speak under the leadings of the Light. Receive the ministry of others in a tender spirit and avoid hurtful criticism. In meetings for business and in all duties connected with them, seek again the leadings of the Light, keeping from obstinacy and from harshness of tone or manner; be teachable, and admit the possibility of being in error. In all the affairs of the meeting community, proceed in the peaceable spirit of "Pure Wisdom," with forbearance and warm affection for each other.

Use your capabilities and your possessions not as ends in themselves but as God's gifts entrusted to you. Share them with others; use them with humility, courtesy, and affection. Guard against contentiousness and love of power; be alert to the personalities and the needs of others. Show loving consideration for all creatures, and cherish the beauty and wonder of God's creation.

Maintaining Unity

[It is] our concern that Friends should work with one another in a humble and loving spirit, each giving to others credit for purity of motive, notwithstanding differences of opinion, and being ready to accept the decision of the meeting even when it may not accord with his own judgment. The mutual forbearance and understanding which are produced by a constant dwelling under the power and control of Christ do much to prevent jealousies, misunderstandings, or any breach of love.

London Yearly Meeting, 1931

Focus on "speaking the Truth in love" (Eph. 4:15 NRSV), using nonjudgmental language which invites others into dialogue. For early Friends, "Truth" meant "how the Spirit is working among us," which is much bigger than one's personal ideas. Let the Light show you what your true concerns and motives are. Where the Light reveals a problem, it may show us care for others as well.

To be faithful, follow the process of discerning God's will. Keep an open mind; otherwise, consciously or unconsciously, you will try to impose your own will on a situation. Give up trying to convert others to your viewpoint—instead, share your measure of the Light, respect the views of others and seek the reality that is unfolding. Leave outcomes to God.

Do not gossip or listen to gossip. Do not blame or listen to blaming. Learn to carry a concern for another's behavior as a concern for that Friend's spiritual well-being, and know that that concern supports the unity of the meeting.

If we hope to be forgiven, we must also forgive one another. He who yields to a suspicious and unforgiving spirit is led on to imagine things against his brother that are exaggerated, or even false. . . . It may be that thou hast just ground for offence. Is thy brother's trespass against thee any warrant for thy own disobedience? . . . Wait not until thy brother be reconciled unto thee, or until he shall make the first overture. Be thyself the first to seek reconciliation . . .

London Yearly Meeting, 1870

Maintain that charity which suffereth long, and is kind; put the best construction upon the conduct and opinions one of another which circumstances will warrant. . . . Let each be tender of the reputation of his brother; and be earnest to possess the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. Watch over one another for good, but not for evil; and whilst not blind to the faults or false views of others, be especially careful not to make them a topic of common conversation. . . .

London Yearly Meeting, 1834

Queries on Community

- How do we recognize and respond to leadings of the Spirit? Do we test our leadings, seeking the help of others in discerning God's guidance and the way forward? Do we wait patiently for "way to open"?
- Do we consider carefully which activities and responsibilities we commit ourselves to, taking into account our gifts and limitations and our sense of leading? Do we leave space for rest and renewal? Do we leave space to respond to needs that may arise and to listen for new leadings of the Spirit? Are we careful not to burden the meeting or each other with preconceived or personal expectations of what they "should" be doing?

- How do we foster participation in the whole life of the meeting? Do members regularly attend meetings for worship and meetings for worship with a concern for business? Do all participate in some way in fellowship and in service?
- How do we care for one another within our meetings? Do we keep good communication with each person? Do we offer aid and support for those who are dealing with difficulties? How is our meeting a place where individuals find healing and encouragement?
- How do we recognize, encourage, and support the development of gifts and leadings among our members?
- Do we deal with disagreements with love and forbearance, seeking God's guidance for peaceful resolution? Do members feel safe to voice their disagreement and concerns, confident that their input is valued?
- Do we have a sense of unity in joining with each other on the Quaker path? Do we foster an understanding of our Quaker identity—faith, testimonies and practice—such that all may find spiritual nourishment and growth?
- How do we reach out to the wider community? Do we serve, participate in, and celebrate the life of our yearly meeting and other Friends organizations? Do we respond to the needs of others in our local communities and the world? Do we build relationships with other organizations in our local communities?