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Faith and Practice

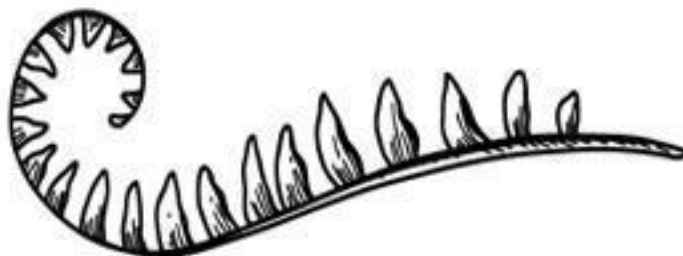
South Central Yearly Meeting

2026

Dearly beloved Friends,

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

—from the Balby Epistle, 1656



Speak of your own experience using the language of your own heart and spirit and leave it to others to translate into their own language. —Val Liveoak, 2025

Our four-state area encompasses the homelands of many Native American Indian nations as well as Indian Removal Territory, today known as Oklahoma.

The Cherokee, Muscogee, Seminole, Chickasaw, and Choctaw nations from the southeastern US were forced to walk the Trail of Tears from their ancestral homelands to Indian Removal Territory in the 1830's, losing many members to exposure and starvation along the way. In spite of all that, the Cherokee Nation offers this prayer, naming a truth shared by Quaker and other spiritual traditions:

***Oh Great Spirit, Help me always to speak the truth quietly
To listen with an open mind when others speak
And to remember the peace that may be found in silence***

Shared with the permission of the Cherokee Nation Executive Branch, Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin, Jr. and Deputy Principal Chief Bryan Warner

1 Why a Faith and 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 a yearly meeting's decisions about how Quakers, also known as the Religious Society of 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.

Members of the Religious Society of Friends who worship in the unprogrammed manner 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. That physical diversity 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 1961 after existing as an association of Friends for 10 years before that. In the early 1990s 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 in this new Faith and Practice document, to describe who we are and aspire to become within the Religious Society of Friends worldwide and give voice to both our distinctiveness and how we fit into the Religious Society of Friends.

This is a living document about who we are and aspire to become. As such, members of SCYM can ask for it to be revised and create a Faith and Practice revision committee to review it and discern what no longer serves and what new material is needed. Other yearly meetings have engaged in this process over the years. Some yearly meetings have a standing committee to deal with changes, while others appoint a new committee every five to ten years.

For more information Friends may view a video by Thomas Hamm, "What is a Quaker Book of Faith and Practice," found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCwWbdXFtBc>.

What Friends Believe

Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continually return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto itself. Thomas Kelly

The first gleam of light, "the first cold light of morning" which gave promise of day with its noontide glories, dawned on me one day at meeting, when I had been meditating on my state in great depression. I seemed to hear the words articulated in my spirit, "Live up to the light thou hast, and more will be granted thee." Then I believed that God speaks ... by His spirit. I strove to lead a more Christian life, in unison with what I knew to be right, and looked for brighter days, not forgetting the blessings that are granted to prayer.

Memories of old friends : being extracts from the journals of
Caroline Fox of Penjerrick, Cornwall from 1835 to 1871

If God ever spoke, He is still speaking. If He has ever been in mutual and reciprocal communication with the persons He has made, He is still a communicating God as eager as ever to have listening and receptive souls. If there is something of His image and superscription in our inmost structure and being, we ought to expect a continuous revelation of His will and purpose through the ages.... He is the Great I Am, not a Great He Was. Rufus Jones, 1948

2 What Friends Believe

Inner Light/That of God in each person

In his early letters Fox speaks of the Light as that 'which guides out of many things into one Spirit,' advising his friends 'to keep in the Oneness...to guide and preserve all in the Unity of the Spirit and the Bond of Peace' (Ep. 24, 1652). 'The Light of God is but one' (Ep. 25, 1653). —Howard Brinton, Friends for 300 Years, p. 21

Another characteristic of the Light is its bestowal on each person 'in a measure.' This does not mean that the whole Truth is not accessible to every person, but rather...that some persons apprehend more of the Truth than do others. —ibid., p. 27

Since the Inner Light is available to everyone, we are all equally responsible to attend to it in ourselves as well as seek it in everyone we meet. Everyone has that Light or that of God within. The challenge becomes to find it when it seems buried or looks different than what we are accustomed to.

The Light that we discover in meeting for worship and our daily contemplation provides the impetus for the way we live our lives. In other words, Friends commit to living according to divine guidance and spend time discerning how that guidance manifests in their lives and how to share it with others.

The Inner Light is also a search light to scan our own inner being for those places that block our connection to the Light, whether intentionally or unconsciously. As George Fox wrote in a tract in 1653: *But dwelling in this light it will discover in thee the body of sin, and thy corruptions, and fallen estate where thou art, and multitude of thoughts. In that light which shows thee all this, stand; neither go to the right nor to the left....for the first step to peace is to stand still in the light (which discovers things contrary to it)....Here Grace grows. (from Ambler, Rex, Light to Live By: An Exploration in Quaker Spirituality)*

To “hold someone/something in the Light” has become a popular expression in recent decades, roughly synonymous with “to keep someone/something in one’s thoughts and prayers.” Like the Light itself, it’s an expression that can hold meaning for those of various spiritual persuasions as well as those who don’t believe in God but do believe in a universal force of one kind or another.

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 Spirit to reveal the truth to individuals insofar as they are prepared to

receive it. Friends' beliefs, traditions, and teachings are meant 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 all the priests, so I left the separate preachers also, and those called 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 did 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. 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 can be an essential testimony to the Truth, which continues to be revealed when read in the Spirit in which they were given: "Come to stay your minds upon that spirit which was before the letter; here ye learn to read the scriptures aright," to quote George Fox (Epistle. 10). 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 early Quakers believed every day and every act was sacred, they did not practice sacraments such as baptism and the eucharist. They also did not observe holidays, as they saw all days as holy. Today, many Quakers tend to join in varied holiday festivities such as 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.

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's Journal, Nickall's edition, "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, wherever you come; that

your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them. Then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one; whereby in them ye may be a blessing, and make the witness of God in them to bless you.”

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 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 unprogrammed Friends. 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; we all have an active role in sharing that experience. 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. Some describe it as the experience of being at home. For many of us, it is the mystical experience of worship in a gathered meeting that brought us into the Society of Friends.

As Thomas Kelly described in “The Gathered Meeting,” (Tract Association of Friends, 1947): *In the Quaker practice of group worship on the basis of silence come special times when an electric hush and solemnity and depth of power steals over the worshippers. A blanket of divine covering comes over the room, and a quickening Presence pervades us, breaking down some part of the special privacy and isolation of our individual lives and bonding our spirits within a super-individual Life and Power—an objective, dynamic Presence which enfolds us all, nourishes our souls, speaks glad, unutterable comfort within us, and quickens in us depths that had before been slumbering. The Burning Bush has been kindled in our midst, and we stand together on holy ground.*

Words are sometimes 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.

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 peace and justice activities; Friends know themselves because they have met in worship to encounter the Spirit that motivates. As George Fox described, 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 meetings 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 their experience of the word of God, the Christ within, Spirit or the Inner Light may express sentiments in response to the deep and even unconscious needs of those gathered together. George Fox taught that such experiences are available to everyone.

Vocal ministry

Vocal ministry occurs when one is moved by the power of the Spirit to share what is felt during a meeting for worship. 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. This is called vocal ministry. We are encouraged to listen in tongues, as people will speak of their experience in the language they use, and it is up to the listener to listen to “where the words come from,” translating into their preferred language as needed. This concept comes from John Woolman’s description of a visit with the Native American Indians in *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman* where he asked the interpreters to sit down, believing that the divine spirit would communicate his prayer directly to the listeners’ hearts. He wrote *Papunehang spoke to one of the interpreters, and I was afterward told that he said in substance as follows: “I love to feel where words come from.”*

As the worshippers sit together in silence to wait upon the Lord, anyone among them may find arising in his consciousness a message which he feels is intended for more than himself alone. It is then his obligation to deliver that message and to cease speaking when he has delivered it. He must learn to recognize the unique sense of urgency which is evidence of a divine requirement. If a thought comes to him with peculiar life and power, he may be justified in assuming that this is a sign from God to speak. He may sometimes be mistaken. There is no sure test of divine guidance in this or any other undertaking. If, however, through prayer and humble waiting he has become sensitive to the ‘still, small voice,’ he will be increasingly enabled to recognize a call when it comes. —Howard H. Brinton, *Friends for 300 Years*

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 in *Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*

We believe that there are many spiritual paths. All those seeking are welcome. We have discovered Christians, those of Jewish faith, Buddhists, Universalists, Muslims, agnostics, atheists, and others among our active participants in our worship and meetings. 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 for 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 social activities. Some Friends meetings rent, or meet within, the facilities of other churches.

Today most individual Quakers grew up in other faiths or no faith at all. Some may have suffered or felt wounded by earlier religious teachings. A step in the membership process practiced by meetings asks that the applicant be able to lay aside earlier beliefs and may offer messages on healing.

In blended families where not everyone is a Quaker, meetings welcome participation as family members are able. Some Quakers find spiritual enrichment in the study of other faith traditions or philosophies.

In the silence, waiting, Quakers know God

These words from Janet Scott in the 1980 Swarthmore Lecture to Britain Yearly Meeting seem to summarize what Friends believe:

We feel the presence, sometimes as a gentle comforter, sometimes a firm assurance, sometimes a light that illuminates our thoughts and gives us new words, sometimes a fearful reality whose loving, tender, awful power enters our pounding hearts and trembling bodies.

We know this power, this light, this reality, this tender love, as individuals and at anytime, but we know it most surely in our meetings for worship together where, at our best, we help, encourage and guide each other, taking, as it were, the clay of experience and together

moulding it into a new and different form which no one mind, but only the eternal, could have envisaged.

This is the essential truth of Quakerism, held not as a belief but as experience. However, our experience is wider than this and carries with it other discoveries which we must express in words but which we know first as living truth.

We have found that this power, this light, turns us from evil to good and brings us into unity with God and thence with our fellows, into that "spirit which takes away the occasion of all wars."

George Fox, writing in his journal in 1648, expresses it as "Great things did the Lord lead me into, and wonderful depths were opened unto me, beyond what can by words be declared; but as people come into subjection to the spirit of God, and grow up in the image and power of the Almighty, they may receive the Word of wisdom that opens all things, and come to know the hidden unity in the Eternal BeingAnd as the Lord opened these things to me, I felt his power went forth over all, by which all might be reformed, if they would receive and bow unto it."

And in his Epistle 181 of 1659: "Live in the unchangeable power of God, which will keep you in righteousness, and truth, and love, and unitypatiently in the power of the Lord wait, that in it ye may all be kept low, in love and unity with God and one with another."

We have found also that this spirit is available to everyone, it speaks to that which is universal in the human heart. There are no pre-conditions of belief or morality. It appears to us even if we will not listen, but if we do heed, it draws us to itself, however we name it and whether we name it or not. We may be Christian or atheist, Jew or Muslim, Marxist, Buddhist, Hindu - the spirit seeks us, and loves us, and calls us to turn to the universal love and unity.

As George Fox wrote in 1683, "God, who made all, pours out of his spirit upon all men and women in the world.....yea, upon white and blacks, Moors, and Turks, and Indians, Christians, Jews and Gentiles, that all with the spirit of God, might know God and the things of God, and serve and worship him in his spirit and truth, that he hath given them."

And as Isaac Penington wrote: "Though they had never heard the outward Sound, or Name Christ; yet feeling the thing, and being gathered to God by the thing, the Value and Vertue of it could not but redound to them. For it is not the outward Name, but the inward Life and Power which is the Saviour." ~ Janet Scott - "What Canst Thou say?" 1980, Swarthmore Lecture

Testifying to the Life of the Spirit

And, oh, how sweet and pleasant it is to the truly spiritual eye to see several sorts of believers, several forms of Christians in the school of Christ, every one learning their own lesson, performing their own peculiar service, and knowing, owning, and loving one another in their several places... For this is the true ground of love and unity, not that such a man walks and does just as I do, but because I feel the same Spirit and life in him... And this is far more pleasing to me than if he walked in just that track wherein I walk. Isaac Pennington, 1690

God does not require us to achieve any of the good tasks that humanity must pursue. What God requires of us is that we not stop trying.

The moral man is opposed to injustice wherever he finds it; the moral man looks for injustice first of all in himself

Bayard Rustin, Time on Two Crosses' Collected Writings 1942-1986, Devon W. Carbado & Donald Weise, Editors 2003

The insight at the heart of nonviolence is that we live in a tragic gap -- a gap between the way things are and the way we know they might be. It is a gap that never has been and never will be closed. If we want to live nonviolent lives, we must learn to stand in the tragic gap, faithfully holding the tension between reality and possibility Parker Palmer in A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey toward an Undivided Life, 2004

3 Testifying to the Life of the Spirit

The Quaker testimonies

The word 'testimony' is used by Quakers to describe a witness to the living truth within the human heart as it is acted out in everyday life. It is not a form of words, but a mode of life based on the realisation that there is that of God in everybody, that all human beings are equal, that all life is interconnected. It is affirmative but may lead to action that runs counter to certain practices currently accepted in society at large.

Hence a pro-peace stance may become an anti-war protest, and a witness to the sacredness of human life may lead to protests against capital punishment. These testimonies reflect the corporate beliefs of the Society, however much individual Quakers may interpret them differently according to their own light. They are not optional extras, but fruits that grow from the very tree of faith. Harvey Gillman, 1988, Quaker author and speaker

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 neither “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 Robert Barclay described in his *Apology for the True Christian Divinity* in 1678, “this inward testimony or seed of God;” or a sense of being led to ministry or a career in ministry.

A common expression of Quaker testimonies today is “SPICES,” or simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and stewardship. These concepts do not reflect separate entities. Many Quaker witnesses in the world involve a combination 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. 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 with how to live into them and on how to implement them in our 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* p. 21) The plain dress and 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: of things, activities, thoughts and feelings. 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 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 participating in acts of civil disobedience. Historically, Quakers have not fully aligned with the peace testimony, as some Quakers have engaged in armed combat against what they saw as a greater evil, and others will allow for a defensive use of force as their conscience and understanding of a conflict requires of them.

By following the peace testimony, we try to live in ways that promote justice and avoid the causes of war; we deny war's 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. Some Friends connect to the peace testimony matters 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 uses of our tax dollars.

In the appendix is provided the full text of the peace testimony given by early Friends in 1660.

Integrity

My brethren, above all things, swear not, neither by heaven, nor by earth, nor any other oath, lest ye fall into condemnation. —James 5:12, as quoted by George Fox, 1656 in his Journal, Nickall's edition, p. 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.

“That all Friends that have callings and trades...keep to their yea and nay in all their communications.” Advices from the Elders at Balby, 1656.

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

The Pendle Hill pamphlet, “The Testimony of Integrity” (#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, Friends' testimony of integrity is the basis for our 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 to avoid spreading misinformation and 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. We support each other in a wide variety of

ways, from the basic needs of food, shelter, and safety, to 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 according to 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 one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand.*

In today's 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. Marcelle Martin clearly expresses this process in "A Community Formed for Faithfulness," *Friends Journal*, September 2017 : *Members of an intimate spiritual community serve as mirrors for each other; they help us acknowledge both the shadow and the brightness within us, and assist us in distinguishing one from the other.*

Equality

Equality is at the center of being a Quaker. There is that of God in everyone. 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 and sentient beings. 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 do away with behaviors and practices that suggest someone is 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" as opposed to "you." Early Friends recognized the spiritual gifts and rights of women. Women served as ministers and often led meetings and worship groups. Their spiritual messages were seen as equal to those of men, as of course they are today. They naturally became leaders outside of the society as well as within.

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 healthy human relations built within a community, where each person and each group can experience self-development, is important to us. Community is the realization of our human potential 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.

We must acknowledge that Friends are dealing with a history of unequal treatment of different races, ethnicities, and abilities, and are learning how best to promote equality. Friends are determined to promote learning about social and economic inequality and to work actively to produce a more equal environment for all. As residents of former slave states where there is a high level of racist thinking and behavior, we have a responsibility to respond.

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

Stewardship

As Quakers we strive to live in simplicity and integrity. It is our intention to be good stewards and take care of the things we own and use. This means caring for 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 become 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 humanity is part of. That includes reducing, reusing, and recycling 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, in "Conversations on the True Harmony of Mankind and How It May Be Promoted," 1772)

Good stewardship also extends to the economic needs of Quakers, our meetings, and other organizations that advance Friends' testimonies. We need to examine all decisions about obtaining, holding, and using our assets and money; 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 strive to find balance in our earning, 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 is essential and what is discretionary in our own lives.

As Quakers, we do not forget stewardship of spiritual gifts: service, teaching, time, talent, and our bodies, as well as the gifts of encouragement, giving, or leadership. We are reminded that all that we have, in ourselves and our possessions, are gifts from God, given to us for responsible use. 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 for how we treat each other and ourselves in our daily interactions, both at the meeting/community level and the individual level. The testimonies also inform how we might inspire a cultural shift in a society struggling with violence and inequity by demonstrating how to live according to these values. People often assume the practices of the culture in which they live are correct even if they feel a conflict between them and a personal sense of what is right and meaningful. Seeing Quakers dare to challenge the status quo and speak truth to power may inspire and empower others to do likewise.

Yearly Meeting level

South Central Yearly Meeting (SCYM) is, as a yearly meeting, a member and supporter of a number of national Quaker organizations facilitating/encouraging Quaker meetings to community actions based on the testimonies. These include but are not limited to:

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; and
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, gun violence, and repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery and 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. Individual members have also acted, especially on the death penalty, immigration, and Indigenous rights.

Believing that there is that of God in everyone, monthly meetings within South Central Yearly Meeting since 1999 have found that the gift of spiritual union is equally strong and valuable regardless of the genders of marriage partners.

Meetings try to welcome everyone regardless of their backgrounds and help each to become involved in meeting communities. We also recognize that some have fallen short of this goal. Recently Quaker organizations formed working groups to study their practices, listen to experiences of others, and develop strategies to help meetings become more inclusive.

Local Meeting level

The activities of local meetings are wide-ranging, often engaging in immediate response to local concerns, such as efforts to preserve Houston's Equal Rights Ordinance protecting LGBTQ rights, or helping cleanup efforts after hurricane and other storm damage, both financially and physically, in Texas and Louisiana.

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 the Vietnam War and both Iraq Wars, provided conscientious objector/military counseling, 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 Friends Committee on National Legislation Advocacy Teams to meet regularly with their Representatives and Senators on FCNL priorities .

During the 1960s many meetings participated with local desegregation efforts, often with assistance from the American Friends Service Committee. Today there are ongoing efforts to address inequities of transportation, zoning, and concentration of polluting industries in neighborhoods where people of color live. Providing resources for unhoused people, advocating for LGBTQ rights, and supporting economic equity and justice for all are other efforts engaging various meetings.

The environment has been a concern for many Friends. They have made community efforts to better steward natural resources in managing meetinghouses, and individual efforts to install solar panels or drive electric cars.

Many individuals participate with Quaker organizations such as Friends Peace Teams or American Friends Service Committee, 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. They have also been instrumental in creating a Texas Alternatives to Violence Project for both local community training and prison training. 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 of United States 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, <https://www.fcnl.org/>) in Washington DC has worked on national political issues of interest to Friends since 1943. FCNL provides guidance to Quaker meetings and churches and many other groups in the lobbying process. They also seek input from Quaker meetings and churches on what they should focus working on for each two-year Congressional session.

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC, <https://afsc.org/>) was founded in 1917 during World War I to give young conscientious objectors ways to serve without joining the military or taking 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.” AFSC’s work continues today, focusing on partnering with Quaker meetings and churches to work across cultures and socio-economic divides on education and justice issues in the United States and beyond.

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. Quakers also instituted solitary confinement with each prisoner alone in their cell as a means for offenders to contemplate their crime and consider how to do better upon release. However, evidence of its harmful effects were cited by courts as early as the 1890s, and today its use is considered a form of torture by many human rights groups.

Elizabeth Fry (1780–1845) was a famous Quaker prison reformer, though others were equally influential in raising public awareness. Fry’s work in Newgate Prison brought public attention 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.

Many Friends have also visited or written letters to inmates, including those on death row. Prisoner Visitation and Support (PVS, <https://www.prisonervisitation.org/>), founded in 1968 by a Quaker and a Methodist minister, is an alternative ministry to those in federal and military prisons. Initially designed for visiting conscientious objectors, it has since expanded to embrace those without visits, those with long sentences, and those lacking support within standard parameters in the federal system.

Torture has long been a concern of Quakers. Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC, <https://fwcc.world/>) 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, <https://www.quit-torture-now.org/>) is a spiritual work to end the worst that humans do to one another. Many Friends in SCYM have been led to work with this initiative.

International level

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 the lawyer Peter Benenson write an article for *The Observer* titled “The Forgotten Prisoners” 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 this organization, both as members and as volunteers.

Several Quaker organizations work for peace at an international level, including Friends Peace Teams, 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 (<https://friendspeacetams.org/>), and Alternatives to Violence Project, a network of volunteers running workshops for anyone who wants to find ways of resolving conflict without resorting to violence (<https://avp.international/>).

The Quaker United Nations Office maintains a presence in Geneva and New York City where staff work with people in the UN, multilateral organizations, government delegations, and non-governmental organizations, to achieve changes in international standards and practice (<https://quno.org/>).

4 Advices and Queries

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

The elders who assembled in 1656 at Balby in the north of England wrote an epistle containing twenty “advices,” which included the first detailed directions about what to do in certain circumstances such as managing relief for the poor or imprisoned, performing marriages, and recording births and deaths. Their epistle prepared the ground for later books of discipline 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 a measure of the light, which is pure and holy, may be guided: and so in the light walking and abiding, these things may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not in 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 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. Advices or queries may be read at the beginning of meeting for worship or meeting 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. More details about how to do worship sharing can be found in Section 6 under Religious Education and Spiritual Growth for Adults. **(add p # when we have final version)**

Worship

As many candles lighted and put in one place do greatly augment the light, and makes it more to shine forth; so when many are gathered together into the same Life, there is more of the

glory of God, and his power appears to the refreshment of each individual for that he partakes not only of the Light and Life raised in himself but in all the rest. —Robert Barclay in An Apology for the True Christian Divinity

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 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, may by another be received as the direct word of 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

1. How are our meetings for worship held in expectant waiting for divine guidance?
2. As we listen, or as we speak, how 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. How do we let the Spirit determine the appropriate moment for closing the meeting?
5. Do I come to meeting with heart, mind, and body prepared?
6. Do I respect the spirit of the meeting by making an effort to arrive on time and trying to avoid unnecessary disturbances?
7. In our worship, how do we seek to experience the spirit which binds us with others and all creation?
8. How do we strive for a meeting that is alive with the power and presence of Spirit?

Vocal ministry

Upon Friends is laid a double responsibility in their communal worship. They are not only hearers and partakers of the Word of Life, but each must be prepared, if the call comes, to

share that Word in words to his fellows. —Beatrice Saxon Snell in “A Joint and Visible Fellowship,” Pendle Hill Pamphlet #140, 1965, p.18

When one rises to speak...one has a sense of being used, of being played upon, of being spoken through. It is as amazing an experience as that of being prayed through, when we the praying ones are no longer the initiators of the supplication, but seem to be transmitters, who second an impulse welling up from the depths of the soul. —Thomas R. Kelly in “A Gathered Meeting, 1947

Advices on vocal ministry

During meeting for worship, some may be moved to respond to 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.

Queries on vocal ministry

1. Is the vocal ministry of the meeting exercised under the leading of the Holy Spirit without prearrangement and in simplicity and sincerity?
2. Are we careful not to speak at undue length or beyond our light?
3. Can we be patient with messages that do not speak to us, trusting that they may speak to another?

Meeting for worship with attention to business

To be truly together, we listen for what the Spirit is bringing forth from us as a body, for what new thing God is bringing forth within us corporately, for how our communal life may be of service to God. We also listen for the Spiritual State of the Meeting in its responsiveness to the work of the Divine within it.” —Patricia Loring in *Listening Spirituality*, Vol II, 2009, p. 23

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. Bring all concerns to the meeting for business rather than as complaints made after a decision has been made.

Attendees and members are encouraged to participate in meeting for business and to be faithful in the service of the meeting's affairs. Such 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

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 do not feel entirely in agreement?
6. How do we love and care for each other throughout the process?
7. Do I participate regularly in meetings for business?
8. In what ways do I take my share of responsibility in the service of the meeting?
9. 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?
10. Do I carefully reconsider my leading when it appears to conflict with the sense of the meeting?
11. Do I seek the opening that allows me to understand another person's view?

Simplicity

If we think of simplicity as a spiritual quality which incidentally simplifies our life styles then I believe it has relevance. This kind of simplicity goes straight to the heart of things and puts first things first, is needed to rectify our distorted values, to help us accept changes in our pattern of living. As this simplicity grows in our hearts and bears fruit in our lives, we may learn and help others to learn that the really abundant life is not to be found in the clutter of material complexity, but in simplicity. L. Hugh Doncaster, 1976 quoted in Faith and Practice of Britain Yearly Meeting

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 the Light, truth, conscience, 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.

Do not be 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 in "A Plea for the Poor, or a Word of Remembrance and Caution to the Rich," *Every degree of luxury of what kind so ever, and every demand for money inconsistent with divine order, hath some connection with unnecessary labor.... To labor too hard or cause others to do so, that we may live conformable to customs which Christ our Redeemer contradicted by his example in the days of his flesh, and which are contrary to divine order, is to manure a soil for propagating an evil seed in the earth. May we look upon our treasure, the furniture of our houses, and our garments, and try whether the seeds of war have nourishment in these our possessions.*

Queries 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 a soil for propagating an evil seed in the earth"?
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?
5. How can I live more simply?
6. 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?
7. Have we confronted our own decisions about the potentially harmful use of likely addictive diversions and behaviors, encouraging others to do likewise?
8. 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

We strive to maintain integrity in word and deed. We recognize the temptations to grow rich at the expense of others, and how apparently harmless indulgence can lead to wrongdoing.

Avoid pretense in clothing, manners, and speech, realizing that false impressions may be conveyed by action and appearance, no less than by words.

In all the settings you find yourself, practice keeping a single and open manner of relating to others. Avoid using different characters in each role you fill.

We live our best lives as Friends when we focus on what Truth and Love require of us, not on our own comfort or contentment. North Pacific YM F&P, 3rd Edition, 2018

Advices on integrity

As our lives become centered on integrity, all that surrounds us is laid bare and can be seen as having a natural or unnatural place in our life. Seek 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.

Queries on integrity

1. Are my factual statements as accurate as possible, without exaggeration or omission? Do I strive to be truthful at all times?
2. How do we as individuals, and as a faith community, let our lives speak with the integrity and honesty in our words and the integrity of behaviors that reflect the Divine Light?
3. Do I live in accordance with my spiritual convictions? Do I seek employment consistent with my beliefs and in service to society?
4. How do we use the resources and strength we are given to meet the challenges of living a whole and honest life?
5. Do we avoid taking judicial and other oaths? Traditionally Friends have affirmed that they always speak the truth.
6. How do we fulfill the promises we make?
7. Are we responsible about incurring and repaying debts? Are we just and honorable in all our dealings?
8. How do we take care that our spiritual growth is not sacrificed to busyness?
9. 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

Apprehend God in all things, for God is in all things.

Every single creature is full of God and is a book about God.

Every creature is a word of God. Meister Eckhart

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 nonviolent 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 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? How do we take advantage of the products of exploitation and how can we change that?
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?
5. How do we address our own blind spots and complicity in maintaining inequities that privilege us, both as individuals and as a meeting community?

Peace

Friends' peace testimony challenges us all to be peace educators. We may not all be teachers, but we are all communicators, and we all need to be learners. Peace education should be seen as an integral part of our peace testimony. But it is essentially something one does, and not something one talks about... Peace education therefore aims at changing our own individual behaviour. Eva I Pinthus, 1982

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. We are also encouraged to work toward eliminating the underlying causes of violence and advocating for justice at all levels of society. It is essential to examine our own role in supporting oppression, considering our choices of financial investments, knowing where our purchases come from, choosing fair-trade

products, avoiding products farmed and mined in war torn areas, and assessing the role our tax dollars play.

Queries on peace

1. How do we maintain Friends' historic peace testimony?
2. How do we "live in the virtue of that life and power which takes away the occasion of all wars?"
3. How are we exerting our influence in favor of resolution of all differences by truly nonviolent methods?
4. How do we strive to share our understanding of the basis of our peace testimony and its applications to how we live and what we buy or use?
5. How do we educate ourselves and others about the impacts of colonial, political, social, and financial oppression, and how do we work toward relieving their results today?
6. How can we help to ameliorate the harm done to non-combatants during war?
7. How do we educate ourselves and support others in developing skills to support transformation of conflicts?
8. How do we seek justice for those who are marginalized by current economic and political systems?

Community

We have a long, long way to go. So let us hasten along the road, the roads of human tenderness and generosity, Groping, we may find one another's hands in the dark."

Emily Greene Balch, "Letter of Love to the Dear People of China," 1955

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 built 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 criticism and gossip. 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

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 welcome newcomers? 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?
9. What does the meeting do to foster an environment where mutual respect and forbearance, rather than criticism and gossip, flourish?
10. How do I contribute to the spirit of community in my meeting?
11. Do I respect that of God in each person, though it may be expressed in discomforting ways or may be difficult to discern?
12. 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?
13. Am I careful with the reputations of others?
14. Do I use language which is gender-inclusive and free from cultural assumptions that put people in prejudged categories?

Stewardship

As Friends we are led to live in right relationship with creation, to protect the Earth and all its inhabitants, to educate ourselves, and to witness both personally and as a Quaker community. This state of right relationship will be manifest in lives lived in equality, simplicity, community, integrity, and peace.

We can educate ourselves by learning about the far-reaching spiritual and environmental consequences of our daily activities: our habits and choices of energy usage, housing, travel, reproduction, diet, and consumption. We can witness personally by being “patterns and examples” of environmentally sustainable lifestyles. We can witness publicly by advocating for cultural changes that reflect the principle of harmony with creation. We celebrate the Earth’s bounty which provides for us, our fellow human beings, future generations, and all other living beings. North Pacific YM F&P

Advices on harmony with Creation

Earth calls us to be mindful of the ground we walk upon, the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the love we need to nurture for creation. When we grow that love we connect ourselves to all Creation.

As we become aware, spiritually and scientifically, of the interconnectedness of all parts of life, 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. Part of that work entails reusing, recycling, and reducing in all areas possible, to do no further harm than has already been done. *“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, in “Conversations on the True Harmony of Mankind & How It May Be Promoted” 1772).

Quakers are well practiced in listening to that still quiet voice of God. Let us expand and tune our ears and our hearts, to hear Spirit in the voices of the waters, the trees, the land, and creatures all around us. Listen to that of God in all Creation.

Queries on harmony with Creation

1. How do you describe your relationship with the living world? How does this impact your faith and your witness in the world?
2. How do we make choices about personal consumption that do not contribute to harming the earth and all its inhabitants?
3. How do we educate ourselves and others about the many opportunities to participate in activities that help to preserve the natural world?
4. Do we manage our buildings and necessary supplies and energy requirements in the most ecologically sound way possible?
5. How do we witness to policy makers in support of laws and regulations that preserve and protect the natural world?
6. Are we awed by the beauty, harmony, and wisdom of the natural world?

7. Do we learn from the natural world and Indigenous people sustainable ways to live?

Advices on stewardship of economic resources

As Quakers, we strive to examine our decisions about obtaining, holding, and using our assets and money. Likewise, we seek to determine if our expenditures support the seeds of war, self-indulgence, injustice, or destruction of the world which we share with others.

We strive to consider the advancement of peace, simple living, justice, and a healthy living environment in all of our actions. 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 advance 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 are encouraged to share outside of our immediate family. This may require 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.

Queries on stewardship of economic resources

1. Do we invest our funds in ways that do not promote harmful impacts on the natural world?
2. How do we use our resources for the betterment of others and our communities?
3. How does the Spirit guide us in our relationship to money? How do our choices reflect the working of truth and love in our lives and in the world?
4. How do we witness to policy makers in support of laws and regulations that promote economic fairness?
5. Are we careful to acquire, use, reuse, and dispose of goods so that other people and the Earth are not harmed?

Children

If God give you children love them with wisdom, correct them with affection; never strike in passion, and suit the correction to their age as well as fault....There should be the greatest care imaginable, what impressions are given to children; that method which earliest awakens their understandings to love, duty, sobriety, just and honourable things, is to be preferred.

William Penn in *Fruits of a Father's Love: Being the Advice of William Penn to His Children, Relating to Their Civil and Religious Conduct, 1776*

Advices on children

Watch with 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 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

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 the young?
3. How do we help our children identify and deal with inequalities of all kinds in our culture?
4. How 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?
5. How do I share my beliefs and values with children?
6. How do I nurture the individuality of children, encouraging them to develop as Spirit leads, giving freely of my approval and love?
7. How do I set a positive example for children in all my activities?
8. Am I attentive to that of God in every child?

Education

*I believe our children deserve to see us grapple, out loud as well as in silence, with our own deepest convictions. They deserve our best efforts to articulate what we find true and holy and transformative—and our humility in knowing that we cannot fully convey our deepest experiences. They deserve to be invited into the Living Waters in which we wade and swim and flounder. Both my swimming and my raft of faith may be clumsy and inadequate, but there is joy, delight, and challenge to be found in immersing myself in the water and learning to float in it. I owe it to the children in my life to invite them into the water, and to climb aboard to share and help build the raft. More than once when I have done this their faith has challenged my unbelief, sustained me through doubt, and kept me afloat in ways that surprised me. Kat Griffith, “Quaker Education: Thoughts on Our Words, Our Silence, and a Very Cool MilkJug Raft” *Friends Journal*, July, 2007*

Advices on education

Seek for yourselves and for your 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 while 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

1. What efforts are we making to become better acquainted with the Bible, the history and writings of 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 lifestyles?
3. Are we concerned to ensure 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?
6. How do we provide care and support for teachers?
7. How do I support and contribute to an educated, critically thinking, and engaged society/community where fairness and justice apply?
8. How do I share my knowledge and insights within the meeting and in the larger community?

More quotes shared by Friends to inspire soul searching

Inner Light:

Art thou in darkness? Mind it not, for if thou do, it will fill thee more, but stand still and act not, and wait in patience till light arises out of darkness to lead thee. Art thou wounded in conscience? Feed not there, but abide in the light, which leads to the grace and truth, which teaches to deny and put off the weight, and removes the cause, and brings saving health to light. James Naylor, 1659

Love

Let us then try what love will do.... Love is the hardest lesson in Christianity, but for that reason it should be most our care to learn it. William Penn, 1693

We are called to obedient love even though we may not be feeling very loving. Often it is through the performance of loving acts that loving feelings can be built up in us. We may start with small, perhaps very tiny steps. It is only as we begin to allow Christ's love to act in and through us that it can become a part of us. Sandra Cronk, 1983

Silence

Words split apart, Silence unites. Words scatter, Silence gathers together. Words stir up, Silence brings peace. Words engender denial, Silence invites even the denier to find fresh hope in the confident expectation of a mystery which can be accomplished within. In my active silence, I shall prepare myself to hear the Silence of God. Pierre Lacout, in *God Is Silence*

Discernment

Words may help and silence may help, but the one thing needful is that the heart should turn to its maker as the needle turns to the pole. For this we must be still. Carolyn Stephen in 'Light Arising; Thoughts on the Central Radiance' 1908

There is no way to find yourself until you discover how utterly to lose yourself ~Rufus Jones delivered at Arch Street Meetinghouse

Stand still in that which is pure. George Fox, 1652, quoted in *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 5th Ed., Britain YM

Worship

Come regularly to meeting for worship even when you are angry, depressed, tired or spiritually cold. In the silence ask for and accept the prayerful support of others joined with you in worship. Try to find a spiritual wholeness which encompasses suffering as well as thankfulness and joy. Prayer, springing from a deep place in the heart, may bring healing and unity as nothing else can. Let meeting for worship nurture your whole life. *Advices and Queries*, Britain Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice

In worship we have our neighbors to right and left, before and behind, yet the Eternal Presence is over all and beneath all. Worship does not consist in achieving a mental state of concentrated isolation from one's fellows. But in the depth of common worship it is as if we found our separate lives were all one life, within whom we live and move and have our being. Thomas Kelly

Worship is our response to an awareness of God. We can worship alone, but when we join with others in expectant waiting, we may discover a deeper sense of God's presence. We seek a gathered stillness in our meetings for worship so that all may feel the power of God's love drawing us together and leading us *Advices and Queries*, Britain Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice

Stewardship

It would go a great way to caution and direct people in the use of the world, that they were better studied and known in the Creation of it. For how could Man find the confidence to abuse it while they should see the Great Creator stare them in the face, it all and every part thereof. William Penn in *Some Friends of Solitude*, 1692

...As the mind was moved by an inward principle to love God as an invisible, incomprehensible Being, by the same principle it was moved to love him in all his manifestations in the visible world. That as by his breath the flame of life was kindled in all animal and sensible creatures, to say we love God as unseen and at the same time to exercise cruelty toward the least creature moving by his life or by life derived from him was a contradiction in itself. John Woolman, *Journal* (Grummer e-edition), pp 156-157)

Only when we see that we are part of the totality of the planet, not a superior part with special privileges, can we work effectively to bring about an earth restored to wholeness. Darkness is no less desirable than light. It is rather, a rich source of creativity... First there is the darkness of the earth in which the seeds wait all through the winter. Second, there is the darkness of the womb in which the young mammal grows into sufficient viability to be born and take its place on earth, as a separate being.... And third, there is the darkness of night, when the garish sun has gone down and the things of earth are blotted out, and we may glimpse the vastness of the universe of which we are part... We say that God is the Inner Light, but I want to affirm that also the Inner Darkness, and I do not mean desolation or evil, but a quiet waiting and creativity. The darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. ~ Elizabeth Watson, "Your God is Too Small", 1996

God calls Friends today ... to look into our hearts and examine our relationship with the rest of Creation, and to recognize that our neighbor includes the entire Earth community. We, too, are being asked to give up habits and things which have made our lives seem easier, just as slaves appeared to make life easier for their owners Lisa Gould, 1994

But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; Ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you, and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Job 12:7-8

Living Together in the Faith Community

True godliness does not turn people out of the world, but enables them to live better in it, and excites their endeavors to mend it not hide their candle under a bushel, but to set it upon a table in a candlestick."

William Penn in 'Some Fruits of Solitude' 1682, quoted in Quaker Faith & Practice, 5th Edition, 23.02, Britain YM

As we come into this world so furnished in the structure of our mind that we must view all objects in space and all events in time, so also we come with souls capable of recognizing truth and of responding to love and of assenting to righteousness when they present themselves; otherwise we never could learn to prize such things. It is with this in mind that Pascal explains religion in the famous words: "Thou wouldst not seek me if thou hadst not already found me." Rufus Jones

We are dimming our lights for fear of what people will think of us... We are at a fork in the road, as our Quaker ancestors were. We must decide if our jobs and our wealth and our comfort are more important than another's freedom. I know it is not easy. It may be hard for some of you to critically look at our Quaker ancestors in this way. Others might be thinking: 'How will our Quaker ancestors and our descendants look at what we did in 2025. How did we respond to the Refiner's Fire?' Because we surely need to have a response..... The question you need to ask — the question you need to answer — is whose well-being, whose death, whose extinction is your comfort worth?" Daquanna Harrison, 2025 FGC Plenary

5 Living Together in the Faith Community

Meeting as a caring community

How can we make the meeting a community in which each person is accepted and nurtured, and strangers are welcome? Seek to know one another in the things which are eternal, bear the burden of each other's failings and pray for one another. As we enter with tender sympathy into the joys and sorrows of each other's lives, ready to give help and to receive it, our meeting can be a channel for God's love and forgiveness. Britain Yearly Meeting F&P, chapter 1, # 18

In addition to getting to “know one another in the things which are eternal,” Quakers have, from their beginnings, also sought to provide tangible assistance. Early Quakers challenged the status quo of 17th-century religion and society which often led to their imprisonment and loss of land and possessions. As a result they established “meetings for sufferings” to care for those in jail and their families or to supply necessities to those deprived of property. This concern for caring for one another has continued to the present day, changing in response to the needs of the group. Larger meetings may have committees charged with being aware of people’s needs and helping to meet them. In smaller meetings everyone may be more aware of each other’s needs and help each other to access appropriate resources.

Meetings can also support people seeking clarity on a personal issue or feeling called to a ministry. Clearness committees are available to help an individual sort through a personal puzzle or discern what they are being called to do and how to go about it. Support committees can be created to support a person in a task or ministry. Sometimes meetings will also provide financial support to a person traveling in a ministry they helped discern.

Simple communication is an essential component, whether that is a phone call, sharing a meal, or sending a friendly card. Some meetings have a tradition of Friendly Eights, where a group of about eight meet regularly to get to know each other over a meal. Working together on meeting projects, community service, or committees is another way to connect and know each other, as are retreats, study groups, or spiritual support groups.

The seekers who come through our doors are often looking for a deeper connection to Spirit. Quakers have long believed that is a communal effort, not a solitary journey. School of the Spirit (<https://www.schoolofthespirit.org>) has begun a Faithful Meetings project (<https://www.schoolofthespirit.org/faithful-meetings-home/>) to help meetings navigate the details of building their spiritual connections in community. Friends General Conference has also developed spiritual deepening resources for meetings (<https://www.fgcquaker.org/fgcprograms/spiritual-deepening-program/>). Some meetings have organized small spiritual companion groups to support each other on their spiritual journey.

Not all needs can be addressed by the community, and so sometimes professional help may be needed. The community's ability to listen to and encourage a person to seek such help is also essential.

A valuable resource for researching puzzling issues is Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's Pastoral Care Newsletters. For almost twenty years a Pastoral Care Working Group published quarterly newsletters covering many areas of community needs and sharing meetings' approaches to dealing with issues. They are all available on their website (<https://www.pym.org/pastoral-care/newsletters/>).

Nurturing one's gifts

Friends have always had a particular concern for the recognition and cherishing of spiritual gifts such as leading, discerning, teaching, serving, listening, vocal ministry, healing, prayer, etc. They place special emphasis on the responsibility of the meeting's members to ensure the ongoing work and nurture of our communities. Simon Gray in *Quaker Faith and Practice Around the World - A study guide for Friends*, Digital Revolution Publishing. Kindle Edition

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.

Care of worship groups, small and new meetings

There are practical matters to consider when several friends of like mind are led to gather for worship in the manner of Friends. Private homes are generally where Quaker monthly meetings begin, as the group of Friends must first determine their level of commitment to this new idea. At this time, it is in right order for a new worship group to associate with an established monthly meeting. The worship group is created "under the care" of the monthly meeting and those Friends are encouraged to visit the worship group often in support of the spiritual growth of these new seekers. If the monthly meeting can be found no further than 100 miles away, frequent visitation and loving care will more easily be provided to those in the worship group.

After a period of time, when the size of the group outgrows meeting at their homes, a search is conducted for a proper public location. Moving from someone's home to a more public location is a step that will usually require funding and, again, personal commitment is required of each person. Collected monies can be entrusted to the person who is led to handle this responsibility and they can serve as treasurer. At this time, the worship group may be ready to advance to the status of a preparatory meeting. This procedure will be guided by the monthly meeting under whose care the worship group was established. It is in right order to have a clerk in addition to a treasurer, and the monthly meeting will offer their support in defining who these people will be.

Paying rent is generally among the first financial obligations of the preparatory meeting. It is good if a public location is centrally located for the people in this new faith community. Privacy for worship and consistency in availability are important considerations as well as how much rent the group can actually pay. Additionally, as a preparatory meeting, Friends may now want to begin financially supporting the many Quaker institutions in existence. This may be the time to open a bank account.

Attendance grows at a Quaker meeting through several avenues. When Friends are empowered in their spiritual journeys through participation in their silent and expectant worship, word of mouth becomes the primary advertisement. Perhaps Friends will want to participate in a local federation of churches or have an information table set up at a farmers' market. A local newspaper may have a special feature on religion in the community and the preparatory meeting can be included in the articles. Now, in the 21st century, social media through computer technology provides another way for sharing ideas. Friends may want to set up a website for their meeting or a social media account.

Use care in deciding when a worship group is to be changed to a preparatory meeting and a preparatory meeting changed to a monthly meeting. It is truly the Quaker way to rely on guidance from Spirit in all things and these changes must be made according to no predetermined timeline. Membership in the Religious Society of Friends can only be facilitated within an established monthly meeting. Marriages can only be taken under the care of an established monthly meeting. In all other matters of a faith community, remaining a preparatory meeting for several or many years will not interfere with the lives of those who have chosen to worship together in the manner of Friends.

Friends are encouraged to focus on the percentages of participation in worship and meeting activities rather than simply how many people are present. Do not be tempted to compare your small meeting to the larger ones in your yearly meeting. Know that the quality of your monthly meeting, preparatory meeting, or worship group lies in what each person brings forth. The personal commitments of a few can have the energy of many. Five people gathered with the common goal of living the Quaker way can discover together imaginative and creative ways to act with guidance from Spirit. Be careful with expectations for they have been known to destroy many of life's opportunities. When we embrace our testimonies as true guidelines for how we live individually and collectively, our faith community, no matter the size, will grow daily in richness.

Always hold dear that the purpose of our faith communities as Quakers is worship of the Divine. Love one another and act always out of love. In this way, the size of your meeting or worship group will not matter.

Dealing with conflict

The idea that Friends can be in conflict with each other, proves often to be surprising. Friends’ ways, their paths and testimonies, can seem to uphold a seamless, comfortable whole peace. But in actuality, creating the gathered enlightened body and its positions often takes tremendous work in moving individual Friends and Friends’ groups through conflict-filled avenues. How Friends manage conflict, both among themselves and with the world around them, is of interest.

Sometimes Quaker testimonies call Friends into conflict with the society around them. Part of simple dress, the men’s broad-brimmed, black felt Quaker hat worn in the 17th century and beyond, is a farmer's hat, a countryman’s hat. Friends' faith led them to believe all were equal before God. Acting upon this belief, Friends refused to tip their hats to aristocrats as was customary.

Most conflicts that grow out of hand and seriously disrupt monthly meetings do so either because of a failure of corporate eldering (which does not mean personal scolding) or because of a failure of the Ministry and Counsel Committee to faithfully fulfill its charge of caring for the spiritual life of the meeting. “When Conflicts Arise: Crisis or Invitation?” Peter Phillips and the NYYM Committee on Conflict Resolution, Friends Journal, April 2013

Conflict transformation

Conflict transformation is a framework for interpretation of conflict that can be useful to Quakers. It flows out of a leading toward Spirit to use conflict as a creative third way to arrive at a place of healing. The table below outlines the conflict transformation framework by contrasting it with a “conflict resolution” framework.

	Conflict resolution	Conflict transformation
Key question	How do we end something not desired?	How do we end something destructive and build something desired?
Focus	Content-centered	Relationship-centered

Purpose	To achieve an agreement and solution to the presenting problem creating the crisis	To promote constructive change processes, inclusive of, but not limited to, immediate solutions
Development of the process	Embedded and built around the immediacy of the relationship where the symptoms of disruptions appear	Envisions the presenting problem as an opportunity for response to symptoms and engagement of systems in which relationships are embedded
Time frame	Short-term relief to pain, anxiety, and difficulties	Mid- to long-range and is intentionally crisis-responsive rather than crisis-driven
View of conflict	Envisions the need to de-escalate	Envisions conflict as an ecology that is relationally dynamic with ebb (conflict de-escalation to pursue constructive change) and flow (conflict escalation to pursue constructive change)

From “Transforming Conflict—Why Conflict Transformation?” Karen Reixach, Ithaca Meeting Clerk of Committee on Conflict Transformation, *SPARK*, March 2019 Full Inset

Threshing sessions

Large topics bearing unfathomable weight sometimes come before a meeting. As witnessed within SCYM, examples might be such things as a meeting declaring sanctuary for immigrants, defining who can be married under its care, or deciding where it might worship in the future. As a broad and diverse group of individuals, many opinions exist that must be presented, worked through, and moved to an accepted sense of the meeting as a whole. Should regular meetings for worship for business, with or without additional worship sharing sessions, not bear fruit, it is customary to arrange for a threshing session (see section on threshing sessions p. 40). Here members can focus completely on the given subject, bringing to light any dark crevices that hold the meeting back from moving

forward as one gathered body. Although unusual, it is possible that some members do not come to a common center even after a threshing session. These individuals often choose to *stand aside*, requesting it be minuted that they are doing so, in order to allow the meeting to proceed. Sometimes, members unable to come to the center have chosen to leave the meeting. Offering meeting for business, worship sharing, and threshing sessions gives the body of the meeting ample opportunities to gather every member's voice, hopefully without cracking its foundation, and work toward gathering the sense of the meeting.

Disruption to worship

What about the Friend who preaches at length every First Day, on inscrutable topics, reading from a prepared paper? By tolerating such dysfunction in our meetings, we end up enabling bad behavior, and realize too late that we are paying a price: our meeting shrinks; the joy disappears and our labors become wearisome. "When Conflicts Arise: Crisis or Invitation?" Peter Phillips and the NYM Committee on Conflict Resolution, Friends Journal, April 2013.

Although rare in occurrence, a mechanism to stop repeated worship interruptions that do not rise to vocal ministry finds a place. Should any disruptive behaviors occurring during meetings for worship become injuriously repetitive, a Friend may stand in silence as a signal to quiet. Others might join this Friend, also standing in place. If the request thus shown is not heeded, a Friend may move toward the person and stand before them in silence—punctuating the ask. Again, this effort may be duplicated by others should the behavior continue. Generally, the silent presence of individuals functioning as one quiets the person and ends the disruption. It is harmful to put this mechanism to use unless there is clear disruption, and ought never to be begun simply out of discomfort with a message. Vocal ministry, as it presents itself, can be uncomfortable at times.

"A meeting's members and attenders (or their families) may have varying degrees of behavioral disorders, including mental illness and dementia. Meetings try to be supportive, although it is not always clear how to be so meaningfully. Treatment of the Insane - Since 1800 Friends have believed in the use of kindness and of sympathetic treatment for the recovery of mental sufferers. The hospital under their management at Frankford in Philadelphia is a model institution for the care and study of the mentally ill." The Quaker Persuasion, Testimonies favored by the Society of Friends, 8 - William Wistar Comfort)

Friends continue to be tolerant and accepting to the extent possible. But it should be emphasized that disruptive behavior during meeting for worship cannot be accepted. The Worship & Ministry and Pastoral Care Committees respond appropriately to stop behavior that disrupts meeting for worship or threatens the fabric of the meeting community. . . In some cases it may be helpful to designate a Friend to sit in meeting for worship with the person showing behavioral disorder; in other cases a designated Friend may invite the person to leave meeting together to talk elsewhere. . . It is important to remember that meetings cannot provide therapy, nor can they ignore such things as civil protection orders. Faith and Practice, North Pacific Yearly Meeting, 3rd Edition, 2018.

Instances of conflict between two members

Being human is not easy, and life brings with it a full color box of emotions. Sometimes, members may find themselves engaged in conflict with each other that bleeds out into meeting activity. It is likely that a meeting has a ministry and care committee formed, or at least some members appointed to positions of caring for the meeting. If conflict between two members remains unresolved, it is customary for the committee to set aside some time to meet with the individuals, both separately and together, to work toward resolution in loving fashion.

Remember always that seasoned Friends from outside meetings, quarterly or yearly meetings, and special committees may be invited to visit and hold meetings or their members in the palms of their hands, in the Light, and work through conflict in new ways. If at any time professional help might be useful, Friends are encouraged to find some. Following up with a meeting for worship for healing would nurture the individuals and the community as a whole.

Reaching out to the community around us

The earliest Friends were very active in sharing their good news about how to live the Kingdom of Heaven here now by attending to the Inner Light and Teacher and sending out pairs of ministers throughout England and beyond. Their failure to convert the multitudes to their understanding of how to be in the world led the next generation to focus more on their own inward spirituality with the expectation that the quality of their lives would attract others to join them. Among unprogrammed Friends, that expectation persists today, with an aversion to practicing the proselytization common to some other denominations. So how do others learn about the Quaker way?

Meetings often participate with local interfaith groups and social justice activities in their communities. Social media and meeting websites are another avenue to share about the local meeting and its activities and beliefs. For those who have their own space, hosting community events provides visibility. Signage that is large, clear, and well placed for the public to see is essential.

Word of mouth and invitation of family and friends is also important. Meeting members and attenders can let their lives speak with their co-workers, neighbors, and groups in which they participate, thereby inviting conversation about spiritual matters through their witness. Friends General Conference and Friends World Committee for Consultation have resources available through their websites (at <https://www.fgcquaker.org/resources/> and <https://fwcc.world/>).

Learning to become Inclusive

George Fox admonished Friends “to know one another in that which is eternal.” In building our communities and in providing pastoral care to our members we reach toward that deep place that transcends differences including race, class, gender, or other external categories. Yet we enter our meetinghouses carrying our experience of the world around us, a world deeply influenced by these categories. Sometimes unwittingly, sometimes knowingly, and too often in ways that cause distress, we let assumptions based in our racial or ethnic backgrounds influence the way we relate to one another, to our world, and to God. How can we help our meetings grow toward our ideal as Friends?

“Moving toward Wholeness: Addressing Race among Friends” by Patricia McBee & Vanessa Julye *Friends Journal*, October 2003

Black, Native American Indian, Asian, Latino, gender-divergent, neurodivergent, and other Friends have served SCYM over the years and built a crucial legacy. It is important to acknowledge that our history with regard to inclusion may seldom have reflected the best of Quaker values. In recent years meetings have participated with national Quaker organizations’ efforts to assess unexamined bias in how our meetings and organizations conduct business and outreach in an effort to become more welcoming to all who come into the meeting.

Led and informed by Friends of color, national and regional working groups have developed to support each other and weave better understanding among Quakers. They have worked with FGC, AFSC, and other Quaker groups to open conversations about race issues and move toward racial healing. We deeply value their important contributions. Currently six national Quaker organizations have joined together to create the Quaker Coalition for Uprooting Racism, QCUR (<https://www.fgcquaker.org/fgcprograms/ministry-on-racism/qcur/>) They seek to partner with meetings and individuals to accelerate the movement for, and capacity to create, racial justice among (and beyond) Friends. Any interested meeting can reach out to them for advice and to participate in the webinars and study groups they offer. One recommendation that has been embraced by several SCYM meetings is to consider a query like this at the beginning of meeting for worship with attention to business: “How *will* our decisions support our goal of becoming an anti-racist faith community which embraces diversity?”

LGBTQIA Friends have also joined together to make their needs known within Friends’ circles and take leadership roles in meetings. Friends have adopted affirming statements in support of gender-diverse rights for transgender people and in support of marriage equality. Friends also have appropriated money to support groups such as the Friends Ugandan Safe Transport Fund.

The forcible relocation of many Tribal Nations from homelands east of the Mississippi River to Oklahoma, where some members of SCYM reside, offers us another opportunity and obligation to open our hearts to the truth of Quaker history, and to living our testimonies more truly. Nationally, Quakers founded and operated at least 30 day-schools

and boarding schools on Indigenous nations' lands, and Quaker Isaac T. Gibson was appointed U.S. Indian agent for the Osage Nation when the permanent agency for the Osage was established in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, in 1872, so Quakers have a long history of active participation in the ongoing cultural annihilation of Native peoples.

In 2016, SCYM joined other yearly meetings in minuting support for repudiating and revoking the Doctrine of Discovery (DoD) and instituting the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) of 2007 as a basis for the laws of the land. Members have also been participating in the National Indian Boarding School efforts to explore and preserve boarding school archival collections. On a national level this work is strengthening thanks to efforts by Native Americans and their allies, including the Friends Peace Teams program Toward Right Relationship with Native Peoples.

The Diversity and Inclusion Leaders community offers some suggestions for advancing our efforts to become more welcoming to everyone, such as to place belonging at the heart of transformation, and to emphasize systemic, holistic change. The group Co-Creating Inclusion calls for more than lip service, for closing the gap between intention and action.

We are reminded that in addition to cultural and racial diversity we need to be aware of accessibility for those who use assistive devices for mobility and those whose minds process information differently. Technology offers us ways to include everyone in our communication. The Americans with Disabilities Act provides guidelines for making accommodations to the physical space. It is important to center the voices and experiences of those needing accommodations in designing how best to create a sense of belonging for them without burdening them with the task of educating us on how best to create welcoming spaces. *Friends Journal* has recently published two articles describing ways to welcome those with accessibility needs: <https://www.friendsjournal.org/shifting-system-paradigms-together/> and <https://www.friendsjournal.org/finding-what-works-for-us/>.

Laboring Together in the Monthly Meeting

In all our fervor--in all my fervor--to be doing, have I paid too little attention to the power that lies in being? Do we remember that it is the spirit of our service, the aura that surrounds it, the gentleness and the patience that marks it, the love made visible that compels it, that is the truly distinctive quality . . .? Stephen G. Cary, 1979

We act not out of our own authority but from an accompanied place
Ben Pink Dandelion, 'Open for Transformation: Being Quaker'
Swarthmore Lecture Book 2014

Look not out; but within ... Remember it is a still voice that speaks to us in this day, and that it is not to be heard in the noises and hurries of the mind; but it is distinctly understood in a retired frame
William Penn in Preface to The Journal of George Fox, 1694, quoted
in NYYM F&P 2020

We can choose, you know, we ain't no amoeba
Bonnie Raitt, Quaker singer/song writer in "Thing Called Love"
chorus, 1989

6 Laboring Together in the Monthly Meeting

The monthly meeting

South Central Yearly Meeting is concerned that all who are moved to worship God in 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 (2020-2022) 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 Spirit 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.

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, a recording clerk to record minutes and other information from the meeting for business, a records clerk to manage meeting records, a treasurer to manage and record financial matters, 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 duties like managing property, conducting religious education, etc., 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, at a time that is most convenient for as much participation as possible.

It is a monthly meeting's responsibility to conduct the following business:

1. Manage membership, including receiving and recording new members and transferring or otherwise ending membership as needed.
2. Provide spiritual and, if need be, material aid to those in its fellowship.
3. Provide religious education to all in its fellowship.
4. Oversee and record marriages and ceremonies of commitment.
5. Celebrate and record births and adoptions.
6. Give care at the time of death and record the departure.
7. Collect and dispense funds for its maintenance and work, and administer real estate and other property.
8. Issue travel minutes and letters of introduction.
9. Recommend setting up or laying down preparative meetings or worship groups under its care.
10. Appoint members and committees for special service and act upon their reports.
11. Keep accurate and complete records of all its proceedings.
12. Witness to Friends' testimonies.
13. Affiliate with other bodies of Friends and to other organizations with common interests.
14. Relate to its quarterly and yearly meetings.

Friends take seriously the claim that, in our management of meeting affairs, including committee meetings, we seek spiritual guidance. Therefore, to cultivate a general approach of working with and in the Spirit, it is 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.
2. Being mindful of our Quaker process and discipline, including silent worship at beginning and end of meetings and as indicated during the meeting.
3. Listening well both to what is said and what is not said.
4. Staying open, not having preconceptions, and being flexible about what comes.
5. Ensuring respect for and appreciation of others (e.g., being clear about the time and the information allocated for their item on the agenda).
6. Displaying 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 for 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 and 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.

A more in-depth treatment of Quaker process can be found in *Quaker Process for Friends on the Benches* by Matilda Navias.

Recording minutes

The recording clerk records the proceedings during meetings for business, special called meetings, and threshing 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 that attempts to summarize the sense of the meeting. When a decision is made, 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. The clerk will restate 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 worshiping 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 create the need to make a new minute, but what has been written is not altered after it has been entered into the permanent record.

When Friends are not 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 may 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. A threshing session may also be useful to allow for a deeper airing of differences in an arena where listening rather than decision making is the focus so that there can be a deeper understanding of them.

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 themselves to listening only to their personal judgments. It may be wise for Friends with strong feelings to ask to meet with a clearness committee to further explore the source of their positions.

If after prolonged laboring, the meeting 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.

There has been a long history of Friends wishing to move forward on a social issue, like abolition of slavery, before the rest of the meeting was ready. Various outcomes have followed, including leaving the meeting to set up their own meeting, as in the case of Progressive Friends in 1853. In other cases, for example in approving taking same-gender marriages under its care, strong beliefs in right and wrong may lead some people to leave the meeting. It is hoped that the love for that of God in the other will result in continued friendship in spite of unresolvable differences of interpretation of right and wrong.

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 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 of the meeting; 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. It is in committees that members of the community get to know each other more deeply and form deeper bonds with each other as they check in with each other and work together. Committees could be considered laboratories for learning and practicing Quaker process.

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, and 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.

Committees for clearness

Clearness committees meet for a short time to provide an opportunity for Friends to worship together and seek Spirit's direction on an important issue of membership, marriage, or a personal leading or concern. People have found this process to be deeply spiritual and moving. A membership clearness committee is composed of a convenor and three or four meeting members. For a marriage clearness committee, a convenor and members with relationship skills are desirable. For individuals seeking clarity on an issue,

people with knowledge or interest of the issue or leading are desirable. They may be people from outside the meeting with knowledge in the area of concern if agreeable to the committee.

A person seeking membership or couple seeking to be married under the care of the meeting writes a letter to the clerk of the meeting requesting clearness for membership or marriage under the care of the meeting. The clerk 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, a request 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 prayerfully consider the issues involved and come to unity that this membership or marriage is in the best interest of the individuals involved and the meeting. In the case of clearness for a personal concern, it is important to support the focus person as they work through their concern without directing, advising, or seeking solutions prematurely.

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 for business, the clerk can schedule a called meeting for worship for business by announcing it the week prior at the rise of meeting and in whatever other ways the meeting shares information with its members.

Threshing sessions

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 sessions,” at which no decision is made, but through which the chaff can be separated from the grain of truth. Such sessions 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 session 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 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 important that someone take notes of the meeting for later reference. At times the threshing session may forward a recommendation to the meeting for business.

Some guidelines for threshing sessions are:

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 the meeting to make dissenting views known during a threshing session.
6. Passion is permitted!
7. Sense of the meeting is not expected in a threshing session.

Threshing session outcomes are reported back to meeting for business.

Marriage under the care of a meeting

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. from "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. The purpose of the process is to enable a lasting and loving relationship. The process also helps build community due to the involvement of the meeting in both the

clearness process and the meeting for marriage. Because of our 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 circumstances or customs in 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.

At the beginning of the process, couples contemplating marriage are 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 love of parents and guardians, if involved in the couple’s lives, in order that family unity may be preserved, and hasty and improper marriages avoided.

Non-members may marry under the care of the meeting, and according to the good order of friends. A civil marriage may be recorded, subject to the laws of the state in which it transpires, and the desires of the couple.

(Non-members may be married by the meeting, in the considered judgment of the monthly meeting and according to the good order of friends.)

Couples who wish to marry under the care of the meeting should address a written proposal to the monthly meeting or its clerk. The letter, signed by them both, and substantially as follows, should be submitted well in advance of the contemplated date. The following is a sample of such a letter.

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)

The clerk should immediately refer the proposal to whichever committee handles requests for clearness committees. In very small meetings this is often done by the meeting for business 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 usually includes a married couple, ideally who were married under the care of a meeting. They should present their report to the supervising committee 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 addictions, medical and genetic considerations, or cultural 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, have conflict with the families of origin, or are about to move away or experience other kinds of upheavals. In any of these cases (and many more challenges) the committee may ask the couple to delay, giving time for professional counseling, or time to resolve the issues. If a delay will not address the committee's concerns, the committee should feel free to report back that they are unable to approve taking the marriage under the care of the meeting.

The process should not be rushed. In a few cases, the process may be speeded up or partially bypassed (for example, by setting the date and place of the wedding before the clearness process has been completed) by action of the meeting at large. This procedure is to be followed only under the most pressing and unusual circumstances.

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 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 is 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 committee may include members of another meeting when distance makes such an arrangement desirable.

The arrangements committee helps with the logistics for the meeting for marriage (as well as any other celebrations) and advises the parties as to the proper procedure for the ceremony. The committee should see that the couple obtains a wedding certificate, attend the wedding to see that it is conducted in the manner of Friends, and make sure that the necessary information is delivered to the recorder and reported to the monthly meeting. In the past, Friends did not obtain marriage licenses, but in this day and age many couples do so. If the couple does wish to formalize their civil marriage with the state, the committee can support them in the process.

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. 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 will indicate they are ready by rising or other agreed upon means 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 marriage committee are to do so too. Then a designated person should then read the certificate aloud. A period of worship should follow, during which those present may offer advice, best wishes or other vocal ministry and, at the conclusion of the meeting, others present should sign the certificate as witnesses. The clerk breaks meeting when they feel that all have had an opportunity to speak.

The marriage certificate

At minimum, the marriage certificate should include the full names of the couple, name and location (city and state) of the monthly meeting, date of the wedding, statement of the vows exchanged, signatures of the couple and the signatures of the marriage committee and other witnesses. The couple prepares the wording of the certificate and reviews it with the arrangements committee before the certificate is printed.

The form below reflects the historic wording of the marriage certificate. It may be modified as the couple desires to reflect their terminology for one another and pronoun usage. If the couple's wedding vows did not follow the traditional form, the certificate should reflect those changes also.

Whereas ___ (person to be married's full name), of ___ (place), daughter/son/child of ___ and ___ (parents' names), of ___ (place), and ___ (person to be married's full name), of ___ (place), daughter/son/child 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 to be married's name), taking ___ (person to be married's name) by the hand, did, on this solemn occasion, declare that ___ (pronoun) took ___ (pronoun) to be ___ (possessive pronoun) wife/husband/spouse/partner, promising, with Divine assistance, to be unto ___ (pronoun) a loving and faithful wife/husband/spouse/partner so long as they both shall live (or words to that effect), and then in the same assembly ___ (person to be married's name) did in like manner declare that ___ (pronoun) took ___ (person to be married's name) to be ___ (possessive pronoun) wife/husband/spouse/partner, promising, with Divine assistance, to be unto ___ (pronoun) a loving and faithful wife/husband/spouse/partner 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)

(from New York YM's Faith and Practice)

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 members of the couple, stating their intention to marry and enclosing, if needed and available, the consent of parents or guardians.
2. Once the clearness committee makes its report in favor of the marriage, to propose, if they so desire, the names of Friends they suggest to serve as an arrangements committee for the wedding and the day, hour, and place where they wish to hold the wedding.
3. To refrain from sending wedding invitations until the monthly meeting approves their proposed marriage.

4. To meet with the arrangements 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 and certificate is given to the clerk or other designated person before the wedding.
8. To commit to memory 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, to the relevant committee immediately following their receipt.
2. To provide for time to receive a report from the clearness committee at the monthly meeting.
3. When the monthly meeting has accepted the report:
 1. to request that the meeting appoint an arrangements committee 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 planning for the wedding.

The responsibilities of the clearness committee

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 on this the beginning of this section on marriage under the care of a meeting, and also see the next subsection, which contains sample questions to ask the couple.)
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 a 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.

Sample questions for a clearness committee to use when meeting with the couple

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? Mutual discussion? Physical attraction? Practical convenience? Fulfilling the expectations of others? Rebelling against the expectations of others?
4. Do you 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.

The responsibilities of the arrangements committee

1. To see that the wedding takes 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 but 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 and fully participate.

Marriage equality

SCYM endorses the marriages of individuals under the care of monthly meetings without regard to gender, and has done so since 1999. A minute reaffirming that endorsement in 2004 reads: 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 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.*

Based on the testimonies on equality, some meetings provided marriage under the care of the meeting to persons without regard to gender, including same-sex couples, as far back as the early 1980s. For many meetings in those years the matter was controversial and decisions were not easily reached—part of SCYM’s mixed history with regard to inclusion.

Death in the meeting

Preparation

Any death leaves a void in the meeting community. Grief takes a wide variety of forms and manifestations. Since Friends have a wide variety of beliefs about what follows death, individual and collective grief can have a wide variety of expressions. While sudden death brings its own chaos, that chaos can be addressed, and arrangements made easier for those left behind, if all Friends take the time well in advance to prepare a will, arrange powers of attorney, and leave instructions or preferences. Some meetings keep copies of those

documents on file. Those items should be discussed with family and friends, as outlined by the query below.

Are you able to contemplate your death and the death of those closest to you? Accepting the fact of death, we are freed to live more fully. In bereavement, give yourself time to grieve. When others mourn, let your love embrace them. —"Advices & Queries," The Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain

Most meetings make an effort to keep in touch with those who can no longer actively participate in meeting activities. Some send greeting cards, keep the individuals on the active mailing list, and provide visitors, whenever possible. Occasionally worship is held in the individual's hospital room or home.

If a meeting is especially fortunate, they may have members who are gifted at visiting. Meetings should do what they can to encourage or enable that ministry. One meeting reported that they created a roster for members to sit with the individual while in hospice care. The meeting may also be called on by the family to provide advice and support. Some meetings keep files or contact information on funeral homes, cremation services, lawyers, etc., that have been especially helpful or attuned to Friends' practices.

During this time, Friends may be asked to hold the individual, their family, and caregivers in the light, or even to hold a special meeting for worship. When no family members could be there, one meeting sent two members to be present and hold the process in the light when life support was stopped.

Immediately after

As soon as possible, the meeting should be notified. The clerk or other designated friends should be available to provide advice and support, if needed or requested.

A minute should be presented at the next monthly meeting for business. This type of minute usually takes a form something like this: ____ (meeting name) mourns the death of beloved member/attender ____ (full name) on ____ (date) and ____ (place). If the memorial meeting is already scheduled, that information may be included.

When or if meetings have burial grounds, burials tend to be soon after the death, without viewings, wakes, or embalment in keeping with testimonies on simplicity. Often only family, close friends, and a few members of the meeting are present.

These days, burials or cremations tend to be private events, with a memorial meeting scheduled some weeks or even months later.

Memorial meetings

There is a wide variety of customs and practices among meetings. Memorial meetings used to be solemn meetings, but these days more often take the form of remembrances or celebrations of life. While there is no real closure, a memorial meeting can be a steppingstone on the way to healing for the meeting, family, and friends.

In general, someone from the meeting acts as a liaison with the family to set up a date, time, and place, and to plan the basic outline. If family members are not familiar with Friends meeting for worship or other practices, this liaison may need to provide some education but also be flexible to accommodate wishes and expectations. The meeting may be asked to incorporate practices from other faiths, such as chanting, music, or prepared messages.

In its most traditional and simplest form, the memorial meeting is a meeting for worship in which all present are welcome to speak and offer their remembrances of the deceased. The format usually starts with the clerk welcoming f/Friends and describing the format. After a brief period of centering, a family member offers some kind of opening remarks followed by silent worship, then everyone is free to speak. Like any meeting for worship, the clerk closes the meeting with shaking hands. Typically, 60 to 90 minutes should be sufficient. A special effort may be needed to make children feel welcome and encouraged to participate.

If the deceased is not well known to Friends, the clerk may ask someone to start the vocal ministry with a reading from the Bible, or a well-known author, or even a hymn. It is also fine to add music, planned readings, or whatever else will help the family deal with the death. One memorial meeting included brief presentations by a Catholic priest and a Buddhist prayer leader. Slide shows, picture displays, and online participation are all welcome.

To acquaint visitors with Friends' practices, some meetings prepare handouts describing the meeting and offering information about the deceased. (A sample is at the end of this document.)

Memorial minutes

A memorial minute is similar to an obituary, in that it lists the usual vital statistics, such as birth, death, parentage, and "survived by" information. Because these minutes become historical documents used by researchers and those seeking family history, it is important to be as accurate as possible, especially when listing the cause of death. Minutes are sometimes prepared by a family member but more often by a committee of a monthly meeting. When completed, a minute should be read and approved by the monthly meeting before being forwarded to the yearly meeting, where it is read by a member of the deceased's meeting at the last of SCYM's meetings for worship with attention to business. It may also be read at the next quarterly meeting session, depending on timing, before being submitted to yearly meeting. A copy is given to the Recording Clerk for inclusion in SCYM's annual proceedings. Copies of the minute may also be sent to Friends' publications.

A memorial minute differs from an obituary in that it includes information on membership and highlights participation in Quaker activities, such as service on committees, or if they served on yearly meeting committees or represented SCYM to other organizations, etc. Sometimes the minute includes references to something someone shared during the memorial meeting.

Since 2022, SCYM requests that a photograph be provided so that it can be projected during the First Day session at the yearly meeting. This helps those present to remember

the deceased, and providing or choosing a photograph has been described as a deeply spiritual experience.

Memorial minutes should be archived with other meeting records.

Two SCYM Members used the following quote to adapt into a handout for use at the Memorial Meeting held in Grand Prairie, TX for Gerald Jimmy, Jr., offering it for wider use as desired. The print ready handout is in the appendix.

Friends' Memorial Meetings are done the same way Quakers do most things: gently, tolerantly, inclusively, and wrapped in the healing power of the Silence. . . .

The Memorial Meeting progresses organically.

After a period of settled silence, someone from the Meeting—or a member of the family of the deceased—may read a prepared memorial message about the person.

After that, Friends and attenders may rise and share personal memories or thoughts.

As in all Meetings for Worship, such messages should come from the Light, with pools of silence between them so that all can reflect on what has been shared.

Sometimes a poem will be read, or a hymn will be sung, but all in the context of the Silence. Those who have attended Memorial Meetings say they are often deeply spiritual events.

—Wendy Swallow, Clerk Reno Friends Meeting, 2017

Membership

In the earliest days of the Religious 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 religious dissenters were jailed, meetings were called on to provide support in a host of ways, including paying of fines, providing food for those in prisons and taking care of children when their parents were in prison. Then, meetings developed lists of who were members and 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. They sometimes tended to become somewhat clannish, 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. Recently, when fewer Friends come from Quaker families, meetings have developed a variety of ways of discerning membership.

Today, membership in the Religious Society of Friends is held by an individual monthly meeting. Membership in a meeting represents acknowledgement that an individual has found a level of unity with Friends' testimonies, beliefs, and practices. It establishes a formal relationship and level of commitment between the member and the meeting. (In many meetings, persons who regularly attend and participate in the life of the meeting but have not become members are called "attenders.") Membership is gained through a clearness process, though meetings often vary in certain of the specifics. A clearness committee for membership is formed within the meeting, with several members helping the individual discern their commitment and willingness to participate in the community of Friends. Part of the 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 need not aspire to have reached some spiritual destination before applying for membership, but membership will further their spiritual growth and even the application process itself can be enlightening. Supporting spiritual growth is also a responsibility of the meeting.

Meetings in SCYM have a variety of practices dealing with applications for membership. Often the process will follow these steps: when an individual has been attending a meeting for some time and has been of service to the meeting (e.g., serving on a committee, reading recommended books, etc.), they may be encouraged to become a member. When that individual feels ready, they write a letter to the clerk. The letter, seeking membership, is read aloud at a monthly business meeting, and then passed to a clearness committee for membership. In some meetings, the letter is given to a designated committee to create that clearness committee; in others, the clearness committee is appointed at the same business meeting or later by the clerk. In some meetings, the applicant can suggest one person for the committee.

This committee usually meets over a period of time, on two or three occasions. It is a process not to be rushed. The purpose is to help the applicant discern their readiness to make a commitment to the Religious Society of Friends, or provide additional information. During this process, applicants are usually called to lay down their memberships in other churches or faith denominations. Traditionally, memberships in two faith groups has been discouraged. However, nowadays Friends may define themselves as Jewish-Quaker or Quaker-Buddhist. The search for clarity also presents an opportunity for an applicant to discuss any misgivings. Such topics are best kept confidential. When the applicant and the committee are clear about membership, the committee clerk reports back to the committee and then to the monthly meeting. A minute is joyfully prepared by the clerk of the monthly meeting, and the entire body approves the membership. All documents should be kept on file in the meeting's archives. Prompt access to such documents are often required if and when Friends change location.

Birthright membership has largely been discontinued. 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 SCYM.

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. With an added emphasis on joyfulness! Members belong to and represent their local, quarterly, and yearly meetings, as well as 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. Also, membership is an acknowledgement of a willingness to contribute to the life of the meeting. A similar willingness towards the member is acknowledged by the meeting.

It is the responsibility of each member to contribute to the life of the meeting and of the Religious 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 presence in meeting for worship and in meetings for worship with attention to 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 meetings 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 certain level of spirituality. It is rather an acknowledgment of a person's desire to contribute to a meeting in a deeper way and in return an acknowledgement by the meeting that the deepening of its relationship with the individual is welcomed. All continue to seek the Truth and remain open to continuing revelation. It is an active commitment to the process of spiritual growth.

Membership and children

All children, regardless of membership status, should be welcomed and nurtured within the meeting.

Traditionally and currently meetings differ in their approaches to membership for children. In general, when parents become members, they have the following options:

1. Request full membership for children or youth,
2. Request associate, sometimes called junior, membership for their children, or
3. Make no request at that time.

Any person of any age may request membership on their own. Some young people may be spiritually ready for membership in their early teens or even younger.

Parents requesting membership for their children are expected to raise the children as Friends, helping them to fully participate in the life of the meeting. The meeting is responsible for helping the parents educate the children in the testimonies and beliefs of Friends and help them feel included and nurtured. Children with parents who live the Quaker testimonies and values may sometimes feel that they are different from their peers. The meeting community can be one place where they belong and feel at home.

Meetings should keep in touch with young adults who were children in the meeting, especially associate members, and when they are settled help them to become full

members, transfer their membership to their new home base, or to discontinue membership.

Note: For Yearly Meeting record keeping purposes any member over 18 is considered an adult

Membership in worship groups and preparative meetings

Membership is held by the monthly meeting, which nurtures the worship group or preparative 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 to the new meeting. This is usually done by an exchange of letters between meetings, with each meeting minuting the change. In cases where the member is not known to the new meeting, or the member was inactive or away for a long time from the meeting they are leaving, 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 their monthly meeting for a period of time, perhaps to attend graduate school or a short-term job posting, and wishes to participate during that period in the life of a meeting that is geographically closer to them. 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.

Discontinuation of membership

Membership may be discontinued by resignation, by inactivity, or by disownment.

By resignation: If a member joins another faith community, they may request a letter of recommendation from their Friends monthly meeting and submit a letter of resignation to the monthly meeting. That resignation is minuted and the member removed from membership rolls.

By inactivity: When a member becomes inactive, usually for a reason not known to the meeting, the matter is referred to the committee that handles membership. That committee may 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 with, or contact information for, the member. 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, and 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.” Thorough efforts at reconciliation should be made, usually by a committee appointed by the monthly meeting, the committee that handles membership, or the committee that handles care of members. Any formal complaints against a 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 or deeds and the 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 are not members but who demonstrate a continuing interest in the meeting and participate in the life of the community. Members should welcome and encourage attenders to participate on committees, but only in extraordinary circumstances should an attender serve in positions 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, ___ (date), ___ (full name) was welcomed into membership in ___ (name of monthly meeting.) This minute was approved and will be signed by the clerk.

List of resources for those considering membership

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

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.

As of 2020, all of these are in print and available from Quaker Books of FGC.

List of possible queries/considerations to be used by a membership clearness committee

Queries for the meeting:

1. How do we value, support, and maintain connections with all our members?
2. How are we living as a spiritual community under Divine guidance?

Queries for the person seeking membership and for members of the committee to share with each other as well:

1. How familiar are you with the Quaker testimonies and how do they inform your life choices?
 2. What does membership in a Quaker meeting mean to you? How does your spiritual journey up to now fit in?
 3. How are you nurturing your spiritual growth?
 4. How do you contribute to the spiritual vitality of the meeting?
 5. What part does meeting for worship play in your life?
 6. What role does being a member of the Religious Society of Friends play in your relationship with the Divine?
 7. To what extent have you become acquainted with the meeting community and what experiences have you shared with them?
 8. Do you trust the community to help you discern a leading? Do you participate in the discernment processes of the meeting and are you encouraged to do so?
 9. Are you willing to be vulnerable with meeting members and deal tenderly with their vulnerabilities?
 10. In what ways do you demonstrate your commitment to the meeting community and to the Religious Society of Friends?

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 for such a group to be under the care of a monthly meeting for support and guidance.

Worship groups may find meeting for worship to be 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 someone in the group to serve as the convener and correspondent of the group. Communications from monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings and other Friends groups or organizations are addressed to the correspondent, who is responsible for sharing these with the entire group. Each group needs to 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 meets for worship and for business, and is under the care of, and reports regularly to, a monthly meeting, and 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 experienced Friends, desiring to organize as a preparative meeting, asks for such 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. Conducting and recording 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 apply for monthly meeting status. When the overseeing 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 meeting's 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 meeting

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. The monthly meeting has the responsibility to labor lovingly with the worship group or preparative 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, the 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 that it be united 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 its 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 yearly meeting archives. Physical property and investments belonging to the monthly meeting vest in the yearly meeting, 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.

Religious education for young Friends and children

Children and youth bring their entire selves when they come to Quaker meetings, including their spiritual selves. They bring their curiosity, their longing for love and understanding and their openness to the Spirit and Light in their lives. They want to learn and to experience the Love that their grown-ups come seeking as well. The responsibility of the meeting is to be ready to welcome them with joy, to provide safe spaces for them, to have a plan to care for and to teach them the first time they arrive and ongoing, to help them learn Quaker faith and practices, to integrate them into the life of the meeting, and to give them the knowledge and skills that will help them grow in spirit and faith.

A big responsibility for meetings is to nurture the spiritual development of all who come. Children and youth learn from stories, from action, from seeing the faithful lives of the adults around them. They grow when they learn about God's Love, about Spirit in action in current lives in the meeting and elsewhere and in those that came before, about Quaker testimonies and action, about how we worship, about how we work together and do business together. They learn by osmosis, but they learn most directly when adults explicitly share their faith, the meeting's practices, faith tradition, stories, and how we worship and wonder. This means that meetings offer experiences and lessons that are specific for a group of children away from their families. It also means that meetings offer experiences and lessons that are multigenerational. Do children get to know adults at potluck meals? Are there spaces in our rooms for meeting for worship where children can feel welcome and included during worship time? Do children feel welcome during meeting for worship? Is there an expectation that they will join meeting for worship for a period of time at the beginning or end of worship? Are there frequent opportunities that are multigenerational? Is the meeting connected across the generations?

How do we do all these things, including some that may seem contradictory—integrate them into the life of the community and also give them spaces that help them grow in their knowledge and skills in the ways in which they learn? We can provide safe, developmentally appropriate and multigenerational spaces, sometimes all at the same time and sometimes in separate settings. By keeping all these goals in mind, children and youth can learn together and be part of the meeting. They can be welcomed into meeting for worship and wonder, and later have a time to learn outside of meeting for worship. They can learn stories of faith, of action, of Quaker testimonies. They can learn in classes just for them where the adults of the meeting nurture, teach, and provide opportunities for them to deepen in the Spirit. The meeting is responsible for much more than just keeping them safe while their grown-ups worship.

Meetings without an active program for children and youth need to be ready for the day children and youth arrive with their grownups. Having a small collection of books, from board books to read-aloud stories, to longer and more complex stories, along with a plan, will allow a meeting to welcome all of the family that comes to visit. In addition, several sets of adults who will be ready to offer their time with newcomers is necessary. Even adults who are unfamiliar working with children and youth may discover that they can learn and grow with them once they have resources and a plan in place.

Resources

Sparkling Still has lists of books for school age and younger children and ways to share these books with a group of children. *Quaker Activity Pages* are free downloadable and printable Quaker-themed pictures of varying complexity for coloring and discussing. *Lighting Candles in the Dark* stories engage older school age children and youth. *Faith & Play* stories show Quaker experiences and tools of faith, especially for children, but for all ages and for multigenerational groups. Using these compelling stories, along with *Godly Play* stories, requires training and materials-making. *The Quaker Way* shows middle school and older youth about Quaker faith. *Build It* is a collection of activities for building a multigenerational spiritual community. FGC's *Spiritual Deepening Library* has activities for adults, children and youth, organized around themes. QREC offers resources for all ages, including a collection of [activities for the home and small meeting](#). From a simple collection of books for starting a religious education or spiritual deepening program to sharing faith and worship tools in more systematic and planned ways, meetings are responsible for and have the joy of guiding and nurturing children and youth as we travel our spiritual journeys together.

Safety

Meetings must provide a safe space for all children. Meetings should require that each group of children and youth have two adults present when they are in their separate spaces. Should there be an instance when there is only one child or youth present, it may be possible for that child or youth to be engaged with only one adult IF they are within eyesight AND earshot of the other adults. Some meetings may want to have background checks of any person working with children. For the safety of the child and of the adult caregiver, adults who are not the child's parent or guardian should not help children with toileting without being in eyesight of another adult. Diaper changing must be in a public enough setting to ensure the child's safety.

Safety for children also includes having a safe and inviting space for them to play and learn. This includes basic child safety procedures such as cabinets that are child-safe and electric outlets with safeguards. Is the space welcoming to children? Are the materials age-appropriate? Attractive? Or are they tired and dreary? Are materials leftovers or prized? When children are not in the same room with worshiping adults, are their normal sounds of learning and interacting accepted and celebrated or are they rejected and hushed? Do the children and teachers feel comfortable with ordinary interactions, or must they worry about adult reactions to their sounds? Are worshiping adults grateful for children and their sounds or annoyed?

Sharing faith and growing in the Spirit with children and youth is a responsibility for meetings. It is also one of the many joys of meeting life.

Religious education and spiritual growth for adults

Many people coming to a Quaker meeting have experienced other traditions and are eager to learn more about Quakerism. Meetings respond by creating opportunities before or after worship or at other times for formal classes such as Quakerism 101 or discussions about what Quakers believe and how to live according to those beliefs. There are many resources available online to help newcomers search for information, and the interactive presence of others in a discussion format offers the advantage of sharing lived experiences.

While there are no creeds to memorize or catechisms to master, there are the principles for how to live that have been described in earlier sections. Quakerism has been described as more question than answer, a religion that could be summarized by Rainer Maria Rilke's advice in his book, *Letters to a Young Poet: Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.* Isaac Penington phrased it thus in *Some Directions to the Panting Soul*, 1661: *Give over thine own willing, give over thine own running, give over thine own desiring to know or be anything, and sink down to the seed which God sows in thy heart and let that be in thee, and grow in thee, and breathe in thee, and act in thee, and thou shalt know by sweet experience that the Lord knows that and loves and owns that, and will lead it to the inheritance of life, which is his portion.* A favorite Quaker practice to engage in this process is called worship sharing.

Worship sharing guidelines

The purpose of worship sharing is to foster spiritual deepening, connecting more deeply with each other, learning to know and appreciate our diversity. It can also be used to draw out the variety of impressions or reactions about an issue the meeting is dealing with.

The focus for a small group of people (six to ten is ideal) is on a particular question to which each person responds from their own experience rather than from intellectual information. Rather than debating or replying, we can take down our usual defenses and encounter each other in that which is eternal.

The convener or leader defines a question as the focus for sharing which is simple, open-ended, and oriented toward individual experience.

It might be a question about the spiritual journey. (How is God moving in my life today? Where do I experience beauty most intensely?) It might be related to an issue that is

exercising or dividing the meeting. (What is it that concerns me most about this controversy? What do I most long for in our community?) It might relate to a book you have been reading together. (What touched me most deeply? Which character seems most like me when I was a child?) The question should be chosen prayerfully, to meet the particular needs of the group at that time. There are no stock questions.

Group members in their response follow these guidelines:

1. Reach as deeply as you can into the sacred center of your life.
2. Speak out of the silence, and leave a period of silence between speakers.
3. Speak from your own experience, about your own experience. Concentrate on feelings and changes rather than on thoughts or theories.
4. Do not respond to what anyone else has said, either to praise or to refute.
5. Listen carefully and deeply to what is spoken.
6. Expect to speak only once, until everyone has had a chance to speak.
7. Respect the confidentiality of what is shared.

(from https://friendsgc.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Worship-Sharing-Guidelines_1.pdf)

Retreats and other opportunities for spiritual deepening

The yearly meeting is a place to experience how Quakers conduct business and to find workshops and other learning opportunities in the company of Friends from other meetings. Friends General Conference holds an annual Gathering with many inspiring and challenging workshops focused on enriching the spiritual life and living according to our spiritual values. School of the Spirit offers several programs for personal and communal spiritual growth. There are several Quaker retreat or learning centers that offer weekend or week-long retreats such as Pendle Hill near Philadelphia, Powell House in upstate New York, and Ben Lomond Quaker Center in northern California.

Larger meetings may bring in outside speakers of interest to the community for a daylong or weekend retreat for their members. Sharing awareness within the meeting community of local educational events on topics of interest is another way to both broaden the meeting's knowledge and build connections with other like-minded groups and individuals.

Letters of introduction, travel minutes

Letters of introduction can serve a wide variety of purposes. They are usually prepared by the clerk or clerk of a committee. They are used to introduce a person or family who are planning to travel for work or vacation and visit a meeting. The letter may also introduce a member to a meeting or meetings when they relocate. The usual wording includes things such as "member in good standing" or "active on our hospitality committee." While these usually go out over the clerk's signature, no further endorsement is needed.

When a meeting receives a letter of introduction, there may be a request involved such as a need for information or hospitality. Meetings should respond in a timely manner, and do the best they can to help. They should warmly welcome the visitors. These letters of introduction are usually filed, but no further endorsement is needed.

A travel minute implies that the person is traveling to fulfill or address a particular concern. The usual process is for the person who develops a concern to discuss it with a clearness committee from their home meeting. If the committee believes that the concern is genuine, a minute is prepared and approved by their monthly meeting. This minute may be forwarded to the quarterly meeting, depending mostly on time available. The minute usually states the purpose of the visit(s), qualifications of the person, or something about their leading. This minute is signed by the clerk of the meeting and accompanies a letter of introduction.

A combination of a letter of introduction and a travel minute can be used to detail a person's credentials, experience or statement of Quaker participation, or testimonies, to enable someone to qualify for some other kind of activity that may not include travel.

Being a "released Friend" implies some sort of financial support, such as covering the cost of the trip, providing childcare or other kinds of assistance beyond spiritual support.

Managing fiduciary responsibilities and property

Money matters

Related testimonies

The testimony of integrity calls for Friends to be honest and open or transparent in all their business affairs, in our meetings and as families and individuals. We are also called to be prudent, cautious, and economical in our spending. The following section includes best practices, primarily for meetings.

Basic procedures common to both small and larger meetings

Each meeting has expenses such as rent, maintaining the website, telephone listing, outreach materials and such. Even the smallest meeting should keep track of these expenses and prepare a budget annually. Often members purchase items that have been budgeted or pre-approved by the meeting and are reimbursed from meeting funds or offer these as donations in-kind. In either case, a record should be kept, in order to better predict expenses. A standard form can help track and plan for expenses. Every meeting regardless of size has an obligation to support the yearly meeting. Details are published in the yearly meeting procedures manual.

While our yearly meeting supports a wide range of Quaker and other charities, many meetings make contributions beyond those amounts to charities and organizations of their choosing. Some meetings have committees that suggest those organizations and amounts to be contributed. Other or smaller meetings make those decisions as a whole.

Occasionally an individual who wishes to support a particular charity may ask their meeting to support their interest and address tax purposes by passing the contribution through the meeting's account.

Small meetings often approve budgets and expenses as a whole. But larger meetings usually have standing committees who deal with finances as well as a treasurer. Because membership implies a long term commitment to the meeting, treasurers should be members and be appointed by the usual nominating process.

Once expenses are understood, a budget should be prepared and approved in advance of the fiscal year. In small meetings the approval may be done by the meeting as a whole or the monthly meeting for business. In any case, the budget should be available in advance and available to the meeting community. The treasurer or clerk of the finance committee should report to monthly business meetings regularly or whenever there are large or unusual expenses.

In any meeting expenses need to be balanced with income. Like many other aspects of any meeting's infrastructure, this process is often discreet to the extent of being hidden. Other churches are open about this process by passing the plate during the service or placing envelopes in racks in the backs of pews. However, it is common for meetings to circulate the budget for the coming year among members and attenders, who might calculate their "fair share," or give what they can. Sometimes meetings have a variety of fundraising events such as simple meals, pancake breakfasts, yard sales, etc.

Traditionally gambling has been frowned on, including lotteries or games of chance. Gambling is contrary to all the Quaker testimonies. It violates the testimony of simplicity because one gambles to win material goods at the expense of a meaningful relationship with Spirit. Gambling also works against integrity and equality because it may incentivize cheating in order to win. Cheating also violates the Quaker testimonies of equality and community as gamblers value winning prizes over community support. Gambling can become an addiction leading to potentially criminal behavior to cover losses. Whether these crimes are violent or not, they still violate the Quaker emphasis on peace and instead sow discord and danger in communities. (excerpted from "Gambling: A Violation of the Quaker Testimonies" by Michael Song, *Friends Journal*, 11/2019,

Banking and searches for "ethical" banks and investment firms

For small meetings, checking and savings accounts may be sufficient. Others have endowments or larger amounts of savings from gifts or annual surpluses. Those meetings may need traditional or computer-based bookkeeping systems.

Choosing a bank or investment firm has been problematic for some meetings, especially when they seek environmentally and socially benevolent investments that speak to testimonies while also obtaining value. This can be challenging and an ever-changing process requiring weighing many options. In any case, the basis for changes in banking should be reported to the meeting and minuted in the usual business process.

Managing property

In the past, the concept of a “settled meeting,” was the goal of any growing meeting. This involved being big enough or well-organized enough to have clerks and functioning committees, as well as a healthy treasury. The next step was building or acquiring a meeting house. The meeting house was used not only for worship but also as the local school or community center.

Today, a meeting house is the center of the meeting community and may be any kind of structure. The most important thing is that it meets the needs of the meeting, such as being large enough to accommodate everyone and having space for children’s programs, potlucks, or whatever else the meeting thinks is necessary. There are many advantages to having one’s own space, including time and space for activities or committee meetings any time the meeting wants, instead of needing to adjust to the schedule of rental contracts.

However, the joy of one’s own space is countered with the responsibilities of upkeep, regular cleaning, repairs, regular maintenance and unexpected disasters or damages. It is wise to keep funds in a savings account sufficient to cover anticipated costs. Insurance can be expensive, especially since there are a very limited number of companies willing to insure churches, since churches provide higher risks for those companies.

Most meetings have a committee designated to deal with their property who work closely with their finance committee and prepare a budget for planned expenses, including planned maintenance. Those people deal with everything from purchasing toilet paper to changing light bulbs. A meeting is fortunate if they have a member who is skilled in doing repairs themselves. The committee may need to find contractors to deal with higher-order repairs. In working with contractors, each company should be vetted in some way, verifying that they are licensed, qualified, and carry liability and workers’ compensation insurance.

Monthly meetings are encouraged, especially if they own property, to incorporate according to the laws and procedures of each state. Those procedures may require that meetings appoint members of the meeting to be trustees, who act with integrity to protect the property and other assets of the meeting.

While our yearly meeting had real estate in the past, i.e., QuakerLand, we do not at this time. And as far as this committee is aware, none of our meetings own cemeteries or burial grounds.

Relating to the Larger Community of Friends

Let us no longer be blinded by the dim theology that only in the far seeing vision discovers a millennium, when violence shall no more be heard in the land wasting nor destruction in her borders; but let us behold it now, nigh at the door lending faith and confidence to our hopes, assuring us that even we ourselves shall be instrumental to declaring liberty to the captive.

Lucretia Mott in The Law of Progress speech delivered at the 14th Annual Meeting of the American Anti Slavery Society, New York, NY, 5-9-1848

It is not enough to be generous, and give alms; the enlarged soul, the true philanthropist, is compelled by Christian principle to look beyond the bestowing of scant pittance to the mere beggar for the day, to the duty of considering the causes and sources of poverty. We must consider how much we have done toward causing it.

Lucretia Mott, 1857

Healing of the Earth is central to all our Quaker concerns.... No peace without a planet.... No justice without a planet.... Those who care about the Earth must feel its woundedness as our own.... How can we look our children and grandchildren in the eye unless we do all we can to give them a future? They need to know that we care, and that we tried.

Elizabeth Watson, 1991

You don't have to hurry. You can stroll or you can saunter. 'Saunter' comes from 'Sainte Terre', meaning 'The Holy Land'. Walk as if you were sauntering to the Holy Land, trusting the land beneath your feet to be holy – now – here!

Teresina Havens in "Mind What Stirs in Your Heart," Pendle Hill Pamphlet No. 304

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 geographical 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 decisionmaking. 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” below for more details on those and others.

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 SCYM representatives meeting.
2. Appoints members to yearly meeting committees as requested.
3. Every meeting is encouraged to have a designated member to be the contact person for SCYM's Peace and Justice (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 yearly meeting's 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 yearly meeting 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 yearly meeting clerk of newly appointed monthly meeting clerks and ministry and care clerks and their contact information.
9. Keeps an accurate membership list and provides it to SCYM annually.
10. Annually sends a State of the Meeting report and records of births, adoptions, marriages, and memorial minutes to the yearly meeting.

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 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 the SCYM representatives meeting. Quarterly meetings 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 representatives 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:

1. Gather one or more times a year.
2. Appoint a clerk and other officers as necessary to conduct business.
3. Carry out yearly meeting adult program responsibilities on the SCYM rotation basis for two consecutive years out of every six.
4. Strengthen the life and fellowship of constituent meetings and other Friends groups.
5. Consider and act upon concerns from individuals and meetings, forwarding those approved at quarterly meeting business meetings to yearly meeting via the representatives meeting.
6. Appoint a quarterly meeting representative to the representatives meeting.
7. Forward to the representatives meeting the name of a Friend to be considered to represent the quarterly meeting on yearly meeting's nominating committee.
8. Assist members of the yearly meeting's nominating committee by suggesting names for service to yearly meeting.
9. Receive recommendations for recognizing and establishing worship groups, preparative meetings and monthly meetings, and forward its minute of recommendation to SCYM via the representatives meeting.
10. Receive recommendations for the laying down of a worship group or preparative meeting, and forward its minute of recommendation to SCYM via the representatives meeting.
11. 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 SCYM via the representatives meeting when a monthly meeting is laid down.
12. Assist current members of the monthly meeting being laid down to find an appropriate monthly meeting to which to transfer their memberships.
13. Possibly assist a monthly meeting or worship group that is associated with a different yearly meeting in its discernment process for affiliation with SCYM, forwarding its recommendation in writing to SCYM via the representatives meeting.
14. 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 SCYM via the representatives meeting.

SCYM organization into quarterly meetings, as of 2025

SCYM is composed of three regional 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. These include the Arkansas-Oklahoma Quarterly Meeting, the Bayou Quarterly Meeting composed of meetings in east Texas and Louisiana, and the Cielo Grande Quarterly Meeting which includes meetings in most of the rest of Texas. There are also several meetings and worship groups in Texas unaffiliated with any quarterly meeting. Updated information about

meetings and their quarterly affiliations as well as contact information can be found on the SCYM website at <https://www.scym.org/sessions/quarterly> .

Friends organizations and educational institutions

As of 2025, the first nine organizations listed below are those supported financially by and with representatives from SCYM. There are many more Friends organizations than those listed here. *Friends Journal* periodically publishes an update on many Quaker organizations, e.g., <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, six African countries, three Central American countries, and six Asian countries, 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)

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 they facilitate participation from Quaker meetings and churches across the country with a number of initiatives:

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

incorporating 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. Its focus areas and related projects are determined by volunteers representing its 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.

FGC's 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.
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://friendspeaceteams.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, they draw sustenance from each other and from the Spirit for their work and life in the world. They 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, they have helped Friends in North America integrate Earthcare into their daily lives. Learn more about their educational programs, grants, newsletter, and more on their website, <https://quakerearthcare.org>.

Quaker Religious Education Collaborative (QREC)

QREC is a grassroots network of Friends holding a sense of stewardship for life-long Quaker faith formation through religious education. QREC includes Friends from all branches of our international Quaker family. They welcome all Friends involved in religious education and seek to link Friends with similar interests and needs to make Quaker religious education resources available. Join them in forming a community of practice to share resources, skills, gifts, questions and insights, and to support each other in the ministry of Quaker faith formation: <https://quakerrecollaborative.org/>.

Right Sharing of World Resources (RSWR)

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

There are many other Quaker organizations engaging in advocacy, education, ecojustice, investment management, as well as a number of retreat, conference, and study centers. Two well known American publications are *Friends Journal* (<https://www.friendsjournal.org/>) and *Western Friend* (<https://westernfriend.org/>).

There are a number of private Quaker schools, most of which are members of Friends Council on Education (<https://www.friendscouncil.org/>), a national organization that serves as a public voice for Quaker education and provides consultations, programs, professional development, peer networks, and publications to promote Quaker philosophy of education and enrich Quaker testimonies in school life. Both Friends General Conference (<https://www.fgcquaker.org/resources/>) and Quaker Religious Education Collaborative (<https://quakerrecollaborative.org/>) also provide resources and support for religious education for all ages at the monthly meeting level.

There are a number of retreat/education centers as well, including Pendle Hill (<https://pendlehill.org/>) near Philadelphia, Powell House (<https://www.powellhouse.org/>) in Old Chatham, New York and Beacon Hill Friends House (<https://bhfh.org/>) in Boston. These offer online opportunities as well as residential ones. There are others, such as the Woolman Center (<https://www.woolman.org/>) in Nevada City, California, which offer residential opportunities only. There are also Quaker youth camps, a listing of which can be found each year at <https://quakerrecollaborative.org/quaker-summer-camps-2022>.

There are organizations for Quakers in the arts and Quaker writers. There is Friends Fiduciary (<https://friendsfiduciary.org/>), an investment firm grounded in Quaker values. There are a number of Quaker groups working for peace and justice in addition to American Friends Service Committee and Friends Peace Teams. They all rely on Quaker principles and participation.

Friends around the world

There are approximately 400,000 Quakers worldwide, in 87 different countries (FWCC, 2017). African Friends make up almost half that number with 181,000. Most of the African and South American Friends are more conservative in their beliefs and affiliated with either Friends United Meeting (<https://www.friendsunitedmeeting.org/>) or Evangelical Friends Churches (<https://efc-international.org/>). Friends World Committee for Consultation maintains a database of Friends meetings and churches throughout the world on their website (<https://fwcc.world>) and also maintains connections among all the

branches of Quakerism through sectional and national meetings and publication of educational materials.

The electronic world community

The benefits of technology for Friends are 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 and within SCYM and its monthly meetings. Video conferencing and digital messaging has enabled increased connections among Friends within the yearly meeting and across the wider Quaker community.

There is a free online library, intended to make available a wide variety of writings on Quakerism, at <https://inwardlight.org/> that can be helpful in providing easy access to these writings both to those deeply involved in Quaker faith and practice and to those with much less or no previous knowledge and experience of Quakerism.

Podcasts and social media allow sharing 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 is 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. <https://quaker.org/> is a useful introductory resource to what Quakers believe and how they practice as well as providing links to many other Quaker resources.

Technology in the world has outpaced 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 relationship to our various electronic devices, as well as to practice periodic abstinence from the digital sphere 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.

History

Ye have no time but this present time, therefore prize your time, for your soul's sake. George Fox, 1652

About this time (circa 1656) I was moved to give forth the following exhortation to Friends in the ministry.

Bring all into the worship of God. Plough up the fallow ground. And none are ploughed up but he who comes to the principle of God in him which he hath transgressed. Then he doth service to God; then the planting and watering and the increase from God cometh. So the ministers of the Spirit must minister to the sprit that is transgressed and in prison, which hath been in capitivity in every one' whereby with the same spirit people must be led out of capitivity up to God, the Father of spirits, and do service to him and to have unity with him. With the scriptures and with one another. And that 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 wherever you come; that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, in 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 them to bless you. Then to the Lord God you will be a sweet savour and a blessing. The Journal of George Fox, edited by John L. Nickalls, first Printed Cambridge University Press, 1953. Pp262-3 in the 1997 printing from Philadelphia Religious Society of Friends.

Peace is possible when we allow ourselves to be vulnerable...when we discover the reality that our happiness is bound up in the happiness of the other. We are bound up together in the bundle of life and no one is free unless all are free Bishop Desmond Tutu

8 History

History: A Brief History of the Religious Society of Friends

The Founding

George Fox, born the son of a weaver in Leicestershire, England, like others found little to sustain him in contemporary religion. At the age of 19, he began his search for truth and founded a movement that before his death in 1691 numbered over 50,000 members in England alone.

Fox had little formal education but possessed a fertile and active mind. As a youth, he suffered from what he called a “temptation to despair,” even of his faith in God. In this spiritual condition he received no help from those clergy he consulted. After several years of seeking and great inward crisis, he received the first of many inner, spiritual illuminations, which he referred to as “openings.” He wrote of this experience in his Journal, one that proved to be the turning point in his search:

When all my hopes in them [the clergy] and in all men, were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could I tell what to do, then, O! 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. This was first-hand religious experience like Paul’s vision and experience of Christ 1,600 years earlier.

Periods of depression still tempted Fox, but less often. His openings led him in a very personal, direct way into a new life. He reported one of these revelations:

I saw the infinite love of God. I saw also that there was an ocean of darkness and death; and an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. In that also I saw the infinite love of God.

Another opening showed him *That every man was enlightened by the Divine Light of Christ ... and that they that believed in it came out of condemnation and came into the Light of Life, and became children of it.*

Through these experiences Fox received his life’s mission, one centered in the living Christ. In the Old Testament, Fox had read of the prophets’ expectation of Christ, and in the New Testament, he had learned of Christ’s historical appearance. Now that which he had known by report became his own experience. He knew the Christ Within; he became Christ’s disciple. He had come to know the same Spirit that those who wrote the Bible had known: *For though I read the Scriptures that spoke of Christ and of God, yet I knew him not, but by revelation, as He who hath the key did open, and as the Father of life drew me to His Son by His Spirit.*

This divine Spirit, this Inward Light, was both illumination and inspiration, a voice to be heard and obeyed. Looking back upon his own experience, Fox declared that anyone who

has not experienced the Light stands in darkness, regardless of creed or moral righteousness. He preached that Christ had come to teach his people himself.

The mission to which he was called and upon which he entered in the year 1647 was, he wrote, *to turn people to that Inward Light, Spirit, and grace, by which all might know their salvation and their way to God—even that Divine Spirit which would lead them into all truth.* His earliest associates were called Children of the Light. *I was sent to turn people away from darkness to the light that they might receive Christ Jesus; for, to as many as should receive him in this light, I saw that he would give power to become sons of God; which power I had obtained by receiving Christ.*

The salvation to which he was calling others was not simply for individuals, just as it was not simply a matter of subjective feeling. He inspired a community that heard and obeyed the voice of God and would be “renewed up again in God’s image.” He saw his mission as one of Christian renewal in a time of falling away from truth and obedience. He drew his fellow believers from the dissenting sects, the Seekers, and the established church—wherever he found listeners “tender,” as he said. They were concerned to live the implications of their faith and testified against war, church taxes, hat honor, the language of privilege and flattery, the use of oaths, and price-bargaining.

Fox’s concept of “that of God in every person” was radical in its day not only for sweeping away distinctions of social class, wealth, and race, but for including women fully in the religious and social community as equals. In a time when there was serious argument over whether women had souls, Fox quoted the words of Mary, “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour.” How could Mary speak thus, he reasoned, if she had no soul? He believed that the dominion of men over women was a result of the fall, but Christ had brought restoration of a “new Eden” where women and men were again equal and “helpsmeet.” Because women possessed the Inward Christ just as did men, they had equal measure of the gifts of prophecy and the ability to preach. Many women were drawn to Fox’s new movement, and early women Friends, imbued with a sense of participation in that which is holy, and freed and encouraged by their communities and families, developed their gifts in the ministry, often traveling, alone or in pairs, over great distances and sometimes at great risk, to preach, to teach, and to establish meetings.

Early Friends owed much to the enthusiasm, encouragement, spiritual insight, and organizational gifts of Margaret Fell. Born in Lancashire, England, she was a devoted Christian, yet restless and spiritually dissatisfied with the Anglican church she had long attended. On first hearing Fox preach in 1652 she found that his message spoke clearly to her condition. She believed with utter conviction that God’s truth was opening the way for the creation of a new religious experience. Her husband, Thomas Fell, a judge of the Assizes, offered their home, Swarthmoor Hall, for meetings for worship. She made it a haven for those persecuted and suffering for their Quaker beliefs and the center of early efforts to provide encouragement and organized support for traveling ministers. She helped establish the Kendal Fund (1654) to provide early Quaker missionaries with basic necessities. The fund was later expanded to include financial aid to prisoners (who were being charged for their beds), the printing of books, and aid to meetings in their hospitality

to visiting Friends. In 1669, eleven years after Thomas Fell's death, Margaret Fell and George Fox married, and together they devoted themselves to the nurture of her children and the organization of the Society of Friends.

In October 1668, after the end of Margaret Fell's imprisonment in Lancaster for holding meetings for worship in her house, the Swarthmoor women's monthly meeting met for the first time. Separate monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings for women eventually came into being throughout the Society. The practice, encouraged by George Fox and other men Friends, lasted into the twentieth century and was a means for women's social education as well as a considered and careful way for Friends to listen to God's leadings.

Margaret and her daughters wrote detailed instructions for conducting business meetings. They also organized Friends' marriage procedure: while family and community approval and support were considered vital to marriage, the partners gave themselves to one another; the woman was not "given" by her father, as though a possession of which he had the right to dispose.

The Spread of the Movement

Following his leading on the importance of "gospel order" for the emerging community, George Fox as early as 1652 began to encourage his followers to set up their own worship meetings. Soon monthly meetings for business were established. In 1656 he organized men's quarterly meetings. What is now Britain Yearly Meeting began to meet regularly in 1668. The Meeting for Sufferings was established to aid the victims of persecution and soon became the general executive body of Friends in Britain.

Fox and his early followers variously called themselves Children of the Light, First Publishers of Truth, and Friends of Truth. Because of their religious enthusiasm, they were later called Quakers, a name that Fox himself disliked. Their movement for renewal of the community of Christ spread with great rapidity in England and from there to the other parts of Europe and to the American colonies. Authorities often reacted harshly, partly because of Friends' uncompromising attitudes and their refusal to follow the customary patterns of social life. Because they refused to take oaths at a time when oaths were a test of loyalty to the Commonwealth and later to the monarchy, and also because they refused to attend or pay tithes to the Church of England, Friends were imprisoned by the thousands. Due to the extreme hardships imposed on them, some 450 died in England under this persecution.

In the New World, mistreatment was most harsh in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, where Marmaduke Stevenson and William Robinson had been hanged in 1659, as were Mary Dyer and William Leddra a few months later. Out of their desire to have a safe haven in the colonies, Friends bought West Jersey in 1674. William Penn obtained Pennsylvania in 1681, and he and other Friends obtained East Jersey the following year. Friends also controlled Rhode Island, North Carolina, and Barbados at various times and tried to govern all these

colonies according to Friends' principles. The worst of Friends' sufferings in England and the colonies came to an end with the Act of Toleration of 1689.

Social Issues

One area of increasing concern, the growing opposition to slavery, brought tensions and controversy among Friends as they wrestled with their varied attitudes to the problem. In 1688, a letter opposing slavery was brought before the Germantown, Pennsylvania, Monthly Meeting. Though action was deferred, it appears that this was the first protest against slavery raised by any religious group in America. In 1711, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting influenced the then Quaker-controlled Pennsylvania Assembly to forbid the importation of slaves, but the Crown failed to approve it. John Woolman (1720–1772) was one of the strongest witnesses against the traffic and holding of slaves and played a large role in persuading Friends to free their slaves.

By 1790, it appears that no Friends in the United States owned slaves, and many were actively working for abolition. Among these were several women, notably Lucretia Coffin Mott (1793–1880) and Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906), who, even before the end of the Civil War, worked with other women for peace, temperance, and rights for women.

After 1750, the French and Indian Wars in America resulted in Friends in Pennsylvania concluding that they must withdraw from active involvement in government in order to maintain the peace testimony. In its militia law of 1755, New York's provincial government exempted Quakers from service on payment of a fee. Later, the War for Independence further separated Quakers from their neighbors as most Friends attempted to maintain a neutral position, neither Patriot nor Loyalist.

As the abolition movement came increasingly to accept violent means to root out the evil of slavery, Friends were under great stress trying to maintain their testimony against war. During the Civil War, meetings disowned a number of Friends for violating the testimony against war by serving in the armed forces even though they were upholding that against slavery.

Although many Friends were active in social reform movements, many others, influenced by the Quietism spreading through other sects, gradually dissociated themselves from worldly issues and lessened active witness in and to the world. They began to emphasize the care of the individual soul and the meeting. Friends formed their own close communities, holding to their pacifist witness and the customs that set them off as a "peculiar people," and sought the guidance of God in their inner lives. They stressed the belief in absolute human helplessness before God and our tendency toward error and evil when we act in our own wisdom. Friends in worship waited in silence for the inner movement of God's spirit to reprove, guide, and strengthen them, and they came to value their meetings more for the quality of the silence than for the quality of the ministry. They considered each individual an instrument upon whom God plays, an instrument whose usefulness to God would become apparent only through self-negation and quiet waiting.

Friends tried to witness for God's peaceable kingdom within their communities, and each yearly meeting came to adopt a book of discipline that provided the basis for sound Quaker business and social structure. The advices and queries contained within these disciplines gave guidance for corporate and personal conduct without establishing a creed. But as Friends became more insular and self-contained, they paid much attention to prescribing and enforcing rules of behavior. Such rules as forbidding marriage to nonmembers resulted in the disownment of valuable members and the alienation of many others.

A markedly greater number of women became active in the ministry during this time. Meetings formally recognized the call to ministry in many men and women; these ministers were nurtured by the increased emphasis on care for the individual soul and often felt inward calls to visit other meetings. Friends, even in areas very far from other settlements, kept in touch with each other by means of these traveling ministers. The travelers themselves helped gather into meetings with Friends persons who felt Christ's light. The practice of appointing younger Friends as companions to traveling ministers afforded a kind of apprenticeship in the ministry. Several generations found themselves stronger Friends because of these visits in their youth.

Friends had already been concerned and involved in education. They extended this concern to those whom society excluded from schooling—females, African Americans, and Native American Indians—despite opposition from the non-Quaker community and from the Native American Indians themselves.

The Quaker relationship with the first inhabitants of the land is mixed. William Penn believed in purchasing the land for his colony and maintaining a fair and equitable relationship with them. However, the land requirements of an increasing number of colonizers from all parts of Europe pushed the Native American Indians out of their native lands. By the mid 1800's Quakers were participating in the Indian boarding school movement and were responsible for 30 of them, 20 in Oklahoma.

In 1956 in *The Quaker Persuasion: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* by William Wistar Comfort, there is a list of 15 Testimonies favored by the Society of Friends (meaning American Friends specifically) on pages 53 thru 55. The fifth testimony is on Native American Indians and reads as follows "Solicitude for the welfare of a native people who have been wronged and defrauded in our national history." Quaker education included teaching a reverence for Native American Indian people and culture. There have been annual AFSC work camps, often including members of SCYM, during which participants spent time working on the Pine Ridge Reservation under the direction of the Oglala Lakota. Following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, there were AFSC work camps in the Bayous of LaFourche and Terrebonne Parishes of Louisiana rebuilding for the unrecognized Houma tribe and the Chitimacha and Choctaw tribes. In the 1990's AFSC began an ongoing project with the Wabanaki in Maine to support them in addressing the injustices of Maine's policies toward them. Since 2013 [Toward Right Relationship for Native People](#) has been seeking to educate Quakers and others about the history of injustice and is currently carrying out that work as part of Friends Peace Teams. Members of SCYM are also participating in the work

of National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, or NABS helping to research that history.

Divisions in the Society

American Friends faced a new set of issues in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The United States during this period became a nation, and the spread of liberalism and democracy increasingly challenged authoritarian regimes. Methodism had spread across England and the United States; it brought religious enthusiasm and disciplined living to many people and stirred up many Friends' groups.

By 1825 many Friends' meetings seemed to share the spiritual inertia that had characterized the English churches when George Fox began to preach. Rather than encouraging vital spiritual experience, Quakerism had become largely a religion of habit and form that held to a glorious past without its substance. Behind this complacency, however, were tensions. First among these were tensions between historical Christian beliefs and the assertion of the primacy of the Inward Light of Christ, with its degree of freedom from some commonly held traditions of historical Christianity. A second came from the elders' enforcement in some meetings of rules that others saw as intrusive. A third reflected social-class and urban-rural differences of thought and behavior. In some meetings Friends bore all these tensions simultaneously, as generally orthodox-Christian, elder-supporting, richer, urban Friends acrimoniously and resentfully opposed Inward-Light-oriented, elder-questioning, less-well-off, rural ones. As Friends confronted the world less and concentrated more on their beliefs, these tensions grew and separated Friends from Friends in several bitter divisions over the years. Some opposed these separations and continued communication between otherwise estranged Friends.

The first of these separations arose around the testimony of Elias Hicks (1748–1830) of Long Island. He taught, very persuasively, that the Indwelling Christ is the heart and center of Quakerism. This he believed to be original Quaker teaching as well as expressive of his own experience. Others, influenced partly by several visiting British Friends, were concerned that the teaching of Hicks left out what they considered essentials of historic Quaker faith, especially its relation to the historic Jesus and the Bible. Conflict broke into the open in the early 1820s and caused the separation of five yearly meetings into two groups: the "Hicksites," who emphasized the Christ Within; and the "Orthodox," who emphasized the historical Christ Jesus. The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting was the first to divide (1827), followed by New York, Ohio, Indiana, and Baltimore (1828).

A later controversy, centering on Joseph John Gurney (1788–1847) and John Wilbur (1774–1856), led to further separation among Orthodox Friends. Gurney stood for the authority of the Bible and the necessity for its careful study, the use of evangelistic methods, and reliance upon the atonement of Jesus Christ. Wilbur, feeling himself the defender of the original Quaker message, held to the infallibility of the Inward Light and

stood for a less theological, non-evangelical type of Quakerism. This led to divisions into Gurneyite (still called Orthodox) and Wilburite (or Conservative) yearly meetings in New England in 1845 and later in New York (1853) and other yearly meetings.

Growth and Reconciliation

During the nineteenth century many Friends moved into newly-opened western territories and established yearly meetings. Because Friends could worship without pastors, their meetings were often the first religious gatherings in new communities and became the centers of religious life, often with many attenders who had no background in Quakerism.

The roots of programmed worship and evangelical Quakerism go back to this time, as the demand arose among Quakers for trained leadership, and as other vigorous Protestant movements, especially Wesleyan Methodism, spread across the United States. Quaker revivalism, which started in 1860 among young Orthodox Friends in Richmond, Indiana, added many new members and further increased the desire for schooled leaders. In the twentieth century some strongly evangelical meetings, dissatisfied with what they considered to be too liberal tendencies in other Orthodox meetings, drew away from the latter to form their own yearly meetings and an international association of them.

In the eastern United States the mid-1800s was a time of precipitous decline in the number of Friends' meetings and in their vigor. Outside of Philadelphia the Orthodox countered this trend by instituting revivalistic methods and by adopting the pastoral system. The Hicksites were slower to respond to the challenge but did begin to foster First-Day Schools, to found new schools and a college, to expand philanthropic activities, and, in the closing years of the century, to institute biennial national educational conferences.

The hiring of full-time pastors was initiated in Glens Falls, New York, in 1875. This practice was later followed by most Orthodox meetings outside of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Meetings or churches of Evangelical Friends International, most of the meetings of Friends United Meeting, and some of those affiliated with both Friends United Meeting and Friends General Conference have programmed worship with music, spoken prayers, Bible readings, offerings, and prepared messages, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Conservative Friends, most of those who affiliate with Friends General Conference, and many of the unaffiliated groups have unprogrammed worship, during which the worshippers gather in silent waiting out of which may arise vocal messages or prayer from any of the participants as they feel led.

After the First World War, many people who had not grown up in the Society began to come to meetings for worship. Some had attended Friends' schools, others knew about the newly tested peace testimony and Friends' ambulance and social work during and after the war, and others sought non-liturgical worship and non-hierarchical religion. This attraction to the Society continued and grew after the Second World War and during the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

New groups of Friends gathered in long-disused meeting houses. Independent groups, often in college or university towns, worshipped without the sponsorship of any existing meetings. As the Society changed, some unprogrammed meetings became programmed and vice versa. Others changed their yearly meeting affiliation. New Friends often instigated reunions of meetings, or new meetings joined both the Friends General Conference and the Friends United Meeting. All gradually began to welcome convinced Friends (members who had come into the Society as adults), as had the first generation of Friends.

The newcomers' concerns for peace, education, equal and civil rights, and for people who are poor brought still more people to Friends. The anti-war and civil rights movements in this country beginning in the 1940s grew from the inspiration of people who found war, segregation, and poverty evil and incomprehensible, many of them new Friends, and many of these former soldiers or sailors or people who had lived or worked in multi-ethnic communities. The later feminist and gay-rights movements also drew many Friends determined to reflect their convictions in meeting life as well.

With appreciation to New York Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice, 2020 edition for much of this description

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 1940s. 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 1950s. 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

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 structure 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.

Major themes of the 1960s 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 1960s. Friends struggled with their role in the Southern states where segregation was 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 worshiped 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 racial violence and hatred was counter to the Quaker message.

The 1970s were a time for growth in monthly meetings and worship groups, largely because of an influx of seekers and Quakers moving into the 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 yearly meeting 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 yearly meeting 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 1980s SCYM was greatly strengthened by the presence of FGC field secretaries, first a Friend from Dallas and then a 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:

...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 yearly meeting 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 yearly meeting 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 1980s the yearly meeting 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 yearly meeting, spread as they are among its officers, the quarterly meetings, committees and the body itself.

During the same time period, the “continuing committee” which had managed business concerns between yearly meetings was laid down and the representatives meeting took on its responsibilities, meeting each fall in order to plan the upcoming yearly meeting. Certain business matters were allocated to the representatives meeting’s agenda. Friends expressed concern that important decisions were made by the Friends body; therefore,

final approval of the yearly meeting budget, the annual assessments, and the reports of the nominating committee are all required to report to business sessions at the yearly meeting. The representatives meeting is open to all Friends. Most representatives meeting participants are part of the overall planning for the yearly meeting programs and activities or members of yearly meeting committees that wish to meet at representatives meeting. The actual yearly meeting planning committee was approved in 1997, charged with coordinating all of the programs and events at the yearly meeting 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, jubilant for having come so far together as a welcoming faith community, and giving 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, *as a verb*, 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 assembles and calls people together for a purpose.

Corporate, corporately, or corporate body - Shared by the whole group, commonly used to refer to the whole meeting.

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.

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 the clerk or designated person.

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

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

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.

Truth - With a capital T refers to the Quaker tradition of seeking a direct experience of Divine reality to serve as an authority for their lives and give their lives meaning (see <https://www.friendsjournal.org/2007030/>).

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 *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.
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 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 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 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.

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.

Resources for Further reading

Quakerism 101 resources:

A survey course developed by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. The materials listed below are recommended as preparation for membership.

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On Clerking

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Almost all of the above are in print and available from Quakerbooks of FGC.

Magazines

Friends Journal is a monthly magazine. Subscribe in either print or e-versions.

www.friendsjournal.org