

SCYM Faith and Practice Draft 2.27.2023

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Section 1: Preface - Why a Faith & Practice for South Central Yearly Meeting?

The tradition of creating a document of guidance on how to live according to Quaker principles began in the late 17th century as a way to convey the Yearly Meeting's decisions about how Friends should live and behave. By the mid 20th century almost every Yearly Meeting had their own Faith and Practice volume as a resource for Meetings and their members on practicing the Quaker way.

Unprogrammed members of the Religious Society of Friends are relative newcomers to this south central region of the United States, coming here in the mid and late 20th century from other yearly meetings in the East or Midwest who brought with them the Faith and Practice volumes of the Yearly Meeting from which they came. They came to an area that extends through four states (Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas) over large geographical distances through at least 14 ecological regions. The diversity of our physical location is matched by the diversity of culture, history, politics, and religion throughout the region, and by wide differences in population density and language. Partly due to geography, we forged a distinctive kind of Quakerism, seeking to touch those in isolated communities as well as those in large, dynamic communities of faith while deepening our commitment to values that may seem out of step with our surrounding communities: nonviolence, peace, equality, inclusiveness, and gentleness.

South Central Yearly Meeting (SCYM) formally began as a yearly meeting in 1965 after existing as an association of friends for 10 years before that. In the early 1990's Friends began the process of creating their own Faith and Practice document instead of relying on those of older yearly meetings, and what they discovered was that they wanted a procedures manual to guide them in managing yearly meeting processes. Now thirty years further along, we are again seeking through this Faith and Practice to describe who we are within the Religious Society of Friends worldwide and give voice to both our distinctiveness and how we fit into the Society of Friends.

for more information: Thomas Hamm, "What is a Quaker Book of Faith and Practice," QuakerSpeak video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCwWbdXFtBc>

Section 2: What Friends Believe

Inner Light/That of God in each person

What do Friends believe? Friends believe that there is that of God in everyone. We believe that when we meet together and worship in silence, we will be guided by the Spirit. We believe in a direct experience with God; therefore, there are no ministers, priests, or teachers in our unprogrammed meetings for worship. We believe that each of us is a minister. On occasion, worship is mystical. The Spirit is present, ministry is pertinent and poignant, and we are changed. Friends call this experience a “gathered” or “covered” meeting. For many of us, it is the mystical experience of worship in a gathered meeting that brought us into the Society of Friends. Some describe it as the experience of being at home.

Words are inadequate in describing this worship experience. We believe, as did the early Christians, that wherever two or more are gathered in God's name, God is there. Over time, our meeting for worship becomes a spiritual community. We strengthen, learn from, and help each other in our lives, both spiritually and in daily living.

What we discover in meeting for worship and our daily contemplations is the impetus for the way we live our lives; our faith generates our practice. In other words, friends are committed to living out of our faith. Our faith guides our practice in our everyday lives, both personal and professional; building our faith and acting out of that faith is our continual goal.

Active presence of the Inward Teacher/Continuing Revelation

Since Friends believe that the Spirit is actively present among them as teacher, they have always trusted in It to reveal the Truth to individuals insofar as they are prepared to receive it. Friends’ beliefs, traditions and teachings are meant to be testimonies to help individuals discern the leadings of the inward Teacher among all the other voices and worldly teachers that vie for allegiance.

As George Fox described in his Journal “But as I had forsaken the priests, so I left the separate preachers also, and those esteemed the most experienced people; for I saw there was none among them all that could speak to my condition. And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, oh, then, I heard a voice which said, “There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition”; and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy. Then the Lord let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give Him all the glory; for all are concluded under sin, and shut up in unbelief as I had been, that Jesus Christ might have the pre-eminence who enlightens, and gives grace, and faith, and power.

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Thus when God doth work, who shall let [hinder] it? and this I knew experimentally [through experience].

Early Friends confronted Christians of their day, charging them with having replaced the direct experience of God's spirit with human aids and institutions like a rigid interpretation of Scripture and the establishment of creeds and other church doctrines. To Friends, scripture is an essential testimony to the Truth, which continues to be revealed when read "*in the Spirit in which they were given*" to quote George Fox. Likewise, the purpose of religious authority is not to establish an outward uniformity of religious practice but to help Friends keep present, individually and corporately, in this personal relationship to the divine.

The Sacraments of Daily Living

Because they believed every day and every act was sacred, they did not practice sacraments such as baptism and the eucharist. Early Quakers also did not observe holidays as they saw all days as holy. Today, Quakers tend to join in the festivities of Christmas or Thanksgiving,

Seeking to live centered lives in the Spirit, Friends hold to ideals of simplicity and honesty in all their activities. To reduce excessive activity, to use material things sparingly, and to maintain a sense of stewardship towards the resources of this Earth is to keep free of encumbering involvements that may hamper life and movement of the Spirit. Friends believe that direct and truthful discourse, tempered always by tenderness, facilitates full communication and understanding. Commitment to a single standard of Truth has traditionally led Friends to refrain from judicial oaths.

The Religious Society of Friends recognizes that all are called to minister in response to promptings from the living Spirit, whether through service, ministry, teaching, hospitality or administration. All ministries are important for the well-ordered functioning of the spiritual body. Each Friend has particular gifts and qualities to bring, and all are called to find their place of service. To quote George Fox, "*And this is the word of the Lord God to you all, and a charge to you all in the presence of the Living God, be patterns, be examples, in all countries, places, islands, nations, where ever you come and 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 ye may be a blessing, and make the witness of God in every one.*"

The Journal of George Fox, edited by John L. Nickalls, Philadelphia, Religious Society of Friends, 1997, page 263.

Friends believe in the power of love to evoke the inherent worth of others. We are called to accept and love all persons despite transgressions, confrontations, or apparent differences. As members of the human community, we try to recognize that differences in relative viewpoints spring from varied experiences and that only through love, compassion and

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understanding can these differences be reconciled. Violence stands as the ultimate denial of love. Peace remains its cherished affirmation. Friends aim toward the transformation of a flawed world into one that would make possible equality, justice, and peace for all peoples.

Meeting for Worship

The meeting for worship, unadorned in its organization and procedure, remains the central corporate experience of Friends. The Society's existence would be impossible without the joining of the divine and human that occurs during a gathering of earnest seekers. Others may know of Quakers because of their social activity; Friends know themselves because they have met in worship to encounter the Spirit that motivates. As George Fox announced, following the promise of Jesus and the tradition of early Christians, a meeting for worship marks the occasion when the divine Spirit called Christ is present to teach the people. The meeting is never complete until they respond.

Many early Friends entered meeting for worship expecting to be changed. Worship is the response of the heart and mind to the influence of the Spirit of God. A meeting for worship convenes in silent expectancy at a previously appointed time and place to await the advent of that Spirit that has a power to unite a diverse group of seekers. Such services are often marked by a sense of awe and mystery, for worshippers never know beforehand how the seed each shares will become manifest. They are confident that any who feels led to speak from her/his experience of the word of God, the Christ within, or the divine being may express sentiments in response to the deep and even unconscious needs of those gathered together. George Fox taught that such experiences were available to everyone.

Vocal Ministry

Vocal ministry occurs when one is moved by the Power of the Spirit to share what is felt. It can be in the form of a prayer, a song, praise, teaching, witnessing, or the simple sharing of a single thought. We each sit in silence, quiet our minds, and wait on that small still voice within to speak to us. When the Spirit does speak to us, we consider the message. We try to discern its truth. When we believe that what the Spirit has spoken to us is for others as well, we share the message in the meeting, which is called vocal ministry.

“As the worshiper sits in silence some message may arise out of the depth of the soul that by its nature is intended not simply for the worshiper but for the gathering as a whole. If it is left unexpressed, the worshiper feels burdened with a sense of omission, but if it is faithfully uttered, the worshiper feels a sense of clearness and relief. This peculiar sense of urgency is usually the sign of divine requirement. There is no sure or single test of guidance. Though a message may seem intellectually fitting it should not be given unless it glows with life.” -Howard H. Brinton, 1942 in Friends for 300 Years

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Friends and Other Faiths

“There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath had different names. It is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion nor excluded from any, where the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nation soever, they become brethren in the best sense of the expression.” John Woolman, 1840, A Journal of the Life, Gospel Labours, and Christian Experiences of ---”, p.238

We believe that there are many spiritual paths. While most Friends are Christian, many are not. All those seeking are welcome. We have discovered Christians, those of Jewish faith, Buddhists, Universalists, Muslims, agnostics, atheists, and others among our visitors, attenders and members. All are welcome.

From the beginning, Friends welcomed any who wished to worship and live according to Quaker principles of seeking and following divine guidance. Over the years Quakers have worked together with other groups on service projects and lobbying national, state and local government for changes on issues like the death penalty, civil rights, reforming the criminal justice system, immigration reform and other issues.

SCYM maintains membership in and sends representatives to a number of Interfaith organizations, such as Texas Impact and the Louisiana Council of Churches. Friends General Conference (FGC) and Friends World Committee on Consultation (FWCC) maintain membership in the World Council of Churches and have sent representatives to that body.

Some meetings maintain “neighborly” relationships with nearby churches, such as exchanging newsletters, or getting together for a variety of social activities. Other meetings rent or meet within other church facilities.

Today most individual Quakers grew up in other faiths or no faith at all or may have suffered and felt wounded by teaching as a child. A step in the membership process practiced by meetings asks that the applicant be able to lay aside childhood beliefs and may offer messages on healing from previous traumas.

In blended families where not everyone is a Quaker, meetings welcome participation as family members are able. Other Quakers find spiritual enrichment in study of eastern philosophies, such as Zen meditation.

Section 3: Testifying to the Life of the Spirit

The Quaker Testimonies

The testimonies, as they emerged in various statements and actions of early Quakers, were “meant to stand as testimony to the reality and power and love of God.” They are not “beliefs” nor “creeds”, but descriptions of committed actions. Understood in this way, the testimonies offer guidance for living our lives as a form of ministry.

Early Friends used the word “testimony” to mean a number of different things: the overall message and witness of Quakers, vocal ministry, inward evidence, as in Barclay’s “this inward testimony or seed of God,” a sense of being led to ministry or a career in ministry.

A common expression of these testimonies today is SPICES, or simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and stewardship. SCYM has chosen to include Inclusion as well. These concepts do not reflect separate entities. Many Quaker witnesses in the world involve a mixture of several of these. It is also important to remember that these are directions for how to live, not creedal statements of what to believe.

It is also important to remember that these are directions for how to live, not creedal statements of what to believe. However, if we truly believe that there is that of God in every person, in perhaps every being, the testimonies reflect what we believe by how we put that belief in action. These testimonies are ideals; each of us struggles on how to live into them and on how to implement them in their own lives.

Simplicity

Simplicity arises from a focus on what is most important or central in one’s life and eliminating what stands in the way of attending to that. That central thing for Quakers is often based on seeking spiritual direction for their life and letting go of those things and activities that interfere with that spiritual exercise. This is a process unique to each individual, for example a person feeling a leading to work for world peace by engaging in civil disobedience regarding nuclear weapons will manifest simplicity differently than will a computer savvy person seeking to foster a meeting’s human connections during a pandemic.

“The first generation of Friends did not have a testimony for simplicity. They came upon a faith which cut to the root of the way they saw life, radically reorienting it. They saw that all they did must flow directly from what they experienced as true, and if it did not, both the knowing and the doing became false. In order to keep the knowledge clear and the doing true, they stripped away anything that seemed to get in the way.” (Frances Irene Taber, 1985, quoted in *Plain Living: A Quaker Path to Simplicity*) The plain dress and

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avoidance of the social customs of the day arose from that intent to live according to that principle of following truth as they experienced it.

Simplicity is often defined as an absence of clutter, either things or activities. A more accurate description might be developing clarity and coherence in what one needs to best follow one's spiritual leadings and letting go of what does not support one's spiritual life. From this perspective, simplicity becomes a welcome container for what is important to your journey through life rather than a feeling of deprivation.

Peace

With the belief that there is that of God in all human beings, Quakers also find that if we physically harm one another, we are then also hurting God. And so, we strive for nonviolent confrontation and peaceful reconciliation in all our interactions. Going a step further, we are called to look for that of the Divine in one another and to find love for those that oppose us.

The peace testimony does not mean that Quakers engage only in passive resignation. Some Quakers have engaged passionately in the peace testimony by protesting wars, the death penalty, and torture, by refusing to serve in armed forces if drafted, seeking conscientious objector status when available, and even participating in acts of civil disobedience. Historically, Quakers have not fully aligned with the Peace testimony as some Quakers have engaged in armed combat and others will challenge allowances for a defensive use of force.

By following the peace testimony, we try to live in ways that promote justice and avoid the causes of war; we deny its legitimacy and seek creative alternatives; and we undertake, with impartiality, to aid those who suffer from violence and war's devastation. Modern Friends also strive to find the underlying causes of violence and examine their own role in supporting oppression, such as the choice of financial investments, the purchase of Fair-Trade Products or products farmed and mined in war torn areas, and the awareness of the role of our tax dollars.

Integrity

My brethren, above all things, swear not, neither by heaven, nor by earth, nor any other oath, lest ye fall into condemnation.

George Fox, as quoted in The Journal of George Fox, edited by John L. Nickalls, Philadelphia, 1997 page 245.

From the very beginnings of the Religious Society of Friends, advices and queries have focused attention on integrity, including being honest in all things and all aspects of our lives. Today we have the legal right to "affirm" that we are telling the truth, in legal documents, as well as all other times. We also honor the Friends who came before us, whose steadfastness in keeping from oaths, gives us that right today.

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“Friends in callings and trades are to be faithful and upright and keep to yea and nay.” Advices from the Elders at Balby, 1656.

A more recent query from Britain Yearly Meeting (2010) says: *Be honest with yourself. What unpalatable truths are you evading?*

The Pendle Hill pamphlet (# 296) by Wilmer A. Cooper lists four elements of the Testimony of Integrity including

- The first is truth telling or simply not telling lies.
- Second, integrity calls for authenticity, for genuineness and for veracity in one’s personhood.
- Third, integrity calls for obedience, or if you prefer faithfulness to conscience, illuminated by the light Within.
- Fourth, the root meaning of the word, “integrity,” calls for Wholeness. This calls us to be as consistent as possible.

In many ways, our testimony of Integrity, is the basis for Friends’ ability to speak our Truths to whomever needs to hear our messages. Now, just as much as in the past, Friends are called to Speak Truth to Power, and avoid spreading misinformation and/or disinformation.

Community

Friends believe that there is that of God in everyone. We seek Truth as individuals and within our community. We actively seek the will of God as individuals in our daily life and reflections and we seek Truth in silent collective worship. As Friends, we create community through our participation in worship, and through sharing, supporting, and loving one another. Ideally, we support, care, and share with one another on a variety of levels, within our Meeting and in our larger Quaker and lay communities. As Quakers, we know that there is a balance between our Individual search for Truth and the process of discernment for Truth. As we practice discernment in our search for Truth, we acknowledge the immense value of helping each other with this process. Ideally, we support each other in a myriad of ways – from the basic needs of food, shelter, and safety – to supporting each other and our meeting in wrestling with our spiritual needs, whether it be with a personal problem, or clearness in how to better express our individual and community faith in our practices.

This has been a testimony of Quaker life since our beginnings in the mid-17th century. We believe that community was one of the earliest testimonies of Friends, as they saw that of God in each other and sought to live their lives out of the Spirit’s light. They sought truth and discernment together. As Isaac Pennington wrote in his letter to Friends in Amersham (1667): “Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations against another, but praying one for

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another and helping one another up with a tender hand... (Quaker Heritage Press/ Online Texts/ Isaac Pennington's Works.)”

In the post-modern world, with all of its fragmentation, frustrations, and isolation, there are those who lament the quality of community in our meetings and in our lives. To be clear, however, we create our communities through our participation: worship on Sunday morning is not enough to build community, nor is participation in monthly, quarterly, or yearly meetings. Community is created through love and support, through caring and sharing, through patience and shared vulnerability. Marcel Martin clearly expresses this process: “Members of an intimate spiritual community serve as a mirror for each other; they help us acknowledge both the shadow and the brightness within us and assist us in distinguishing one from the other (“A Community Formed for Faithfulness,” Friends Journal, September 2017).

Equality

Equality is at the center of being a Quaker. There is that of God in every person; all humans are equal before God. We can all bear and respond to the Light. We believe all individuals are children of God, and we are asked to recognize that of God in all persons. Equality was the earliest of our social testimonies.

Each of us, in our infinite worth, is drawn by the love of God to live a full and worthwhile life, with respect and consideration for all. We think of others as precious and unique individuals.

Friends did away with behaviors and practices that suggested someone was superior to someone else. Thus, early Friends did away with honorific titles, the distinction of roles and other 17th century signs of deference and place – even in the use of language – where classes of people were distinguished by the use of “thee” and “thou” or “you.” Friends pioneered in recognizing the spiritual gifts and rights of women. Women served as ministers and early in our history often led meetings and worship groups. Their spiritual messages were seen as equal to those of men, as they are today. They naturally became leaders outside of the society.

Meetings can help shape and create unity, but we are also treasured as individuals in the Religious Society of Friends, each with our own beliefs and abilities.

Equality is the foundation of our approach to each other and to the world. We believe all are equally empowered by God to speak for themselves. Understanding others can change and teach us in the lives we lead. Doing so is often how we learn to remain open to revising our own beliefs and actions.

The goal of good human relations via a community, where each person and each group can experience self-development, is important to us. It is the realization of our human potential

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and helps bring about rewarding relations with others. We encourage all people to realize their full potential as human beings, bearing the Light of God.

(With credits to John Woolman, North Pacific Yearly Meeting, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association.)

Stewardship

As Quakers we are charged to live in simplicity and integrity. It is our intention to be good stewards and do a good job taking care of the things we own and use. This means taking good care of the earth and any and all possessions that we have been blessed to own/have.

As we become aware of the interconnectedness of all parts of life on the planet and the ripple effect and devastation that can be caused by a single act of neglect on our part, we are mindful of the full impact of our lives on earth. We strive to first do no harm to the earth, but more importantly to work to enhance and protect this vast ecosystem that has been entrusted to humanity. Part of that trust entails reusing, recycling, and reducing in all areas possible to do no further harm than has already been done.

Stewardship touches every aspect of our earthly existence. Like early Quakers, we believe that “the produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious Creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age” (John Woolman, 1772).

Good stewardship also covers economic resources. In being good stewards, we need to examine all decisions about obtaining, holding, and using money and any other assets; we need to determine if our expenditures support the seeds of war, self-indulgence, injustice, or destruction of the world which we share with others.

We must consider in all of our actions the advancement of peace, simple living, justice, and a healthy living environment. Good stewardship also extends to the economic needs of Quakers, our meetings, and other organizations that advance Friends' testimonies.

It also involves the support of actions that advances peace, simple living, justice, and a healthy ecosystem. As Quakers, we do not forget stewardship of spiritual gifts: service, teaching, time, talent, various treasures, and our bodies, as well as the gifts of encouragement, giving, or leadership.

We are asked to consider the aspects of economic equality and simplicity in our own lives. We strive to find balance in our earnings, spending, saving, and giving. We all make decisions about sharing outside of our immediate family in an effort to balance social sufficiency against the social value of aiding the more needy. It also requires exercising judgment about what are essentials and what is discretionary in our own lives. As we move through life, we strive to be good stewards, always mindful of the testimonies of simplicity, integrity, and community.

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We are reminded that all that we have, in ourselves and our possessions, are gifts from God, given to us for responsible use. To be good stewards in God's world, we are called to examine and consider how our testimonies for peace, equality, and simplicity interact to guide our relationships with all life. We desire "To leave the world a little better than you found it. That's the best [one] can ever do" (Paul Auster, Timbuktu, 1999).

Living into the Testimonies

Living with Integrity requires us to continually search ourselves and our motives for the positions we take on any of the above issues and how we treat each other in our daily interactions, both at the meeting/community level and the individual level.

Yearly Meeting Level

South Central Yearly Meeting (SCYM) is a yearly meeting member and supporter of a number of national Quaker organizations facilitating/encouraging Quaker meetings to community actions based on the testimonies. These include

1. American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) focusing on equality and peace at the grassroots level around the world
2. Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) speaking truth to power in the halls of Congress on equality, integrity and peace
3. Quaker Earthcare Witness (QEW) calling for environmental stewardship and inspiring a strong Quaker response to environmental concerns
4. Friends Peace Teams (FPT) seeking to create long-term relationships with communities in conflict around the world to work for justice and healing, and to create enduring cultures of peace

SCYM has approved a number of Minutes over the years calling for action on addressing climate change, the right of all loving couples to marry, criminal justice reforms including ending the death penalty and abolishing torture, instituting the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) of 2007 as a basis for the laws of the land. They have also invited constituent monthly meetings to take action on these matters as led. Also, individual members have acted, especially on death penalty, immigration, and indigenous rights.

Believing that there is that of God in everyone, monthly meetings within South Central Yearly Meeting have been taking the marriages of same-gender couples under their care for many years. We find that the gift of spiritual union is as strong and valuable to our community in same-gender couples as it is in opposite-gender couples.

Practicing inclusivity for all who enter meetinghouse doors continues to be a challenge to a group of largely white, middle-class Friends whose life experience does not include the experiences of people of color or others who have not lived a white, middle class

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heterosexual life. For several years there have been working groups in national Quaker organizations to study their practices, listen to the experiences of others, and develop working groups to help meetings at all levels become more inclusive.

Local Meeting Level

The activities of local meetings are wide ranging, often engaging in immediate response to local concerns, such as Live Oak Friends participating in efforts to preserve Houston's Equal Rights Ordinance protecting LGBTQ rights, or helping the clean up efforts after Hurricane Harvey, both financially and physically.

Some members earn their living by doing justice work, as staff with Texas Coalition to End the Death Penalty, Director of the Dallas Peace Center, or leading a diversity and inclusion effort at the school where they work. Friends marched and protested both Iraq Wars and continue to work for immigrant rights and have helped refugee families in various ways. Protests against the death penalty and letter writing campaigns on a variety of national or state issues are common. Several meetings have formed FCNL Advocacy Teams to meet regularly with their Representatives and Senators.

During the 1960's many meetings participated with local desegregation efforts. Today there are ongoing efforts to address the remnants of inequality maintained by transportation, zoning, and concentration of polluting industries in neighborhoods where people of color live.

The environment has been a concern for many with efforts to better steward natural resources in managing the meetinghouse or individual efforts to install solar panels or drive electric cars.

Many individuals participate with Quaker organizations such as Friends Peace Teams or AFSC, including helping to support hurricane rebuilding in Louisiana or helping a neighborhood association in New Orleans acquire land for a community garden in a food desert. Ongoing human rights abuses in Israel/Palestine, supporting indigenous led actions on behalf of the environment, providing assistance to immigrants and seeking to ensure school curriculums teach all our history are other efforts that engage members of various meetings.

National Level

There are two nationwide Quaker based organizations engaged in social justice work. Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) in Washington DC has worked on national political issues of interest to Friends since 1943. They provide guidance to Quaker Meetings and churches and many other groups in the lobbying process. They also seek input on what they should focus working on for each two-year Congressional session.

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) was founded in 1917 during World War I to give young conscientious objectors ways to serve without joining the military or taking

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lives. They drove ambulances, ministered to the wounded, and stayed on in Europe after the armistice to rebuild war-ravaged communities. Their efforts to care for people in Europe after the devastation of World War II earned them and their British counterpart the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947 for service “...from the nameless to the nameless....” Their work continues today, focusing on partnering with Meetings and Churches to work across cultures and socio-economic divides on education and justice issues.

Criminal justice reform has been a concern among Friends since the seventeenth century. William Penn abolished capital punishment for all crimes except murder in Pennsylvania in 1680. He also stated that ‘prisons shall be workhouses,’ that ‘bail should be allowed for minor offenses,’ and ‘all prisons shall be free, as to fees, food and lodgings’. He provided for rehabilitation, as he stipulated that prisoners should be helped to learn a trade, so that they could make an honest living when they were released.

Elizabeth Fry (1780-1845) was the most famous of Quaker prison reformers, though others were equally influential in raising public awareness. Her work in Newgate Prison raised public awareness to the horrors of the women’s prison. She gave evidence before a Committee of the House of Commons revealing the facts she had unearthed and outlining reforms that would remedy the worst of the corrupt practices. Her work remains an inspiration to those who understand the courage called for in taking on this cause.

Torture has long been a concern. Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) minuted their concern about the use of torture in 1976.

“We believe in the worth of every individual as a child of God, and that no circumstances whatsoever can justify practices intended to break bodies, minds and spirits. Both tortured and torturer are victims of the evil from which no human being is immune. Friends, however, believe that the life and power of God are greater than evil, and in that life and power declare their opposition to all torture...”

The Quaker Initiative to End Torture (QUIT) is a spiritual work to end the worst that humans do to one another.

Quakers were instrumental in setting up Amnesty International. Using his contacts, experience and position, British Quaker Eric Baker campaigned for the humane treatment of political prisoners. He helped write an article for The Observer entitled “The Forgotten Prisoner” in 1961. This article called for “the amnesty of all political prisoners” and began a campaign that resulted in the founding of Amnesty International in 1962. Many Friends continue to be involved with Amnesty International, both as members and as volunteers.}

Section 4: Advices and Queries

(Reworked from the 1990 SCYM version with additions from NYYM F&P, 2015 edition)

The elders who assembled at Balby, in the north of England, in 1656 wrote twenty “advices,” which included the first detailed directions about what to do in certain circumstances such as managing relief for the poor or imprisoned, marriages, recording births and deaths. Their epistle prepared the ground for later books of discipline also known as “Faith and Practice.” The last paragraph is the best known: *Dearly 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 guided: and so in the light walking and abiding, these may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.* The full text, a worthwhile read, can be found in the appendix.

In 1682, when the Religious Society of Friends was still taking form and when many Quakers were in prison, London Yearly Meeting asked representatives of Quarterly Meetings to respond to three questions about the welfare of Friends in their areas. In subsequent years these questions became more numerous, and more devotional in character. A century later they were supplemented by separate paragraphs of advice, thus forming what was known as ‘Advices and Queries’. Over the years these have been revised to meet the needs of specific times and places, and yet still retain the spiritual basis on which they were originally developed. Most yearly meetings continue to find them a valuable tool in spiritual development.

Advices in this section are based on experiences of Friends from SCYM and elsewhere trying to live faithfully according to the Light they have been given. Queries direct us toward the Source of guidance as we consider how they apply to our current condition, both as individuals and as a meeting. Their value lies in the process of considering them rather than in finding definite answers. Responses may be based on our current condition and/or on our aspirations and how we are progressing toward them.

Advices and Queries may be used by the group as a whole or as part of personal devotional practices or self-examination. An advice and/or a query may be read at the beginning of meeting for worship or for business as part of the centering process. They may also be used in worship sharing where Friends can speak their thoughts and personal experiences during a period of worshipful listening.

Worship

Advices on Worship

The center of the life of the Religious Society of Friends is the Meeting for Worship. We gather in expectant silence seeking refreshment of the spirit and offering ourselves to God

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for the purpose of carrying out the Divine Will. From the depth of this silence comes the consciousness of the presence of the Holy Spirit within. When Friends worship together, there is an opportunity to receive greater insight and spiritual understanding than we achieve in our private reflections. As in Matthew 8:20, Jesus said, "Where two or more are gathered in my name, there I will be also." Thus, we are enabled to sense the Inner Light and follow its leadings.

We receive the messages of others in a tender and understanding spirit, remembering that ministry which to one may seem to have little value to another is the direct word from God.

Throughout the week we think prayerfully of our meeting and its members. We carry those messages that speak to us into our daily lives.

Queries for Worship

Queries for the meeting on worship.

1. Are our meetings for worship held in expectant waiting for divine guidance?
2. As we listen, or as we speak, are we guided by the Inward Light and sensitive to the needs of one another?
3. Is there a living silence as Friends worship – a silence in which those present are drawn together by the power of God in their midst?
4. Do we let the Spirit determine the appropriate moment for closing the meeting?

Queries for the individual on worship.

1. Do I come to meeting with heart, mind, and body prepared?
2. Do I protect the spirit of the meeting by arriving on time and avoiding unnecessary disturbances?
3. In my worship, how do I seek to experience the spirit which binds me with others and all creation?
4. How do I strive for a meeting that is alive with God's power and presence?

Vocal Ministry

Advices on Vocal Ministry

During meeting for worship, some may be moved to respond to these leadings by sharing insights, prayers, and praise. When we feel led to speak, we do so clearly and simply; even though the message may be expressed in hesitating and imperfect words. Vocal ministry may wonderfully draw those present into a communion with God and with one another. It springs from a deep place in the heart; let it be offered with reverence.

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Queries on Vocal Ministry

1. Is the vocal ministry of the meeting exercised under the leading of the Holy Spirit without prearrangement and in the simplicity and sincerity of Truth?
2. Are we careful not to speak at undue length or beyond our light?

Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business

Advices on Meeting for Business

Friends' meetings for business are conducted in the same manner of expectant waiting as are meetings for worship. Aware that we meet in the presence of God, Friends seek to discover and implement his will. Friends try to conduct business reverently in the wisdom and the peaceable Spirit of Jesus, willing to wait upon God as long as may be necessary for the emergence of a decision which clearly recommends itself as the right one. The process of individuals opening themselves to the corporate revelation of God's truth is basic to how Friends conduct meetings for business. All matters are considered thoughtfully, with due respect to every point of view presented and proceed in the peaceable spirit of the light of truth, with forbearance and warm affection for each other. When a course of action receives the general, though not necessarily unanimous, approval of the group, the presiding clerk formulates the sense of the meeting and it is recorded in the minutes. No vote is taken; there is no decision made by a majority who override opposition. Action is taken only when the group can proceed in substantial unity.

Attendees and members are encouraged to participate in meeting for business and to be faithful in the service of the meeting's affairs. It is the Quaker way of living and working together, a process that can create and preserve a sense of fellowship in the meeting community. From there it can spread to larger groups and larger decisions in which individual Friends or meetings have a part. This contributes to peace in the world.

Queries on Meeting for Business

Queries for the Meeting on Meeting for Business

1. Are our meetings for business held in the spirit of worship?
2. Do we avoid pressure of time, neither prolonging nor curtailing full discussion?
3. As difficult problems arise, are we careful to meet them in the spirit of love and humility with minds open for creative solutions?
4. Are we aware that we speak through inaction as well as action?
5. Do we recognize that the search for unity may require us to accept with good grace a decision with which we are not entirely in agreement?

Queries for the Individual on Meeting for Business

1. Do I participate regularly in meetings for business?
2. In what ways do I take my share of responsibility in the service of the meeting?

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3. Do I attend meeting for business in a spirit of love and understanding, seeking a right course of action through a patient search for unity?
4. Do I carefully reconsider my leading when it appears to conflict with the sense of the meeting?
5. Do I seek the opening that allows me to understand another person's view?

Simplicity

Advices on Simplicity

Quaker simplicity is the result of a commitment to living in that divine unhurried center of peace and power that we call Truth, the Light, or the Spirit of God. Living from that divine center takes no time but occupies all of our time. As our desire to live in this way grows, we make choices that strengthen the integrity of our commitment.

It is the experience of Friends that all excesses lead to personal willfulness and weaken our ability to listen for the will of God. Shun practices which interpose themselves between you and the Light. Friends are earnestly advised to refrain from practices that are detrimental to the body or the mind. For example, the use of intoxicants and tobacco and the misuse of drugs.

Do not be too quick, however, to remove from your life those things which bring you a sense of joy and heighten your awareness of the beauty of creation. Remember that whatever promotes wholeness and helps accomplish the will of God is to be accepted and used with thanksgiving.

As we choose a life of simplicity and integrity, we discover that our actions affect more than just our close relations. In the words of John Woolman,

“To labor hard or cause others to do so that we may live conformably to custom which Christ our Redeemer discountenanced by His example in the days of His Flesh, and which are contrary to the Divine order, is to manure a soul for propagating an evil seed in the earth.”

Queries on Simplicity

Queries for the meeting on simplicity.

1. Is the life of our meeting ordered in such a way that it helps us simplify our lives?
2. How does our meeting demonstrate the principles of simplicity to the wider community?
3. Do our decisions and investments “manure the soil for propagating an evil seed in the earth”?

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4. What support and guidance do we as a meeting give to those who are seeking to simplify their lives or change their consumption patterns?

Queries for the individual on simplicity.

1. How can I live more simply?
2. In what ways have behaviors which find favor in society or gratify my own sense of worth, such as long hours of work or service, called me from living a centered life?
3. Have we confronted our own decisions about our use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, and do we encourage others to do likewise? Have we considered the cost in human suffering that might result from such use?
4. To what degree does living simply call me to examine the effects that my patterns of production and consumption have on the earth and its people?

Integrity

Advices on Integrity

As our lives become centered on Truth, all that surrounds us is laid bare and can be seen as having a natural or unnatural place in our life. Seek for manifestations of Truth in everything you do. Integrity of word and deed has always been basic to Friends' public testimony. Conscientious honesty and Friends' faithfulness to their testimony against a double standard of truth can help create a society based on trust in one's neighbors and in the validity of their words.

Observe great care in your speech. Conduct yourself in a loving, sincere, and truthful manner in all your endeavors, and seek ways to foster the same conduct in everyone you meet. Live, work, play, and love with the simplicity and integrity of a Seeker of Truth.

Queries on Integrity

1. Do I keep to a single standard of truth? Are my factual statements as accurate as possible, without exaggeration or omission?
2. In my search for truth, how do I center my activities in the presence of God so that all things take their rightful place?

Equality

Advices on Equality

We believe we are challenged to achieve right-relations with persons in other groups, especially exploited groups. We are often involved in non-violent efforts to attain justice and self-determination, and in working to do away with discrimination and exploitation. We ask ourselves to examine how our own attitudes and practices may contribute to

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discrimination and exploitation, and to practice discernment on how we make our own life choices in a way that eliminates that.

Queries on equality

1. How do we seek to work with groups and individuals victimized by prejudice and exploitation to reclaim their voice and power?
2. How do we identify and address our own complicity in such victimization?
3. How do we witness to the need for human equality to those with decision making power so that opportunities are made more equitable?
4. How can we support disempowered people in organizing and speaking on their own behalf?

Peace

Advices on Peace:

Friends are earnestly cautioned against the taking of arms against any person, since "all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons" are contrary to our Christian testimony. Friends should beware of supporting preparations for war even indirectly and should examine in this light such matters as non-combatant military service, cooperation with conscription, employment or investment in war industries, consumption of goods that were made available by violence against others, and payment of war taxes. Friends are advised to maintain our testimony against war by endeavoring to exert an influence in favor of peaceful principles and settlement of all differences by peaceful methods. We are encouraged to lend support to all that strengthens international friendship and understanding and give active help to movements that substitute cooperation and justice for force and intimidation.

Queries on Peace:

1. How do we maintain Friends' testimony against war?
2. How do we "live in the virtue of that life and power which takes away the occasion of all wars?"
3. Are we exerting our influence in favor of settlement of all differences by truly non-violent methods?
4. How do we strive to transmit an understanding of the basis of our peace testimony and how it applies across what we buy or use and how we choose our activities?

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Community

Advices for Community

The Religious Society of Friends endures as a community of individuals who take thought for outward society by first taking care of one another. The care and nurture of other Friends strengthens our ability to see past our own circumstances, attitudes, and motives into the sometimes unfamiliar needs of others. When we extend ourselves in a loving way to others, we often feel exposed and vulnerable. Mutual care and nurture require that we respect each other's needs, fears, and vulnerability as well as gifts and individuality. The trust and love which are the essence of a Quaker community do not come quickly: they are build over a period of time through the interaction of individuals committed to discovering together the will of God.

Friends are advised to maintain love and unity. Friends are also advised to avoid tale-bearing and detraction. Settle differences promptly and directly with each other, in a manner free from resentment and all forms of inward or outward violence. Seek the assistance of the community if necessary.

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 be ready to ask for and receive help. When cares are heavy or life is presenting difficult decisions, do not let pride keep you from asking for a clearness process or help from the Meeting. Remember that asking for help is a gift and opportunity one gives to the community. Bear the burden of one another's failings; share the buoyancy of one another's strengths.

Queries on Community

Queries for the Meeting on Community

1. How do we maintain a climate of love and trust in our meeting that invites and encourages everyone to be open?
2. Do we care for one another so deeply that we are aware of the personal difficulties of those in the meeting community? How do we translate our awareness of those difficulties into appropriate action? How do we express our concern for others when we feel a problem exists and our help has not been sought?
3. How do we inform people of the resources and assistance available within the meeting?
4. How do we make newcomers feel welcome? How do we encourage attenders to share in meeting activities and to consider membership when they are ready?
5. Who has stopped attending? Why?
6. How can we, as a meeting, keep in touch with members and attenders in such a way that each feels a valued part of the meeting community?
7. What does the meeting do to encourage members to visit each other outside of the meeting?
8. How do we practice the art of listening to one another, even beyond words?

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9. What does the meeting do to foster an environment where mutual respect and forbearance, rather than criticism and gossip, flourish?

Queries for the Individual on Community

1. How do I contribute to the spirit of community in my meeting?
2. Do I respect that of God in each person, though it may be expressed in discomforting ways or may be difficult to discern?
3. How do I express my concern for the well-being of those living with chronic problems? Are the ways I demonstrate my love for Friends who may need assistance helpful and appropriate to their circumstances?
4. Am I careful with the reputations of others?
5. Do I use language which is gender-inclusive and free from cultural assumptions that put people in prejudged categories?

Stewardship

Advices on Stewardship

It is our intention to be good stewards and do a good job taking care of the things we own and use. This means taking good care of the earth and any and all possessions that we have been blessed to own/have.

As we become aware of the interconnectedness of all parts of life on the planet and the ripple effect and devastation that can be caused by a single act of neglect on our part, we are mindful of the full impact of our lives on earth. We strive to first do no harm to the earth, but more importantly to work to enhance and protect this vast ecosystem that has been entrusted to humanity. Part of that trust entails reusing, recycling, and reducing in all areas possible to do no further harm than has already been done.

Stewardship touches every aspect of our earthly existence. Like early Quakers, we believe that “the produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious Creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age” (John Woolman, 1772).

Good stewardship also covers economic resources. In being good stewards, we need to examine all decisions about obtaining, holding, and using money and any other assets; we need to determine if our expenditures support the seeds of war, self-indulgence, injustice, or destruction of the world which we share with others.

Queries on Stewardship

Queries for the meeting on stewardship

1. Do we manage our buildings and necessary supplies and energy requirements in the most ecologically sound way possible?

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2. Do we invest our funds in ways that do not promote harmful impacts on the natural world?
3. How do we witness to policy makers in support of laws and regulations that preserve and protect the natural world?

Queries for the individual on stewardship

1. How do we make choices about personal consumption that do not contribute to harming the earth and all its inhabitants?
2. How do we educate ourselves and others about the many opportunities to participate in activities that help to preserve the natural world?

Children

Advices on Children

Watch with Christian tenderness over the opening minds of children. Remember that they too possess the Inner Light and are capable of their own spiritual discernment. Seek to awaken in them the love and awareness of the Spirit. Uphold in your own conduct, and thus encourage in theirs, truthfulness and sincerity through example and training; help them to recognize and follow the voice of God that they may be joyful and willing in God's service. Remember, at the same time, each person, as a child of God, develops in unique ways and that the Holy Spirit may lead our children along paths which we have not foreseen. We are mindful that our meeting community is made up of all of us who attend and that the life of the meeting springs from the inner lives of children and adults of all ages.

The meeting cannot replace the family in the care of children. At the same time, every member of our meeting is responsible in some measure for the care of families and their members, including children. Given this sense of common concern, our children may gain a sense of belonging and commitment to the expanded family of Friends and to our heritage.

Queries on Children

Queries for the meeting on children.

1. In what ways do we as a meeting help to develop the spiritual lives of our children?
2. Are we aware of the delights in being with, serving, caring for, and learning from young?
3. How do we help our children identify and deal with inequalities of all kinds in our culture?
4. Do we provide our children with a framework for active ongoing participation in the life of our meeting? In our community outside of our meeting?

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Queries for the individual on children.

1. How do I share my beliefs and values with children?
2. How do I nurture the individuality of children, encouraging them to develop as the spirit leads, giving freely of my approval and love?
3. Do I set a positive example to children in my leisure activities?
4. Am I attentive to that of God in every child?

Education

Advices on Education

Seek for yourselves and for you children an education that leads to the development of spiritual understanding. The intellect is an integral part of our spiritual equipment. As development brings growth in character and increased ability to face difficult moral issues, we recognize the importance of education continuing throughout life and its privileges being shared by all. We support methods of teaching that stimulate freedom of thought and inquiry

While the religious education of our children is primarily the concern of parents, each member of the meeting should assume some measure of responsibility for the education of the children in the meeting. If this spirit of common concern is present, our children will gain a sense of belonging to the larger community and be able to face the mysteries of life with trust, knowing they are surrounded by love.

Some Friends study the Bible intelligently, using the help available from modern sources. Others are more comfortable with the wisdom of other spiritual traditions. Be ready at all times to receive fresh light from whatever quarter it may come; approach new theories with discernment.

Queries on Education

Queries for the meeting on education.

1. What efforts are we making to become better acquainted with the Bible, the history and writings for Friends, and the contributions of other religions and philosophies to our spiritual heritage?
2. How do we foster a spirit of inquiry and a loving and understanding attitude toward learning about different cultures and life styles?
3. Are we concerned to see that education for ourselves and for our children improves our understanding of the changing world?
4. How do we share our deepest beliefs with our children and with one another? What influences among us tend to develop our religious life?
5. In what ways does our meeting help to develop the spiritual lives of our children and all our members and attenders?

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Queries for the individual on Education

1. How do I support and strive to improve the public schools?
2. How do I share my knowledge and insights with others?

Section 5: Living Together in the Faith Community

E-Meeting as a Caring Community—under construction

Nurturing One's Gifts

“Friends have always had a particular concern for the recognition and cherishing of spiritual gifts. They place special emphasis on the responsibility of the meeting’s members to ensure the ongoing work and nurture of our communities.”¹

There are several avenues for sharing one’s skills and passions with the monthly meeting and the outside world, both with the larger Quaker community and with everyone else. Within the meeting there are the committees that do the work of the community, and a nominating committee to help guide a person seeking to serve the community to the committee that best fits one’s interests and skills.

Clearness Committees provide another way for someone to explore a leading to serve or minister in a particular way. Clearness committees can be requested by anyone to help discern a direction for action. Support committees can offer ongoing support and guidance to someone providing a service or ministry within the meeting, such as clerk of meeting, or outside it such as someone feeling called to minister to people on death row.

¹ Gray, Simon. Quaker Faith and Practice Around the World - A study guide for Friends. Digital Revolution Publishing. Kindle Edition.

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**E-Care of Worship Groups, Small and New Meetings–
under construction**

E-Dealing with Conflict–under construction

**E-Being a Quaker Today: Our Personal Lives and
Witness–under construction**

E-Struggles to Become Inclusive–under construction

Section 6: Laboring Together in the Monthly Meeting

The Monthly Meeting

South Central Yearly Meeting is concerned that all who are moved to worship God after the manner of Friends may be able to do so by participation in a Worship Group, a Preparative Meeting, or a Monthly Meeting. In areas where no Friends Meetings exist, individual Friends and those drawn to Friends' ways are encouraged to meet for worship and to seek Divine guidance. Since the COVID 19 pandemic, many meetings have added an online component and welcome those who are at a distance to join them online

The Monthly Meeting is the "family" of Friends; it is the fundamental unit of the Religious Society of Friends. It consists of a group of Friends who meet together at regular intervals to wait upon God in Meeting for Worship and Meeting for Business. When these are meetings in the true Quaker sense, Friends are "joined with God and with each other", and there is order, unity, and power. It is upon this concept of a meeting that the good order of Friends is based. Through the corporate life of a Monthly Meeting, Friends order their lives in relation to God and, through that relationship, to the most profound realities of life: birth and death, marriage and family, community of spirit, and concern for humanity and the rest of God's creation.

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Officers and Committees of Monthly Meetings

It is the usual practice of each Monthly Meeting to appoint a Clerk to preside over meetings for business, Treasurer, Recording Clerk to record minutes and other information from the meeting for business, Records Clerk to manage meeting records and other officers and committees necessary for the corporate life of the Meeting. The degree of organization does not exist for its own sake but to provide what is needed for the Meeting's orderly and effective operation, while allowing each person a maximum of freedom, participation, and responsibility. There may be a wide range of complexity according to the size of the meeting, for example small meetings may conduct all their business together during meetings for business while larger meetings may have a number of committees tasked with specific tasks like managing property or conducting religious education, each of which reports to the Meeting.

Quaker Decision Making: The Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business

The Meeting for Business is a Meeting for Worship where Friends care for their corporate business. It is essential for the functioning of the Monthly Meeting. It takes place in the same expectant waiting for the guidance of the Spirit as does any Meeting for Worship. Friends' manner of conducting business is an expression of their basic faith that the Light, which is in all, when heeded, draws all into agreement in their common affairs, and is an expression of their commitment to follow that Light. A Meeting for business is usually held once a month.

Monthly Meeting's Responsibility to conduct the following business:

1. receive and record new members
2. terminate membership when necessary
3. provide spiritual and, if need be, material aid to those in its fellowship
4. provide religious education to all in its fellowship
5. oversee and record marriages and ceremonies of commitment
6. celebrate and record births and adoptions
7. give care at the time of death and records the departure
8. collect and dispense funds for its maintenance and work, and administers real estate and other property
10. issue travel minutes and letters of introduction
11. recommend setting up or laying down Preparative Meetings or Worship Groups under its care
12. appoints members and committees for special service and act upon their reports
13. keep accurate and complete records of all its proceedings,
14. witness to Friends' testimonies,
15. affiliate with other bodies of Friends and to other organizations with common interests,
16. relate to its Quarterly and Yearly Meetings

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We take seriously the claim that, in our meetings for church affairs, including committee meetings, we are trying to align ourselves with God's purposes. Therefore, we want to cultivate a general approach of working with and in the Spirit. It's worth asking ourselves:

1. What spiritual disciplines sustain us as individuals?
2. How can/do we apply these in the role of clerk?
3. How can/do we apply these when we are not the clerk?

The clerk's attitude and approach can be crucial. They set the tone. Centeredness and cheerfulness are infectious. Everyone present can join the clerk in facilitating the following:

1. Sharing the agenda prior to the meeting. Be mindful of our Quaker process and discipline, including silent worship at beginning and end of committee meetings and as indicated during the meeting.
2. Listening well both to what is said and what is not said.
3. Openness - not having preconceptions; being flexible about what comes.
4. Ensuring respect for and appreciation of others, (e.g., being clear about the time and the information allocated for their item on the agenda)
5. Grace and humor.

All the above can be part of your spiritual discipline. All contribute to the process of discernment - using intellect, emotions, prayer - to judge what is right and how the Spirit (and/or energy) is moving in the meeting.

Decisions are arrived at by deep listening to those present and also to Spirit to arrive at what is known as "sense of the meeting." Sense of the meeting hears the opinions and concerns of those present and also moves beyond those verbal expressions to hear the spirit of the concern. It is the result of seeking what is right for the group. The process of reaching the sense of the meeting often involves discarding "baggage", allowing time and space for doubts and questions about a subject and the Light to enter and reach beyond the surface of things. Once there appears to be a sense of the meeting, the clerk and/or recording clerk create and read a draft minute to enable Friends to listen to where discernment has got to and contribute to its development Remember that the divine spirit "presides," with the clerk and members together working to ensure good discipline or right ordering for that to be clear.

It is good to be organized, to anticipate timing, while keeping open to the flow of the meeting. Quaker testimony is that these apparently secular things are also sacred. Be willing to ask for help. Remember that the clerk is not alone in exercising spiritual disciplines.

Recording Minutes

The recording clerk records the proceedings during business and committee meetings. The clerks discern and bring forth in words the sense of the meeting. At some point in a discussion the clerk may summarize his or her perception of the sense of the meeting for approval or further discussion. Other times, a member of the meeting may propose a minute, which attempts to summarize the sense of the meeting. When a decision is made,

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the recording clerk prepares and reads a minute, modifying it if needed for approval by the meeting.

When all present are aware of an inner sense of rightness it is recognized that a decision has been reached - that the Meeting has reached unity and the Clerk will re- state what the Meeting has been expressing - the sense of the Meeting. Members may offer additions and corrections. Once the meeting voices general approval of the sense of the meeting as articulated by the Clerk, the final minute is written down and read back to the Meeting by the Clerk. Sometimes the final wording of a minute requires the silent support of the worshipping Meeting. The Clerk should be given authority to make minor editorial changes in the minute later, if any appear needed. At the next meeting, when the minutes of the previous meeting are read, attention may be called to the changes. When approved in its original or edited form, the minute becomes part of the Meeting's permanent record. For better or for worse the minute now belongs to everybody. It stands as the expression of what happened at that time and place and is not open to alteration. New thinking or information may cause a later YM to make a new minute of its own, but not to change what has been written.

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When Friends Aren't in Unity

At times it is difficult for a meeting to reach a decision and the Clerk must carefully weigh the various points of view which have been expressed before offering a tentative formulation of a minute. If there are one or two members who do not agree, but feel that it is nevertheless the right decision for the Meeting at the time, they will stand aside, remaining silent or withdrawing their objection, thereby freeing the Meeting to proceed.

When there are serious differences of opinion and some remain strongly convinced of the validity of their point of view, it is frequently possible to find unity by recourse to a period of silent worship and prayer. If not, the decision may be referred to a committee for their prayerful consideration. This committee should be composed of Friends with diverse views and is charged with revising the proposal in light of the objections and with bringing recommendations to a later meeting.

Occasionally some Friends find they cannot withdraw their objection to the Meeting's taking action in a matter on which all other Friends in the Meeting unite. These Friends must then ask themselves if their objections should be binding on the entire meeting and the meeting members must ask themselves if they have well pondered the objections voiced by a few Friends. Friends need to be reminded that they must remain open in seeking God's will for the Meeting and not limit their Spirits to listening only to their personal judgments. It may be wise for Friends with strong feelings to ask to meet with a Committee for Clearness to further explore the source of their positions.

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If the Meeting, after prolonged laboring, is convinced that it is following Divine guidance, it may set aside the objections and proceed. It may include reference to the objections in the minute recording the action. The growth of Truth among the members in the course of time will confirm the action or lead the Meeting to a sounder decision.

A Meeting which finds a Friend repeatedly objecting may deal considerately with that Friend without the Meeting's necessarily being disrupted. An objector, however, who insists, time after time, in putting a personal judgment, in a disruptive manner, against the clear unity of the Meeting, even after being elderred, may need the counsel of Friends as to whether that individual understands and can function in Friends' way of doing business.

In the process of reaching a decision, the Clerk and the Meeting may quite properly take into consideration that some Friends have more wisdom and experience than others. It should also bear in mind that some members have specialized knowledge and training in certain areas and therefore their conviction may carry greater weight when the matter at hand is related to their expertise. In either case, the opposition of such Friends cannot as a rule be disregarded. The Meeting, however, must be on guard against always accepting words of weighty Friends as final and must also be wary of accepting the traditional pattern only because it is traditional. Fresh, powerful insights are often granted to new and younger members.

Committees

To facilitate the work of the Meeting community, various committees may be created to address caring for the community, attending to worship, managing the property, finances, and other physical resources, and interfacing with the larger community around them. Membership on many committees is open to both members and regular attenders, although some Meetings may require membership to serve on some committees.

Committees hold regular committee meetings for worship following the same principles as the monthly meeting for worship with attention to business: deep listening to all present to hear their opinions and concerns, moving beyond verbal expressions to hear the spirit of the concern, and arriving at the sense of the meeting. A clerk or co-clerks manage the communication and organization of the committee. They also see to it that minutes and proceedings of their meetings are recorded and shared as necessary with the Meeting as a whole.

Common committees are concerned with Worship and Ministry, Religious Education, both for youth and adults, Community or Pastoral Care, Communication, Outreach, Peace and Social Justice, Finance, Nominating, Hospitality, Property. Each meeting discerns its own needs for community care and sets up committees accordingly, for example a small meeting using a rented space may find they work best as a single committee of the whole addressing whatever comes up at any given time.

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Committees for Clearness

These are special short term committees appointed to meet with attenders applying for membership, couples applying for marriage under the care of the meeting, or individual members or attenders seeking clarity on an issue or a leading. They are composed of a convenor and three or four Meeting members in the case of a membership clearness committee, a convenor and members with relationship skills in the case of a marriage clearness committee, and people with knowledge or interest of the issue or leading for individuals seeking clarity on an issue. If desired by the individual, they may be people known from outside the meeting with knowledge in the area of concern.

The focus person or couple writes a letter requesting clearness for membership or marriage under the care of the meeting to the clerk who shares it with the meeting and then passes it on to the appropriate committee to set up the clearness committee or else personally sees that such a committee is set up. In the case of clarity on a personal issue, the request is may be made to the clerk or to the committee tasked with setting up clearness committees. The request may include the names of people the focus person would like on the committee with the understanding that others may be appointed.

Clearness committees meet as often as necessary to accomplish their task. Everything discussed in any clearness committee is confidential. In the case of membership and marriage, committees report their conclusion to the committee overseeing them, or if no committee, to the meeting directly. For personal clarity on an issue, the only report is that they met.

Threshing Sessions and Other Called Meetings

Called Meetings: When business cannot wait until the next scheduled Meeting for Worship with Attention for Business, the clerk can schedule a called Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business by announcing it the week before at rise of meeting, and in whatever other ways the meeting shares information with its members,

Threshing Meetings: Friends should not avoid issues which may be difficult or controversial. It is better for the Meeting to allow full opportunity for differences to be aired and faced. In dealing with such issues, or those of a complex nature entailing information with which some Friends may be unfamiliar, it is often helpful to hold one or more preliminary "threshing meetings" in which no decision is made, but through which the chaff can be separated from the grain of truth. Such meetings can clear the way for later action on the issue. Full notice of a threshing session should be given and special efforts made to see that Friends of all shades of opinion can and will be present. To the extent that Friends of a given view are absent, the usefulness of such a meeting will be impaired. If factual material needs to be presented, persons knowledgeable in the area should be asked to present such material and be available to answer questions.

The Clerk or moderator of a threshing session should make it clear at the start that the Meeting not only expects, but welcomes expressions of the widest differences. Friends are

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urged not to hold back whatever troubles them about the issues at hand. Hesitancy to share a strong conviction because it may offend someone, reflects a lack of trust. The Clerk's job, then, is to draw out the reticent, limit the time taken by too-ready talkers, and see that all have an opportunity to speak. It is useful to ask someone to take notes of the meeting for later reference. At times the threshing meeting may forward a recommendation to the Meeting for Business.

Guidelines For Threshing Meetings

1. Speak from personal experience.
2. Do not reply to or rebut others.
3. All ideas and thoughts on an issue are welcome for consideration.
4. Everyone should have a chance to speak.
5. Friends have a responsibility to YM to make dissenting views known during a threshing session.
6. Passion is permitted!
7. Unity does not have to be achieved in a threshing session.
8. Threshing meeting outcomes are reported back to Business Meeting.

Meetings for Marriage

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. New English Bible Translation, I Corinthians Chapter 13, verse 4

Marriage has always been regarded by Friends as a religious commitment rather than a merely civil contract. Both partners should offer, with God's help, an intention to cherish one another for life. Remember that happiness depends on an understanding and steadfast love on both sides. In times of difficulty, remind yourself of the value of prayer, of perseverance and a sense of humor. Advices and Queries, The Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain.

Marriage in the "manner of Friends" is a very old tradition, based in the testimony of equality. No one "gives the bride away" during the ceremony and the couple pledge each other.

The Process for Marriage Under the Care of a Meeting

The phrase, "Under the Care," has had a wide range of interpretations depending on circumstances, such as a couple being new to Quakerism, or to the local meeting. In taking a couple and their marriage under their care, the meeting agrees to support them and their relationship long after the ceremony is over. They should be encouraged to bring their problems to members of their clearness committee whenever difficulties arise. The process should not be rushed, or faced with time constraints, so couples should not select a date or send out "save the date" notices, until the clearness process is complete.

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The Process begins:

Couples contemplating marriage are earnestly advised to seek divine guidance in making their decision, to give serious consideration to the importance of harmony and sympathy in religious convictions, and to seek early the approval of parents and guardians in order that family unity may be preserved, and hasty and improper marriages avoided.

Non-members may marry in the meeting, subject to the laws of the respective states and the considered judgment of the monthly meeting and according to the good order of Friends.

Couples who wish to marry after the manner of Friends should address a written proposal to the monthly meeting. The letter, signed by them both, and substantially as follows, should be submitted well in advance of the contemplated date. It may be as simple as the one below, or may contain additional information.

To the _____ Monthly Meeting:

We, the undersigned, propose taking each other in marriage, and we hereby request the approval of the meeting.

(Signatures of both)

If either person is under the age of 18, the proposal must be accompanied by written consent of parents or guardians of such person or by a statement explaining why it cannot be obtained.

The clerk should immediately refer the proposal to whichever committee handles requests for clearness committees. For instance, in Live Oak Meeting, clearness committees are organized by the Care and Concern Committee. In very small meetings this is often done by the Business Meeting as a whole.

That committee then appoints three to five members of the monthly meeting to inquire into the couple's clearness to proceed in the marriage. Ideally, this committee should include a married couple. They should present their report to the supervising committee (or Business meeting as a whole) and then to the monthly meeting when the process is complete.

The term "clearness" referred originally to clearness from other entangling engagements. There has been in recent years a broadening of the concept to an exercise of the loving care of the meeting by making sure, as far as possible, that there is nothing to interfere with the permanence and happiness of the marriage.

It is wise to treat all applications with the same care. The clearness committee should explore with the couple their mutual commitment to God and their capacity for the unselfish love that endures. The committee should discuss with the couple any previous marriages or commitments, the making of decisions, including those concerning finances, having and raising children, commitments to extended family, and other areas of concern. In addition, the committee may also need to raise questions about sexual preference, potential drug and alcohol abuse, and medical and genetic considerations or cultural

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differences in their families of origin. Information revealed during these meetings should be kept confidential.

There may be times or instances when the proposed marriage does not seem wise or right ordered in the judgment of the clearness committee. For instance, it may be that one member of the couple may be legally free, but still has emotional issues that should be resolved for the health of the marriage. It may also be that the couple is very young, has conflict with the families of origin or even about to move away or other kinds of upheavals. In any of these cases and many more challenges, the committee may ask the couple to delay to give time for professional counseling, or time to resolve the issues. If a delay will not address the committee's concerns, they should feel free to report back that they are unable to approve taking the marriage under the care of the meeting.

If the couple are members of different meetings, both meetings should reach clearness before the wedding takes place.

When one or both are members of the Religious Society of Friends but for adequate reasons have chosen to wed in a meeting to which neither belongs, the usual procedure for securing the approval of the home meeting is carried out, and the clerk communicates with the clerk of the meeting where the wedding is to take place, asking for its cooperation. The meeting that allows the marriage should appoint a committee of oversight; it may include members of another meeting when distance makes such an arrangement desirable.

The couple should be present, if possible, at the monthly meeting when the reports on clearness are presented. If no obstruction appears, they shall be at liberty to wed according to the custom of the Religious Society of Friends in a regular or appointed meeting at such time and place as the monthly meeting may approve. A Minute to that effect is recorded by the Monthly Meeting for business.

The monthly meeting then appoints a committee to supervise or carry out the ceremony. This is sometimes called the "arrangements committee." The couple are free to propose the time and place of the marriage and may suggest the names of the Friends who are to serve as the arrangements committee.

The arrangements committees advises the parties as to the proper procedure for the ceremony, to see that they have obtained a marriage license and a wedding certificate; to attend the wedding and see that it is properly conducted and that other requirements of the law are fulfilled, to make sure that the necessary information is delivered to the recorder for recording, and to report to the monthly meeting.

Bypassing the normal clearness process

In a few cases, the process may be speeded up or partially bypassed by action of the meeting at large. Including scheduling the date and place before the clearness process has been completed. This procedure is to be followed only under the most pressing and unusual circumstances.

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The Ceremony

Often the couple may have guests who are unfamiliar with Quaker practices, so the Clerk or some other person, may welcome everyone and briefly describe the procedures.

The marriage having been authorized, and the meeting at which it is to be solemnized having gathered, it is recommended that the meeting begin with a period of silent worship. The following is the traditional wording of the vows, but each couple is free to write their own vows, with approval or knowledge of the committee.

At a suitable time in the meeting, the couple should rise and taking each other by the hand, declare in words to the following effect, each speaking in turn:

In the presence of God and before these our friends, I take thee, ____, to be my wife/husband/spouse/partner, promising with Divine assistance to be unto thee a loving and faithful wife/husband/spouse/partner so long as we both shall live.

After these declarations, the couple signs the wedding certificate, and, either then or later, the members of the committee of oversight are to do so too. Some designated person should then read the certificate aloud. A period of worship should follow, and, at the conclusion of the meeting, others present should sign the certificate as witnesses.

The traditional form of the wedding certificate shall be substantially as follows:

Whereas ____ (woman/man's full name), of ____ (place), daughter/son of ____ and ____ (parents' names), of ____ (place), and ____ (woman/man's full name), of ____ (place), daughter/son of ____ and ____ (parents' names), of ____ (place), having declared their intentions to marry each other to the ____ Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, held at ____ (place), according to the good order used among them, and, (insert this clause if applicable) having the consent of parents (or guardians), that meeting allowed their proposed marriage.

Now this is to certify that for the accomplishment of their marriage, this ____ day of the ____ month, in the year ____, they, ____ and ____ (couple's names), appeared in a meeting for worship of the Religious Society of Friends, held at ____ (place), and ____ (person 1 name), taking ____ (person 2) by the hand, did, on this solemn occasion, declare that she/he took her/him to be her/his spouse, promising, with Divine assistance, to be unto her/him a loving and faithful spouse so long as they both shall live (or words to that effect), and then in the same assembly ____ (person 2 name) did in like manner declare that she/he took her/him to be her/his spouse, promising, with Divine assistance, to be unto her/him a loving and faithful spouse so long as they both shall live (or words to that effect); and moreover, they, as a further confirmation thereof, did, then and there, to this certificate, set their hands.

(Full signatures of the couple)

And we, having been present at the wedding, have as witnesses set our hands the day and year above written:

(signatures of witnesses)

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Printed wedding certificates are available on order with two months' notice from the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting; 1515 Cherry Street; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102. Assistance is also available from the New York Yearly Meeting office. You may also find local calligraphers to create the certificate.

It is affectionately advised that moderation be observed in all of the proceedings of the wedding day, including simplicity of dress and surroundings, and that the occasion be characterized by the dignity becoming its serious spiritual purpose.

A condensation of the duties of individuals may prove useful:

The Responsibilities of the Persons to be Married

1. To write a letter to the clerk of the monthly meeting under whose care they wish to be married, signed by both of the couple, stating their intention to marry and enclosing, if needed and available, the consent of parents or guardians.
2. To write a second letter to the clerk for presentation to the session of the monthly meeting at which the clearness committee makes its report requesting permission to marry in a regular or appointed meeting for worship (the latter is more usual) and proposing, if they so desire, the names of Friends they suggest to serve as a committee of oversight for the wedding. The day, hour, and place where they wish to have the marriage solemnized should be included. (This may also be replaced by a proposed minutes from the clearness committee.)
3. To refrain from sending wedding invitations until the monthly meeting allows their proposed marriage.
4. To meet the committee of oversight, at a time and a place suggested by the committee, to discuss plans for the wedding, including such matters as the choice of persons to read the wedding certificate and to close the meeting for worship.
5. To have the Friends' wedding certificate prepared in ample time.
6. To inform themselves of the legal requirements of the state in which the wedding is to take place and to obtain the forms to be used to comply with them.
7. To be sure that the license is given to the clerk or other designated person, before the wedding and that the wedding certificate is ready.
8. To commit to memory long before the wedding day the promises they will say to each other.
9. To sign the wedding certificate after they have spoken their promises.

The Responsibilities of the Clerk

1. To refer the letter of intention to marry and the letters from the parents or guardians, if needed and available, to the relevant committee immediately following their receipt.
2. To provide for time to receive a report on clearness at the monthly meeting.
3. When the monthly meeting has accepted the report:

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1. to request that the meeting appoint a committee of oversight for the wedding and also that it grant permission for a meeting for worship to be held at the time and place requested for the wedding.
2. to inform the couple that they are free to proceed with their plans.

The Responsibilities of the Clearness Committee

A selection of sample questions is attached at the end of this document.

1. To make inquiry and conscientiously satisfy itself that there is nothing to interfere with the accomplishment of the marriage. The couple are often interviewed both separately and together. (See the beginning of this section on marriage.)
2. To report its findings and recommendations to a subsequent session of the monthly meeting.
3. To make available books and pamphlets on marriage and, when appropriate, to refer the couple to an available marriage counselor.
4. To be informed concerning legal requirements for obtaining a marriage license.
5. To make sure that the rights of children have been legally secured, if either of the couple has children by a former marriage.
6. To be available to assist in any way that may be needed.

The Responsibilities of the Arrangements Committee

1. To see that the wedding is taken place with dignity, reverence, and simplicity.
2. To meet the persons being married to discuss plans for the wedding, including the choice of persons to read the wedding certificate and to open and close the meeting.
3. To see in advance that all legal requirements have been met and that the proper license has been secured, executed, and filed with the public authorities within the specified time.
4. To arrange for the care of the wedding certificate following the meeting for worship and to see that opportunity is given for those present to sign it.
5. To arrange for the recorder to record the marriage, as the monthly meeting requires.
6. To report to the monthly meeting whether the wedding has suitably taken place, whether the legal requirements have been satisfied, and whether the marriage has been properly reported to the recorder.

Marriage of Members not under the Care of the Meeting

If a member is married not under the care of the meeting, someone appointed by the monthly meeting should either visit or correspond with the newly married couple, expressing the interest of the meeting in their new home. It should be assumed that the relationship of the member with the Society will continue, and the non-member will be made welcome and invited to attend meeting.

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Sample questions for a clearness committee

1. What are your priorities in life?
2. What are your basic values, goals, and beliefs? Are they similar?
3. What are your expectations of marriage? To what degree is your decision to marry based on: intense feelings, careful thoughtful and prayerful consideration and mutual discussion? Physical attraction? Practical convenience? Fulfilling the expectations of others? Rebelling against the expectations of others?
4. Do you both see marriage as a sacred and lifelong relationship?
5. Will the relationship allow and encourage individual as well as collective spiritual, intellectual and social growth?
6. How do you plan to seek the divine assistance you will invoke in your marriage vows?
7. How well do you know yourself and your partner? Are current differences accepted?
8. Do you try to be in touch with your partner's feelings and needs? Can you communicate your own? Are you able to be honest with each other?
9. Are you able to ask for and give support during difficult periods?
10. How do you resolve conflict? What do you do when you are angry?
11. Is there a general willingness to share: Possessions, friends, housework?
12. What will your household roles be? Who makes financial and other major decisions? Will you need to balance two careers?

from Human Relations Committee, Ohio Yearly Meeting [Conservative], Growing in Marriage.

SCYM and Marriage Equality

Based on the testimonies on equality, as far back as the early 1980's some meetings provided marriage under the care of the meeting to persons without regard to gender, including "same-sex couples." SCYM has two relevant Minutes.

YM 1999-24: South Central Yearly Meeting endorses the marriages of individuals under the care of Monthly Meetings without regard to gender.

Marriage YM 1999-24: South Central Yearly Meeting endorses the marriages of individuals under the care of Monthly Meetings without regard to gender. YM 2004-11: We reaffirm the South Central Yearly Meeting 1999 minute reading: "South Central Yearly Meeting endorses the marriages of individuals under the care of Monthly Meetings without regard to gender." Believing that there is that of God in everyone, monthly meetings within South Central Yearly Meeting have been taking the marriages of same-gender couples under their

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care for many years. We find that the gift of spiritual union is as strong and valuable to our community in same-sex couples as it is in opposite-sex couples. Based upon our testimony of equality, we affirm the right of all married couples to the same legal privileges and rights. By not recognizing these rights, the state places a burden on the affected couples and their families and on our community as a whole as we support them. We are led by the Spirit to call upon the state to extend the right of civil marriage with all its attendant legal rights and privileges to all couples regardless of gender. We encourage Friends to work toward this end by witnessing to other Friends, to people of other denominations and faith traditions, and to our legislators.

E-Memorial Meetings—under construction

Membership

In the earliest days of the Society of Friends, there was no formal membership. Everyone and anyone present, was “counted” as a member. But during the persecutions, when Quakers and other dissenters were jailed, meetings were called on to provide support in a wide variety of ways, including paying of fines, providing food for those in prisons and taking care of children when both parents were in prison. In order to distinguish between Friends and other dissenters, meetings developed lists of who were members and therefore entitled to help when needed.

During Colonial and post-colonial decades in North America, Friends tended to live in communities near each other with families known to each other and sometimes tended to become somewhat clannish, or looking inward towards those known to them rather than outward. “Birthright” membership was common and education in the Quaker way was provided by family members. Today when fewer Friends come from Quaker families, meetings have developed a variety of ways of discerning membership.

Today membership in a meeting represents acknowledgement that an individual has found a level of unity with Friends’ testimonies, beliefs and practices. Membership implies a more formal relationship and a level of commitment to the Meeting and the Meeting Community. Membership is held by monthly meetings and gained through a clearness process, although meetings often vary in the specifics or details. In general a committee is formed with several members helping the individual discern their commitment and willingness to participate in the community of Friends. Part of the essential genius of Friends is the experience of spiritual growth through shared worship and service as well as the loving acceptance of the individual by the meeting community. It is an open and accepting fellowship that recognizes that of God in everyone. Friends should not aspire to have reached some spiritual destination before applying for membership, but should trust that membership will further their spiritual growth and even the application process can be enlightening.

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It is common practice for membership to be required of those serving as meeting clerks, treasurer, or other positions of responsibility.

Birthright membership has been discontinued in the Yearly Meetings where it was practiced. But it was bestowed on children at or near birth when both parents were members, usually of the same meeting. It appears as if birthright membership has never been practiced in South Central Yearly Meeting.

Membership in the Religious Society of Friends is held by Monthly Meetings.

Membership in the Religious Society of Friends is meant to be a joyful responsibility in a community that is intended to enrich the spiritual journey of all. Members belong to and represent their local and yearly meeting and the Religious Society of Friends. As members, we affirm our concurrence with the testimonies and practices of the Society and our willingness to do our best to live by them. Membership is an acknowledgment of willingness to contribute to the life of the meeting.

It is the responsibility of each member to contribute to the life of the meeting and of the Society of Friends as the Spirit leads. All Friends are open to hearing and answering their individual call to service. It is important for Friends to participate with their worshipful presence in meeting for worship and in meeting for worship for business. Ministry takes many forms. This may include, but is not limited to, spoken ministry, serving on committees, holding offices, providing financial support, teaching First Day School, leading discussions, joining in adult religious education, participating in the activities of the meeting and wider Quaker organizations, representing the meeting to other organizations, supporting others in their efforts, and caring for others. Membership does not imply that one has reached a particular level of spirituality. Membership is an acknowledgment of a person's desire to contribute to a meeting in a deeper way and in return an acknowledgment by the meeting that the deepening of its relationship with the individual is welcomed with joy. All members continue to seek the Truth and remain open to continuing revelation. It is an active commitment to the process of spiritual growth.

The clearness process: it appears that meetings in SCYM have a variety of practices dealing with applications for membership, depending at least, in part, in the size of the meeting. But the process usually follows these procedures. When an individual has been attending a meeting for some time, participating in the life of the meeting, perhaps serving on a committee, taking formal courses such as Quakerism 101 (Live Oak Friends Meeting) or reading a recommended series of books. (A sample reading list will appear in an appendix.) When the individual feels ready, she/he writes a letter to the clerk of the meeting. This letter is read aloud at a monthly meeting for business and then passed to a designated committee. In some meetings, it appears that the monthly meeting for business appoints the clearness committee. In other meetings, the letter is passed to a designated committee, such as a Care and Concerns or Ministry and Counsel committee who then appoints the clearness committee. The members of the committee should be members with some

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sensitivity, knowledge of Quaker beliefs and practices or other relevant skills. That committee should have a clerk or convener who arranges for meetings, and files reports. The clearness committee usually meets together one or more times over a period of time—this is not a process that should be rushed. The purpose is to help the applicant discern their readiness to make the commitment to the Society of Friends, address hesitations or to provide additional resources or explanations.

During this process, the applicant should be ready to lay down their membership in another church or at least openly discuss their condition with the clearness committee. This is also an opportunity for the applicant to discuss any reservations or misgivings they might have. Discussion topics and documents should be kept confidential.

When the applicant and the committee are clear that there are no impediments to membership and that the applicant is ready, the committee clerk reports back to the committee and then to the monthly meeting. A minute is prepared by clerk of the monthly meeting and the entire body approves the membership. Some meetings hold the minute over for a second reading, but others do not. All documents should be kept on file in the meeting's archives.

If a couple or entire family are applying at the same time, individual letters and committees may be preferred, but not required.

Associate Membership for Children

Children may be granted associate membership that records them as members of the community. A Minute was adopted on the membership of children in 1978, to be considered as a guideline to the Monthly Meetings. "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 guided."
-Letter from the Meeting of Elders at Balby, 1656.

"Associate membership may be granted to children of members at the request of the parent(s.) It is usually discontinued at age 26 or when and if the child, now grown up, becomes a member of another church or meeting. They may also resign. The resignation or discontinuance should be reported to and minute by the monthly meeting.

The category of Associate member is recommended on its own behalf.

On the question of "birthright" membership of newborns, two choices will be open to Monthly Meetings.

1. Assume automatic Associate Membership for children whose parents are both members of a Monthly Meeting unless the parents request otherwise.
2. Require parents to apply for Associate Membership for their child before he/she is recorded as an Associate Member. If one or both parents are members or are applying for membership in the Monthly Meeting, they may apply for their children under 12 years of age to be recorded as associate members.

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The Yearly Meeting urges that each Monthly Meeting bring to the attention of all parents the possibilities of Associate Membership for their child. Those children already recorded as members will continue in full membership.

Children over 12 should be received as Associate Members on their own request rather than at the request of their parents. It is recommended that no Monthly Meeting carry as Associate Members anyone over 25 years old.

Associate members should be included in statistics of membership and have the full rights and under 12 years of age to be recorded as associate members.

Young people who are Associate Members may be given the opportunity any time between the ages of 12 to 26 to become full members of the Society of Friends on their own request." *Minute Number 19, from SCYM Proceedings, May 27-29, 1978.*

Membership in Worship Groups and Preparative Meetings

Membership is held by the Monthly Meeting who nurtures the new meeting. Someone appointed by the Monthly Meeting, should verify that new attenders of the worship group are sufficiently educated in Quaker beliefs and practices as they prepare for membership.

Membership by transfer

When a member in good standing in one meeting relocates to another area, membership may be transferred between the "home" and the new meeting. This is usually done by an exchange of letters, with each meeting minuting the change. In rare cases where the member is not known to the new meeting, or the member was inactive or away for a long time, in the "home" meeting, the new meeting may opt for a complete or modified clearness process.

Sojourning Membership

This involves a member of a meeting who will be away from the "home" meeting for a period of time, perhaps to attend graduate school or a short-term job posting. This is accomplished with an exchange of letters between the meetings and minuted by each monthly meeting. The sojourning member has all the privileges and responsibilities of a local member.

Discontinuing Membership

By Resignation: If a member becomes joins another denomination, they may request a letter of recommendation from their monthly meeting and submit a letter of resignation to the monthly meeting. That resignation is minuted and the member removed from membership rolls. Traditionally, holding memberships in two denominations has been discouraged because the practice can lead to divided loyalty. However in more modern times, some Friends define themselves as Buddhist-Quaker, or Jewish-Quaker. This condition should be discussed with the clearness committee early in the process to determine if the previous affiliation has been sufficiently laid to rest.

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When a member becomes inactive, usually for a reason not known to the meeting, the matter is referred to the committee that handles membership. They usually ask one person to initiate contact to find out the reason. If that is unsuccessful, or they are unable to make contact, membership may be discontinued. This process often continues over several years and should be reported to the monthly meeting. It may be that someone not on the committee has contact or contact information. If all efforts to contact the member have failed and three years have elapsed, the committee reports to the monthly meeting who minute their assent, the former member is removed from the membership list. As a final act, a copy of this minute should be sent to the former member at their last known address.

By Disownment: When a member develops serious conflicts with the meeting or continually behaves in ways that disrupt the community, they may be removed from membership by a process called, “disownment.” Every effort at reconciliation should be attempted usually by a committee appointed by the monthly meeting committee that handles membership or care of members. Formal complaints against the member should be prayerfully considered. A committee appointed to labor with the member should labor in love to resolve the problem. Care should be taken to distinguish between the deed and doer. If the committee is unable to restore the member to fellowship in the community, or alter the behavior(s) the matter should be referred to the monthly meeting which will then prepare a minute of removal or disownment. The member shall be given a copy of the minute and the membership records corrected accordingly. Cases of disownment may be appealed to the quarterly meeting or the yearly meeting for review. In this case, a committee should be appointed by that body who then work towards reconciliation with all involved. If the disowned member, alters the behaviors or becomes reconciled to the community, they may be considered for membership either by reinstatement or through the usual application for membership process.

Attenders

“Attenders” are those persons who demonstrate a continuing interest in the meeting and participate in the life of the community. Friends should welcome their participation, but they may not serve in positions reserved for members, such as clerk of the meeting, or treasurer.

Sample Minute for Membership

Minute Number

On the recommendation of the committee clerked by (name), on this day, (fill in date) (full name) was welcomed into membership in (fill in name of monthly meeting.) This minute was approved and will be signed by the clerk.

List of resources for those considering membership. As of 2020, all of these are in print and available from Quaker Books of FGC.

Pink Dandelion, The Quakers, a Very Short Introduction, Oxford University Press, 2008.

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Brinton, Howard H. et. al, Friends for 350 Years, Pendle Hill Publications, 2002

Punshon, John, Encounter with Silence, Friends United Press, 1997

Kelly, Thomas, The Gathered Meeting, pamphlet, The Tract Association of Friends, 2005.

Establishing Worship Groups and Preparative Meetings

Worship Groups

A worship group is a gathering of persons who meet regularly for worship after the manner of Friends and desire to be identified with the principles and practices of the Religious Society of Friends. Such a group may organize independently or may be set up with the encouragement of a Monthly Meeting for Friends and other interested persons living in a certain area. It is desirable to be under the care of a Monthly Meeting for support and guidance.

Worship Groups may find Meeting for Worship their only activity, and it is acceptable to continue in this fashion for an indefinite time. As Worship Groups become larger, other activities such as shared meals, reading groups, study groups, service projects, religious education, or worship-sharing groups may be undertaken. Worship Groups need to be mindful of the danger of attempting too many activities or of having an individual or couple carry all of the responsibility, for this can invite exhaustion and disillusionment. A Worship Group usually names one of the groups to serve as the convener and correspondent of the group. Communications from Monthly and regional Meetings and other Friends groups or organizations are addressed to the correspondent, who is responsible for sharing these with the entire group. Each group need organize only to the degree which is right for it at a particular time.

A Worship Group may not receive members, hold weddings, or otherwise act formally as a Monthly Meeting. Such actions must be carried out by application to a Monthly Meeting, usually the one to which the Worship Group is affiliated.

When a Worship Group feels it is ready to organize and conduct business in the manner of a Monthly Meeting, it may ask the Monthly Meeting to which it is affiliated for Preparative Meeting status. After approval of the monthly meeting, the recommendation is then taken to the Quarterly meeting, and then recommended to the Yearly Meeting for final approval.

Preparative Meeting

A Preparative Meeting is a Meeting for Worship and for Business which is under the care of, and reports regularly to, a Monthly Meeting, and which ordinarily looks forward to becoming a Monthly Meeting. A Preparative Meeting may be recognized by a Monthly Meeting when a Worship Group asks to be established as such or when a group of

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experienced Friends, desiring to organize as a Preparative Meeting, asks for this recognition.

A Preparative Meeting has the continuing care and counsel of the Monthly Meeting with which it is affiliated. A Preparative Meeting has officers and committees as needed. In the manner of Friends, a Preparative Meeting holds a Meeting for Business once a month and may receive and distribute funds on behalf of its constituents. It regularly sends a copy of the minutes of its Meeting for Business to its Monthly Meeting.

A Preparative Meeting may not receive members, hold weddings, or otherwise act formally as a Monthly Meeting: such actions are brought to and carried out through the Monthly Meeting to which it is related. Friends participating in a Preparative Meeting are urged to hold their membership in the overseeing Monthly Meeting.

Responsibilities of the Monthly Meeting to the Preparative Meeting:

1. Visitation and Communication
 - A. See that members are well grounded in Friends testimonies.
 - B. Explain the commitment implied in membership
 - C. See that Friends know Quaker organizations
2. Pastoral care and ministry
3. Assistance in the conducting of meetings for worship and business.
4. Assistance in keeping of records and accounting of funds.
5. Conduct and record official business of membership, births, marriages, and deaths
6. Education of children
7. Outreach

Becoming a Monthly Meeting

After a due period, the Preparative Meeting may then apply for Monthly Meeting status. When the Monthly Meeting believes that the Preparative Meeting has sufficient commitment and stability to assure its continuance, the Monthly Meeting should make a recommendation to the Quarterly Meeting. Upon approval of the Monthly Meetings recommendation, the Quarterly Meeting then recommends to the Yearly Meeting that the Preparative Meeting be accorded full Monthly Meeting status. The Yearly Meeting has the final responsibility for establishing monthly meetings.

Laying Down a Meetings

When a Worship Group or a Preparative Meeting recognizes that it should be laid down or affiliate with another meeting, that request should be brought before the Monthly Meeting under whose care it exists. A Worship Group or Preparative Meeting should not lay itself down or suspend its meeting without first consulting with this Monthly Meeting. Monthly Meeting has the responsibility to labor lovingly with the Worship Group or Preparative

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Meeting in order to explore the consequences and possible alternatives of being laid down. If the laying down of a Worship Group or Preparative Meeting is minuted, Monthly Meeting will report its action to its Quarterly Meeting, which will in turn report it to Yearly Meeting for final acceptance.

In like manner, if a Monthly Meeting requests that it be laid down, or unite with another meeting, that request is taken to its Quarterly Meeting which has the responsibility lovingly to labor with the Monthly Meeting in order to explore the consequences and possible alternatives of being laid down. If the laying down of a Monthly Meeting is minuted by Quarterly Meeting, the minute is forwarded to Yearly Meeting for final acceptance.

If the request for laying down a Monthly Meeting is approved, Quarterly Meeting, or a committee formed by Quarterly Meeting, should assist the Monthly Meeting in making necessary business arrangements. Individual memberships should be transferred to another Monthly Meeting. Monthly Meeting records should be forwarded to the YM Archives. Physical property and investments belonging to the Monthly Meeting vest in the YM, except when otherwise determined by deed or other legal obligation. All assets should be administered, as far as possible, in accordance with the directions of the original donors. Monthly Meeting funds should be disbursed in an appropriate manner. If the request for laying down a Monthly Meeting is approved, and that Monthly Meeting becomes a Worship Group or Preparative Meeting, it is encouraged to place itself under the care of another Monthly Meeting.

If Worship Groups, Preparative Meetings, or Monthly Meetings cease to function or to report regularly to the larger bodies which have care and oversight for them, the latter should take the initiative to lay them down.

E-Religious Education for Adults, Young Friends and Children—under construction

E-Continuous Education and Spiritual Advancement—under construction

E-Managing Fiduciary Responsibilities and Property—under construction

Section 7: Relating to the Larger Community of Friends

The Yearly Meeting

The purpose of our yearly meeting is to strengthen and support one another in a common search for Truth and Light. We gather to search in the Light, to seek renewal, and to celebrate our joy in coming together. Far-separated as we are geographically, we are given to feel ourselves, with deep gratitude to God, to be of one body. When Friends from a wider geography area share in worship, business, social, and educational opportunities, the faith of all is broadened

Another principal purpose of the yearly meeting is meeting for worship for the transaction of business. This enables a larger group to undertake matters of concern that cannot be accomplished by smaller Friends' groups. This is done through eleven standing committees and temporary ad hoc committees as needed. Committees may meet throughout the year to attend to business to bring to the annual gathering of the whole yearly meeting in the spring for further discernment and decision making. There is another, smaller, Representatives Meeting in the fall where preparations for the spring Yearly Meeting are made and other business may be transacted.

The yearly meeting also maintains contact and support with a number of national and international Quaker organizations through financial support and providing delegates to those that rely on volunteers from yearly meetings to do their work. See Friends Organizations and Educational Institutions for more details on those and others.

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The yearly meeting exercises only general oversight and loving care of the constituent monthly meetings, leaving to them the proper ordering of their worship, fellowship, and service. Yearly meeting represents an extension and an expansion of Friends' basic spiritual community - the local meeting.

Monthly Meeting Responsibilities to SCYM

Representation

1. Appoints representatives to the Representative Meeting of YM
2. Appoints members to YM committees as requested.
3. Every meeting is encouraged to have a designated member to be the contact person for SCYM's P&J Committee. This Friend will act as a two-way information conduit between their Meeting and the Committee.
4. Designated meetings provide a representative from their meeting to the SCYM Nominating Committee. When one of the large monthly meetings approves a representative to the YM Nominating Committee, it is responsible for informing the representative that their term of office begins with the yearly meeting year rather than the monthly meeting year.

Financial

5. Provides financial support to the YM through the annual assessment.
6. Monthly Meetings are encouraged to extend financial assistance to Friends to enable them to attend Yearly Meeting

Reports

7. Sends written copies of concerns, ideas, or questions to the P&J Committee to be compiled and periodically sent on to all monthly meetings and concerned individuals.
8. Informs the YM Clerk of newly appointed Monthly Meeting Clerk and Ministry and Care Clerks.
9. Keeps an accurate membership list and provides it to SCYM.
10. Annually sends Spiritual State of the Meeting and records of births, adoptions, marriages, and memorial minutes to the Yearly Meeting (see appendix for details)

The Quarterly Meetings

A quarterly meeting is a cooperative association of two or more monthly meetings in a given geographical area and is composed of all the members/attenders of its

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constituent monthly meetings, preparative meetings and worship groups, as well as interested persons within its area who are isolated from any established Friends group.

Each quarterly meeting sets its own calendar. Quarterly meetings appoint a clerk, appoint other necessary officers and committees, and conduct their business in the usual manner of Friends. Each quarterly meeting will also appoint a representative to SCYM Representative Meeting. Quarterlies collect and administer funds as needed.

The Purpose and Responsibilities of Quarterly Meetings

The purpose of a quarterly meeting is to strengthen the life and fellowship of meetings and other Friends groups in their area and to provide a link in transmitting business and other information to and from yearly meeting. The quarterly meeting provides an opportunity for considering and acting upon concerns from individuals and meetings and forwarding those approved to the yearly meeting, via the representative meeting. Quarterly meeting is concerned about the condition of its constituent groups, strengthening and supporting them.

Along with monthly meetings, the quarterly meeting is responsible for the nurture of new gatherings of Friends and, when the time comes, reports their request for establishment as monthly meetings to the yearly meeting. Quarterly meeting is also the body that considers a request from a monthly meeting or worship group whose members believe it should be laid down.

Quarterly meeting responsibilities include the following

- gather one or more times a year.
- appoint a Clerk and other officers as necessary to conduct business.
- carry out Yearly Meeting Adult Program Responsibilities on the YM rotation basis for two consecutive years out of every six.
- strengthen the life and fellowship of constituent Meetings and other Friends' groups.
- consider and act upon concerns from individuals and Meetings, forwarding those approved at Quarterly Meeting Business Meetings to Yearly Meeting via Representatives Meeting.
- appoint a Quarterly meeting Representative to Representative Meeting.
- forward to Representative Meeting the name of a Friend to be considered to represent the Quarterly on Yearly Meeting's Nominating Committee.
- assist members of the Nominating Committee by suggesting names for service to YM.
- receive recommendations for recognizing, establishing Worship Groups, Preparative Meetings and Monthly Meetings, and forward its Minute of Recommendation to YM via Representative Meeting.
- receive recommendations for the laying down of a Worship Group or Preparative Meeting, and forward its Minute of Recommendation to YM via Representative Meeting.
- receive recommendations for the laying down of a Monthly Meeting, laboring with that Monthly Meeting to explore the consequences of being laid down, and forward its Minute of Recommendation to YM via Representative Meeting. When a monthly meeting is laid down,

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- assist its current members to find an appropriate Monthly Meeting to which to transfer their memberships.
- possibly assist a Monthly Meeting or Worship Group that is associated with a different YM in its discernment process for affiliation with SCYM, forwarding its recommendation in writing to YM via Representative Meeting.
- possibly assist a Monthly Meeting or Worship Group that is seeking disaffiliation with SCYM in discerning its needs or problems in its relationship to SCYM, forwarding that recommendation in writing to YM via Representative Meeting.

SCYM Organization into Quarterlies

SCYM is composed of three quarterly meetings that meet from one to three times a year, with at least one of those meetings being in the fall of each year.

The Arkansas-Oklahoma Quarterly Meeting includes Fayetteville, Little Rock, Sunrise in Springfield, Oklahoma City, Stillwater, Green Country in Tulsa, Caddo Preparative in Texarkana, and Norman, and Kiamichi in the eastern Oklahoma area.

The Bayou Quarterly Meeting includes Acadiana in the Lafayette area, Baton Rouge, New Orleans, Galveston, and Live Oak Friends in Houston.

The Cielo Grande Quarterly Meeting includes Austin, Dallas, Hill Country in Kerrville, Rio Grande Valley in McAllen, San Antonio, Coastal Bend in Corpus Christi, and Georgetown Worship Group.

There are several meetings and groups unaffiliated with any quarterly. These include Lubbock, Longview Worship Group, Fort Worth, Alpine, and Lubbock Friends of Christ.

Friends' Organizations and Educational Institutions

The first eight listed are those supported financially by and with representatives from SCYM. There are many more. Each October, Friends Journal publishes an update on many Quaker organizations, the 2022 one can be found here:

<https://www.friendsjournal.org/quaker-works-october-2022/>

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC):

Begun in 1917 during World War I to give young conscientious objectors ways to serve without joining the military or taking lives, their focus and function has evolved in response to world conditions. It can be summed up in this quote from Stephen Carey from the 1980's: "It is the AFSC's business to search for ever new and creative ways to bring the power of love to bear on the intractable and harsh reality of evil in the world around us -- at our doorstep and at the far corners of the earth. We can take comfort in our faith that God speaks; new truth and new insights are always available. This is a source of strength as we try to move beyond theorizing and debating to reach the hearts of the oppressed and the bitter, the deprived and the despairing, the hungry and the ill, to widen the boundaries of justice and lay the foundation of peace." AFSC has offices and programs in 20 states, work/collaborate in 6 African countries, 3 Central American countries, 6 Asian countries,

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including North Korea, Jerusalem/Gaza and Jordan. Their four key focuses are Advancing Peacebuilding, Humane Migration Responses, Healing, not Punitive Justice, and Just Economies. Learn more about their online educational programs and opportunities to weigh in with elected officials at www.AFSC.org

Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)

has been lobbying Congress since 1943 on peace and social justice issues. Their current priorities include A world free of war and the threat of war, a society with equity and justice for all, a community where every person's potential may be fulfilled, and an earth restored. They maintain a staff in Washington DC, and facilitate participation from Quaker meetings and churches across the country with a number of initiatives:

- FCNL Advocacy Teams–(125 teams in 44 states) meet regularly with Congressional representatives to develop a relationship and provide information on a specific issue each year
- Young Adult Advocacy Corps who receive training to spend a year educating and mobilizing their communities.
- Summer Internships
- Spring and Fall Lobby Weekends for all ages with training before visiting your legislator on Capitol Hill
- Biannual requests to all Quaker meetings and churches for input on the legislative priorities for the upcoming legislative 2 year session. Their staff then incorporates that information into their work plan.

Visit their website, www.fcnl.org, to learn about issues they are currently working on and sign up for email alerts to send messages to your legislators.

Friends General Conference (FGC)

Founded in 1900, Friends General Conference is an association of local and regional Quaker organizations primarily in the United States and Canada. FGC is a volunteer led association. Our focus areas and related projects are determined by volunteers representing our affiliates and consistent with FGC's organizational Minute of Purpose and Vision Statement. What was once an association of seven yearly meetings holding a biennial "general conference" is now a coalition of sixteen yearly meetings and eleven directly affiliated monthly meetings. With Divine guidance FGC nurtures the spiritual vitality of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) by providing programs and services for Friends, meetings, and seekers.

Major Goals include:

1. Nurture meetings and worship groups.
2. Provide resources and opportunities for meetings, Friends, and seekers to experience the Light, the living presence of God.
3. Help meetings guide Friends to discern the leadings of the Inward Teacher and to grow into ministry.
4. Transform our awareness so that our corporate and individual attitudes and actions fully value and encompass the blessed diversity of our human family.

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5. Work to grow and sustain a vital, diverse, and loving community of Friends based on a shared search for unity in the Spirit.
6. Articulate, communicate, and exemplify Friends' practices, core experiences, and the call to live and witness to our faith.
7. Promote dialogue with others, sharing with them our corporate experience of Divine Truth and listening to and learning from their experience of the same.

Learn more about all the ways they work on those goals at <https://www.fgcquaker.org/>

Friends Peace Teams (FPT)

Friends Peace Teams is a Spirit-led organization that develops long-term relationships with communities in conflict around the world to work for justice and healing, and to create enduring cultures of peace. From their website: We rely on the power of the Living Spirit when we bring together people who have suffered on all sides of oppression, violence or war. Together we mutually discern how to create peaceful societies. Learn more about their programs around the world at the website, <https://friendspeacetams.org>

Friends World Committee For Consultation (FWCC)

The purpose of FWCC is to encourage fellowship and understanding among all the branches of the Religious Society of Friends throughout the world. FWCC brings Quakers together in multiple ways to celebrate God in our lives, to gather the Quaker voice, build networks to address issues of our time, and to unite Friends within our diversity.

FWCC works across five offices. One World Office and four Section offices. All four Sections have within them a diversity of cultures, language, and theological orientation. Each Section operates independently in terms of strategic direction and finance/budgeting, while enjoying collaborative work across the four Sections and the World Office. Learn more about both their many activities and educational resources on their website, <https://fwcc.world>

North American Friends For Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns (FLGBTQC)

Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns is a North American Quaker faith community that affirms that of God in all people. Gathering twice yearly for worship and play, we draw sustenance from each other and from the Spirit for our work and life in the world. We are learning that radical inclusion and radical love bring further light to Quaker testimony and life. Learn more about activities and support on their website, <https://www.flgbtqc.org>

Quaker Earthcare Witness (QEW)

Quaker Earthcare Witness (QEW) is the largest network of Friends (Quakers) working on Earthcare today to inspire Spirit-led action toward ecological sustainability and environmental justice. QEW has grown out of a strong leading among Friends that our future depends on a spiritual transformation in our relationships with each other and the natural world. For over 30 years, we have helped Friends in North America integrate

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Earthcare into their daily lives. Learn more about their educational programs, grants, newsletter, and more on their website, <https://quakerearthcare.org>

Right Sharing of World Resources

Right Sharing of World Resources (RSWR) is an independent Quaker not-for-profit organization sharing the abundance of God's love by working for equity through partnerships around the world. RSWR gives grants to groups of marginalized women in Kenya, Sierra Leone, and India to fund individual micro-enterprise projects. Right Sharing's work is grounded in a sense of stewardship for the world's material, human, and spiritual resources.

Other Quaker organizations—under construction

There are many other Quaker organizations engaging in advocacy, education, ecojustice, investment management, as well as a number of retreat, conference, and study centers.

Friends Around the World - under construction

How much detail do we want? Information from below websites could form the basis? <https://fwcc.world> <https://www.friendsunitedmeeting.org> <https://efcinternational.org> and <https://www.fgcquaker.org>

The Electronic World Community

The benefits of technology for Friends is undeniable. South Central Yearly Meeting has the unique challenge of distance, with hundreds of miles between monthly meetings as well as many isolated Friends. The exponential growth of technology has largely been embraced by Friends. Recent years have allowed for video conferencing, digital messaging, and a platform for meeting the wider Quaker Community. Podcasts and social media bring ideas among the community, a large advantage for both the environment and for remote Friends far from faith-based libraries.

A resource to find podcasts: https://blog.feedspot.com/quakers_podcasts/ Searching for "Quaker Groups" on Facebook brings up a number of national and local Quaker groups. FWCC maintains a list of online worship opportunities at <https://fwcc.world/find/online-worship/> Many Quaker organizations provide online webinars and other online educational opportunities.

Technology in the world has grown exponentially, outpacing the ability for many to recognize the effects on the physical and personal well being of man. Friends must look at the digital world with awareness, neither giving up the faith tradition nor denying the world in which we live. The addiction of the constant influx of information is very real and requires awareness and a mental ability to listen for the small voice of the divine amongst the digital alerts, notifications, and updates. Friends are advised to consider one's

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relationship to our various electronic devices, as well as to practice periodic abstinence from the digital presence to promote better sleep, concentration and authentic relationships.

As a tool, electronics can promote community, share ideas, and bring Friends closer. The ability to make connections in a virtual world provides much needed comfort and support, and propagates idea-sharing in a way no other time has experienced.

Section 8: History

E- History: A Brief History of the Religious Society of Friends–Under Construction

A Brief History of South Central Yearly Meeting (SCYM)

A small number of members of the Religious Society of Friends (RSoF) moved to university towns and small cities in Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas in the 1940's. At the same time, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) sent staff to these areas to establish peace and justice programs. Those who were members of the RSoF came from all the different traditions but when they came together in groups, often attracting others who were working with AFSC, they worshipped in the unprogrammed manner. By 1949 two groups had become established enough to apply for monthly meeting status. Friends Meeting of Austin and Friends Meeting of New Orleans were approved that year as monthly meetings by the Friends Fellowship Council, the precursor to Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC).

Friends and attenders from Texas and Louisiana began meeting regionally for fellowship and nurture in the early 1950's. The first planned meeting was in 1954 in the Houston area. By 1955 they had adopted the name Southwest Conference of Friends (SWCF) and included attenders and members from meetings and worship groups from Oklahoma and Arkansas as well as some isolated Friends. Some of the same Friends gathered for another conference, called the Mt. Magazine Conference after its location at a state park in Arkansas. A worship group in Little Rock sprang up in the years 1954-56.

The members and attenders of the meetings and worship groups involved in SWCF held political, theological, and spiritual values that were different from most people in their

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communities. Within the Quaker worship groups or monthly meetings, however, they found people who shared a commitment to equality, simplicity, integrity and peace. SWCF gatherings provided an opportunity to renew energy through fellowship and worship with a larger group of Friends. They offered opportunities to learn about Quaker faith and practice, to connect with the national and international Quaker world, and to share social concerns of friends in peace education, civil rights, the death penalty, and other areas. These meetings also provided a way for the few children in each small group to share and interact with other Quaker children, through establishing and maintaining a children's program.

Friends from several organizations, including AFSC, Friends Committee for National Legislation (FCNL), FWCC and Friends General Conference (FGC), provided keynote speakers and counsel in those early years. They also provided support as SWCF Friends struggled to nurture the growing number of small groups, find resources for First Day School, increase their knowledge of Quakerism, and interact with the wider Quaker world. SWCF established a newsletter to assist in communications among monthly meetings and worship groups as well as the announcements about conferences.

A quote from the 1960 SWCF Epistle gives a sense of how Friends were prospering:

The Society of Friends in the Southwest is a new movement. Its meetings are made up of Friends from Conservative, Evangelical, Five Years and Friends General Conference and Independent Meetings, and of new convinced Friends. We have found a real sense of unity about our differences. It is our prayer that the same Spirit of oneness will permeate the Society as a whole, helping us to see beyond old walls.

Several of the visitors encouraged forming a new yearly meeting in the area. While the SWCF minutes in 1956 recorded "SWCF's objective should be a mixture of retreat, outreach, fellowship, sharing of problems of meetings, and doing business," some SWCF Friends saw value in a yearly meeting structures that could properly support the establishment of new monthly meetings and appoint delegates to various national and international Quaker organizations. They encouraged others to consider becoming a yearly meeting. It was becoming obvious that this new group was meeting the needs of both Friends and seekers who were meeting across the four-state area. Finally, after extensive discussion, the following minute was recorded in SWCF 1961 Proceedings:

We, the members of the Friends Southwest Conference, gathered at our 10th Annual Meeting, feel that the way is now open for us to enter into the status of a yearly meeting. Therefore, we preserved our present organization, joyfully and prayerfully assume a new name: The South Central Yearly Meeting of Friends."

Affiliation with FGC commenced in 1961. SCYM first sent representatives to FGC's Central Committee, followed by representatives to AFSC, FCNL, the Associated Committee of Friends on Indian Affairs, and FWCC annual meetings and triennials. SCYM was also instrumental in encouraging FGC to hold their annual conferences closer to the geographic center of the country.

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Major themes of the 1960's were concerns for the spiritual life at the monthly meeting level and providing opportunities to learn more about and better understand Quakerism. In order to provide outreach and strengthen spiritual life, SCYM requested that seasoned Friends stay with Friends in this area and give talks on Quakerism. Peace and social concerns (including nonviolence and civil rights) dominated much of the work of SCYM in the 1960's. Friends struggled with their role in the southern states where segregation was still the norm. The South and Southwest were rapidly growing parts of the country, as well as areas in which our messages of peace, integrity and silent worship were far from the norm. Assimilation and acceptance of Quakers, given our numbers, were going to be long term goals.

We were committed, however, to just such a process. The places where we lived, worked, and worshipped as Friends were our homes. Many SCYM Friends were active with AFSC and other groups doing civil rights work. There was worry and concern that the growing violence and hatred on both sides was counter to the Quaker message.

The 1970's were a time for growth in monthly meetings and worship groups, largely because of an influx of seekers and Quakers moving into our region. Seekers were often first attracted through the peace and justice work of Quakers but had little experience with the RSoF as a religious body. Some were leaving other denominations whose religious beliefs no longer reflected their own. Many found themselves comfortable with both unprogrammed worship and like-minded individuals who were often a welcome source of personal support. Newcomers embraced our testimonies on peace, equality, simplicity, integrity and community. They became members of our meetings. They brought new, fresh ideas that aided in the growth of the Yearly Meeting, sometimes encouraging a reexamination of traditional Friends' practices. SCYM Friends embraced these new members and attenders and encouraged them to participate in all aspects of our yearly meeting's work and activities.

Though authority remained in the monthly meetings, questions of practice and procedure came up increasingly at YM business sessions. SCYM began to play a role in interpreting issues of our practices, such as memberships and weddings under the care of a meeting. This was increasingly important since so many YM members were convinced (new) Friends. Monthly meetings elected to use the Faith and Practice books from other yearly meetings, but increasingly looked to yearly meeting for guidance and support on vital concerns.

In the 1980's SCYM was greatly strengthened by the presence of FGC field secretaries, first with a Friend from Dallas and then from couple from east Texas for most of that decade. They traveled among our meetings, listening and addressing expressed needs which included First Day School, vocal ministry, spiritual growth, understanding of the Quaker materials, and arranging presentations from others. They helped connect SCYM Friends to the wider Quaker world.

In 1984 a Field Secretary characterized SCYM as follows:

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...almost all of our people are convinced Friends, many of them having joined only recently and having experienced only the meeting they currently attend. The Society of Friends (in SCYM) is young, vibrant and frequently without a core of experienced Friends. Some meetings find this a concern. Others find it a joy and freedom.

In the same report, the Field Secretary expressed that it was imperative to build ties between east and west to “learn to walk together with our differences, that we appreciated and take advantage of what each has to offer.” After several years in our midst, she saw SCYM sessions as not just a yearly event but as the gathering of a large family. However, in 1988 she reflected that both on the monthly and yearly meeting levels, “being a family is not all sweetness and light.”

In 1988 a visitor to our YM observed that community was the main issue, and that Friends in SCYM were “not enamored of business or discipline,” but hungry for fellowship. Notable, for instance, was the need to make the sessions at YM easier for young parents by offering a consistent program that not only cared for the children but also taught about Quaker faith and practice. 1988 was the first year that Young Friends held a business meeting of their own. A visitor, who had once been a member of SCYM, noted that programs for junior yearly meeting and Young Friends seemed to be well planned, with “space being provided, and where the integrity of its boundaries were respected.”

The same Field Secretary had written in 1986:

We are creating a new thing here, an entity which has never existed before. There has never been a yearly meeting developed out of our particular personalities under our particular circumstances. Other yearly meetings have either long since passed this state, or have not arrived there yet. In the coming years, we in South Central have the privilege to participate in this coalescing of a new entity. We can either let this new vision, that is becoming reality, happen to us or we can actively enhance that happening.”

In the late 1980’s the YM established a committee to explore writing an SCYM Faith and Practice. Those in attendance at the Yearly Meeting asked the committee to instead explain our processes and practices. This became the SCYM Procedures Manual and was approved in 1995. It was descriptive, not proscriptive, replete with job descriptions, operational practices, and lists of things that needed to be done to keep the yearly, quarterly, and monthly meetings functioning together as a body. SCYM Friends have found it helpful in carrying out the responsibilities of the YM, spread as they are among its officers, the Quarterly meetings, committees and the body itself.

During the same time period, the Continuing Committee (CC) which had managed business concerns between yearly meetings was laid down and the Representatives Meeting (RM) took on its responsibilities, meeting each fall in order to plan the upcoming Yearly Meeting. Certain business matters were allocated to the RM’s agenda. Friends expressed concern that important decisions were made by the Friends body; therefore, final approval of the

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YM budget, the annual assessments, and the reports of the Nominating Committee are all required to report to business sessions at the Yearly Meeting. The RM is open to all Friends. Most RM participants are part of the overall planning for the YM programs and activities or members of YM committees that wish to meet at RM. The actual YM Planning Committee was approved in 1997, charged with coordinating all of the programs and events at the YM gathering, and for all age groups.

In 1992 the Quarterly Meetings were asked to take over the adult program planning for the Yearly Meeting session on a rotating basis. It was considered an appropriate means of strengthening ties between the Yearly Meeting and the 21 monthly meetings spread across our geography. By this time there were three active Quarterly Meetings: Arkansas-Oklahoma; Cielo Grande, composed of most Texas Meetings and worship groups; and Bayou, composed of East Texas and Louisiana meetings and worship groups.

In 2011 SCYM celebrated its 50th anniversary in jubilation and thanksgiving. We are jubilant for having come so far together as a welcoming faith community, and we give thanks for the guidance of Spirit in addressing the challenges along the way.

From its early days SCYM has been challenged to support small meetings and worship groups over a five-state area and also remain in touch with isolated Friends. Monthly Meetings often struggle to meet the needs of their own members and attenders. The diversity of views and practices within the SCYM present challenges. Both large and small monthly meetings struggle to accommodate newcomers to our faith and practice. Our diversity can be both a welcoming strength and a puzzling impediment to finding a unified voice on an issue.

In this day and age, most meetings are a “big tent” covering a wide variety of experiences, beliefs and spiritual journeys.

Appendix

Quaker Glossary

Advices - Ideals stated as a continuing reminder of the basic faith and principles held to be essential to the life and witness of Friends.

Attender - One who attends and participates in Meeting activities fairly regularly but has not become a Member.

Center or Center down - A process of stilling our bodies, minds and spirits and focusing on the presence of God within.

Clearness - A sense of confidence that a decision or action is consistent with Divine will.

Clearness Committee - A committee appointed to assist a person or the meeting to clarify thinking about a decision or concern, also used for those applying for membership or for marriage under the care of a Meeting.

Clerk - The person who facilitates Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business or a committee meeting and who discerns and states the Sense of the Meeting, also the act of guiding such a meeting.

Concern - an issue one feels called by God to work on.

Consensus - (secular term) A common opinion emerging for a group's coming to a decision about an issue.

Continuing Revelation - The belief that God speaks to people directly today.

Convener - The member of a committee who is asked to be in charge of the committee meeting (in particular, arranging the logistics of the meeting and ensuring that all committee members are notified).

Covered Meeting - A meeting in which those present sense real spiritual power and influence.

Discernment - Prayerfully sifting through information and impressions under Divine guidance to come to a sense of truth or right action.

Divine Guidance - Promptings from Spirit to an individual or a group that guide decisions and actions

Elders - Friends of any age with the gift of spiritual nurture.

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Eldering - The exercise of spiritual leadership either to support and encourage members or attenders in their ministry or to question and guide those needing direction.

Experiential or Experimental - based on personal spiritual experience rather than on creeds or articles of faith. The experiential basis for Quakerism distinguishes it from most other religious bodies.

First Day - Sunday, the first day of the week (see plain speech for more details)

Friends - Members of the Religious Society of Friends. The term was used as early as 1652 and was based on John 15:14-15, where Jesus says "You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

Gospel Order - The procedures for Friends business that have been found by experience to facilitate our corporate activities. Also, patterns of faithful living uniting the inward life of prayer and worship, the daily life of caring and accountability in the meeting community, and prophetic witness in the world.

Inner Light - The direct, unmediated experience of the Divine which corrects us, guides us and provides strength to act on its guidance.

Leading - An inner conviction that impels one to follow a certain course under a sense of divine guidance.

Meeting - can refer to an event, as in Meeting for Worship, or to the institution called a church in other religious groups

Member - someone who has formally joined a Meeting

Minding The Light - Paying attention to the Inner Light.

Minute - A statement of an item of business approved by those in attendance at a given Meeting for Business.

Minutes - Written records of Meeting for Business or Committee Meetings to reflect the actions taken at the meeting.

Plain Speech - arising from early Friends' testimony of equality, the use of thee, thy, and thine to address everyone at a time when superiors were addressed as "you." It includes numbering the days of the week and the months to avoid using the names of pagan gods.

Queries - questions based on Friends' practices and testimonies that are considered by individuals and meetings as a way of guiding and examining individual and corporate lives and actions.

Representative Meeting - a body made up of representatives of the monthly meetings to conduct business between yearly meetings. In SCYM this happens near the end of November, and all are welcome to attend, not just representatives.

Rise of Meeting - the end of a meeting for worship or business, signified by clerk or designated person shaking hands with others.

SCYM - South Central Yearly Meeting. The regional meeting to which LOFM belongs, comprised of monthly meetings from Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma.

Seasoning - taking time to seek clarity rather than moving hastily to a decision.

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Sense of the Meeting - A collective decision on an issue, grounded in spiritual guidance emerging from a Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business, described and explained by the clerk in a minute for the approval of the Meeting.

Standing Aside - The withdrawal of an objection by a member who is not able to unite with a proposed minute which enables the Meeting to proceed.

Stand in the Way - A position taken by someone not in unity with a proposed action.

Threshing Session - A meeting held to discuss a controversial issue. At such a session all points of view are heard, but no decision is made.

Unity - Recognition of the truth emerging from a group's corporate search and yielding to the Holy Spirit in its decision-making. It does not require unanimity.

compiled from LOFM Handbook and Quaker Process for Friends on the Benches

Advices from the Elders of Balby, 1656

1. The settled meetings to be kept each first-day. General Meetings, as a rule to be on some other day of the week.
2. As any are brought in to the Truth new meetings are to be arranged to suit the general convenience, without respect of persons.
3. Persons ceasing to attend meetings are to be spoken to. Persons who walk disorderly are to be spoken to in private, then before two or three witnesses; then, if necessary, the matter is to be reported to the Church. The Church is to reprove them for their disorderly walking, and, if they do not reform, the case is to be sent in writing "to some whom the Lord hath raised up in the power of the Spirit of the Lord to be fathers, His children to gather in the light" so that the thing may be known to the body and be determined in the light.
4. Ministers to speak the word of the Lord from the mouth of the Lord, without adding or diminishing. If anything is spoken out of the light so that "the seed of God" comes to be burdened, it is to be dealt with in private and not in the public meetings, "except there be a special moving to do so."
5. Collections to be made for the poor, the relief of prisoners, and other necessary uses, the moneys to be carefully accounted for, and applied as made known by the overseers in each meeting.
6. Care to be taken "for the families and goods of such as are called forth in the ministry, or are imprisoned for the Truth's sake; that no creature be lost for want of caretakers."
7. Intentions of marriage to be made known to the Children of Light, especially those of the meeting where the parties are members. The marriage to be solemnized in the fear of the Lord, and before many witnesses, after the example of scripture, and a record to be made in writing, to which the witnesses may subscribe their names.
8. Every meeting to keep records of births, or of burials of the dead that died in the Lord. Burials to be conducted according to scripture, and not after customs of "heathen."
9. Advice to husbands and wives, as in I Peter iii:7. Advice to parents and children, as in Ephesians vi:1-4.
10. Advice to servants and masters, as in Ephesians vi:5-9.

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11. Care to be taken “that none who are servants depart from their masters, but as they do see in the light: nor any master put away his servant but by the like consent of the servant; and if any master or servant do otherwise in their wills, it is to be judged by Friends in the light.”
 12. Needs of widows and fatherless to be supplied:—such as can work and do not be admonished, and if they refuse to work, neither let them eat. The children of needy parents to be put to honest employment.
 13. Any called before outward powers of the nation are to obey.
 14. “That if any be called to serve the Commonwealth in any public service which is for the public wealth and good, that with cheerfulness it be undertaken and in faithfulness discharged unto God, that therein patterns and examples in the thing that is righteous yet may be to those that are without.”
 15. Friends in callings and trades are to be faithful and upright, and keep to yea and nay. Debts to be punctually paid, that nothing they may owe to any man but love one to another.
 16. None to speak evil of another, nor grudge against another, nor put a stumbling-block in his brother’s way.
 17. None to be busybodies in others’ matters.
 18. Christian moderation to be used towards all men.
 19. The elders made by the Holy Ghost are to feed the flock, taking the oversight willingly, not as lords, but as examples to the flock.
- Dearly 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 guided: and so in the light walking and abiding, these may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.

Full text of peace testimony of 1660

A Declaration from the harmless and innocent people of God, called Quakers

A Declaration from the harmless and innocent people of God, called Quakers, against all plotters and fighters in the world, for the removing the ground of jealousy and suspicion from both magistrates and people in the kingdom, concerning wars and fightings. And also something in answer to that clause of the King's late proclamation which mentions the Quakers, to clear them from the plot and fighting which therein is mentioned, and for the clearing their innocency.

Our principle is, and our Practice have always been, to seek peace and ensue it and to follow after righteousness and the knowledge of God, seeking the good and welfare and doing that which tends to the peace of all. We know that wars and fightings proceed from the lusts of men (as Jas. iv. 1-3), out of which lusts the Lord hath redeemed us, and so out of the occasion of war. The occasion of which war, and war itself (wherein envious men, who are lovers of themselves more than lovers of God, lust, kill, and desire to have men's lives or

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estates) ariseth from the lust. All bloody principles and practices, we, as to our own particulars, do utterly deny, with all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretence whatsoever. And this is our testimony to the whole world.

And whereas it is objected:

'But although you now say that you cannot fight nor take up arms at all, yet if the spirit do move you, then you will change your principle, and then you will sell your coat and buy a sword and fight for the kingdom of Christ.'

Answer:

As for this we say to you that Christ said to Peter, 'Put up thy sword in his place'; though he had said before that he that had no sword might sell his coat and buy one (to the fulfilling of the scripture), yet after, when he had bid him put it up, he said, 'He that taketh the sword shall perish with the sword.' And further, Christ said to Peter, 'Thinkest thou, that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?' And this might satisfy Peter, after he had put up his sword, when he said to him that he took it, should perish by it, which satisfieth us. (Luke xxii,36; Matt. xxvi.51- 53). And in the Revelation it's said, 'He that kills with the sword shall perish with the sword: and here is the faith and the patience of the saints.' (Rev. xiii.10). And so Christ's kingdom is not of this world, therefore do not his servants fight, as he told Pilate, the magistrate who crucified him. And did they not look upon Christ as a raiser of sedition? And did not he say, 'Forgive them'? But thus it is that we are numbered amongst fighters, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled.

That 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 unto it; and we do certainly know, and so 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.

First:

Because the kingdom of Christ God will exalt, according to the promise, and cause it to grow and flourish in righteousness. 'Not by might, nor by power [of outward sword], but by my spirit, said the Lord.' (Zech.iv.6) SO those that use any weapon to fight for Christ, or for the establishing of his kingdom or government, both the spirit, principle and practice in that we deny.

Secondly:

And as for the kingdoms of this world, we cannot covet them, much less can we fight for them, but we do earnestly desire and wait, that by the Word of God's power and its effectual operation in the hearts of men, the kingdoms of this world may become the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Christ, that he may rule and reign in men by his spirit and

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truth, that thereby all people, out of all different judgements and professions may be brought into love and unity with God, and one with another, and that they may all come to witness the prophet's words who said, 'Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.' (Isa.ii.4; Mic.iv.3)

So, we whom the Lord hath called into the obedience of his Truth have denied wars and fightings and cannot again any more learn it. This is a certain testimony unto all the world of the truth of our hearts in this particular, that as God persuadeth every man's heart to believe, so they may receive it. For we have not, as some others, gone about cunningly with devised fables, nor have we ever denied in practice what we have professed in principle, but in sincerity and truth and by the word of God have we laboured to be made manifest unto all men, that both we and our ways might be witnessed in the hearts of all people.

And whereas all manner of evil hath been falsely spoken of us, we hereby speak forth the plain truth of our hearts, to take away the occasion of that offence, that so we being innocent may not suffer for other men's offences, nor be made a prey upon by the wills of men for that of which we were never guilty; but in the uprightness of our hearts we may, under the power ordained of God for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of them that do well, live a peaceable and godly life in all godliness and honesty. For although we have always suffered. and do now more abundantly suffer, yet we know that it's for righteousness' sake; 'for all our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our consciences, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world' (2 Cor.i.12), which for us is a witness for the convincing of our enemies. For this we can say to the whole world, we have wronged no man's person or possessions, we have used no force nor violence against any man, we have been found in no plots, nor guilty of sedition. When we have been wronged, we have not sought to revenge ourselves, we have not made resistance against authority, but wherein we could not obey for conscience' sake, we have suffered even the most of any people in the nation. We have been accounted as sheep for the slaughter, persecuted and despised, beaten, stoned, wounded, stocked, whipped, imprisoned, haled out of synagogues, cast into dungeons and noisome vaults where many have died in bonds, shut up from our friends, denied needful sustenance for many days together, with other like cruelties.

And the cause of all this our sufferings is not for any evil, but for things relating to the worship of our God in obedience to his requirings of us. For which cause we shall freely give up our bodies a sacrifice, rather than disobey the Lord. For we know, as the Lord hath kept us innocent, so he will plead our cause, when there is none in the earth to plead it. So we, in obedience to his truth, do not love our lives unto the death, that we may do his will, and wrong no man in our generation, but seek the good and peace of all men. And he that hath commanded us that we shall not swear at all (Matt. v.34), hath also commanded us that we shall not kill (Matt. v.21), so that we can neither kill men, nor swear for or against them. And this is both our principle and practice, and hath been from the beginning, so that if we suffer, as suspected to take up arms or make war against any, it is without ground from us; for it neither is, nor ever was in our hearts, since we owned the truth of God; neither shall we ever do it, because it is contrary to the spirit of Christ, his doctrine, and the

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practice of his apostles, even contrary to him for whom we suffer all things, and endure all things.

And whereas men come against us with clubs, staves, drawn swords, pistols cocked, and do beat, cut, and abuse us, yet we never resisted them, but to them our hair, backs and cheeks have been ready. It is not an honour to manhood nor to nobility to run upon harmless people who lift not up a hand against them, with arms and weapons.

Therefore consider these things ye men of understanding; for plotters, raisers of insurrections, tumultuous ones, and fighters, running with swords, clubs, staves and pistols one against another, we say, these are of the world and hath its foundation from this unrighteous world, from the foundation of which the Lamb hath been slain, which Lamb hath redeemed us from the unrighteous world, and we are not of it, but are heirs of a world in which there is no end and of a kingdom where no corruptible thing enters. And our weapons are spiritual and not carnal, yet mighty through God to the plucking down of the strongholds of Satan, who is author of wars, fighting, murder, and plots. And our swords are broken until ploughshares and spears into pruning; hooks, as prophesied of in Micah iv. Therefore we cannot learn war any more, neither rise up against nation or kingdom with outward weapons, though you have numbered us among the transgressors and plotters. The Lord knows our innocency herein, and will plead our cause with all men and people upon earth at the day of their judgement, when all men shall have a reward according to their works ...

O friends offend not the Lord and his little ones, neither afflict his people, but consider and be moderate, and do not run hastily into things, but mind and consider mercy, justice, and judgement; that is the way for you to prosper and get the favour of the Lord. Our meetings were stopped and broken up in the days of Oliver, in pretence of plotting against him; and in the days of the Parliament and Committee of Safety we were looked upon as plotters to bring in King Charles, and now we are called plotters against King Charles. Oh, that men should lose their reason and go contrary to their own conscience, knowing that we have suffered all things and have been accounted plotters all along, though we have declared against them both by word of mouth and printing, and are clear from any such things. We have suffered all along because we would not take up carnal weapons to fight withal against any, and are thus made a prey upon because we are the innocent lambs of Christ and cannot avenge ourselves. These things are left upon your hearts to consider, but we are out of all those things in the patience of the saints, and we know that as Christ said, 'He that takes the sword, shall perish with the sword.' (Matt. xxvi.52; Rev.xiii.10)

This is given forth from the people called Quakers to satisfy the King and his Council, and all those that have any jealousy concerning us, that all occasion of suspicion may be taken away and our innocency cleared.

Given forth under our names, and in behalf of the whole body of the Elect People of God who are called Quakers.

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George Fox, Gerald Roberts, Henry Fell, Richard Hubberthorn, John Boulton, John Hinde, John Stubbs, Leonard Fell, John Furley Jnr., Francis Howgill, Samuel Fisher, Thomas Moore

Postscript: Though we are numbered with plotters in this late Proclamation and put in the midst of them and numbered amongst transgressors and have been given up to all rude, merciless men, by which our meetings are broken up, in which we edified one another in our holy faith and prayed together to the Lord that lives for ever, yet he is our pleader for us in this day. The Lord saith, 'They that feared his name spoke often together', as in Malachi, which were as his jewels. And for this cause and no evil doing, are we cast into holes, dungeons, houses of correction, prisons, they sparing neither old nor young, men or women, and just sold to all nations and made a prey to all nations under pretence of being plotters, so that all rude people run upon us to take possession. For which we say, 'The Lord forgive them that have thus done to us,' who doth and will enable us to suffer. And never shall we lift up a hand against any man that doth thus use us, but that the Lord may have mercy upon them, that they may consider what they have done. For how is it hardly possible for them to require us for the wrong they have done to us, who to all nations have sounded us abroad as plotters? We who were never found plotters against any power or man upon the earth since we knew the life and power of Jesus Christ manifested in us, who hath redeemed us from the world, and all works of darkness, and plotters that be in it, by which we know our election before the world began. So we say the Lord have mercy upon our enemies and forgive them, for that they have done unto us.

E-Resources for Further reading-under construction