

Baltimore Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice Revision Committee Proposed Advices, Queries and Voices

Equality: Advices

From the beginning of Quakerism in the 1640s, Friends have been aware that every person is equal in God's eyes. Women played a very important role right from the start. Refusing to doff one's hat to a person of superior rank was another way early Friends expressed the testimony of social equality. The servants at Swarthmore Hall in England were invited to attend the meetings for worship. In England during this period, "you" and "your" were used only when speaking to a person of higher rank, and peers or persons of lower rank were addressed as "thee" and "thou." Quakers adopted "plain speech," using thee and thou to all persons.

John Woolman (1720-1752) spent years convincing Friends and others that slavery was wrong and that people should be paid for their work. Schools were set up by Friends to educate the slave children so that they also might have the opportunity to develop their gifts.

In our meetings for worship, God's message may be delivered through any person attending that meeting. In our meetings for worship with a concern for business, each person present may shed Light on a matter under consideration. We also need to recognize that the young among us need to be listened to as any adult. Out of the mouths of babes may come something that would bring unity among us.

It is important to realize that equality does not mean sameness. Each person is a separate individual and should have the opportunity to pursue her or his own gifts. To deny anyone the right to develop his or her full potential for any reason is not equality. Cultural and other differences among us weave a tapestry that is immeasurably enriched by our diversity. It is the right of every person to be treated with dignity and respect.

We need to be careful that we speak in positive terms when talking about others, especially those who might be different from ourselves or our close community. Adults have a specific responsibility to model Friendly values to children, who do not see other children as different until they are taught that others may be different and in some way may not be as "good" as they are. Speaking in a negative way about a person or group of people may be a form of violence, especially if the statement is not carefully qualified to show the rationale and purpose of the remark.

Equality: Queries

In what ways do we oppose prejudice and injustice?

How do we benefit from inequity and exploitation? How are we victims of inequity and exploitation? In what ways can we address these problems?

Do we teach our children, and show through our way of living, that love of God includes affirming the equality of all people, treating them with dignity and respect, and seeking to address that of God within every person?

Equality: Voices

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

I believe that Meeting for Worship has brought the same awareness to all who have seen and understood the message that everyone is equal in the sight of God, that everybody has the capacity to be the vessel of God's word. There is nothing that age, experience, and status can do to prejudice where and how the Light will appear. This awareness – the religious equality of each and every one – is central to Friends.

Ursula M. Franklin, Gardner Lecture, Canadian YM, 1979

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There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female, for you are all one person in Christ Jesus.
Galatians 3 v.28 *The Oxford Study Bible.*

To consider mankind otherwise than brethren, to think favors are peculiar to one nation and exclude others, plainly supposes a darkness in the understanding. For as God's love is universal, so where the mind is sufficiently influenced by it, it begets a likeness of itself and the heart is enlarged towards all men.

John Woolman, *Journal*

A very far-reaching part of the Quaker message, affecting character and behavior unconsciously, is the affirmation that if God is revealing himself to every human person, then there can be no parts of life which are "secular" in contrast to other parts which are "sacred." God is equally relevant to every part of life, whether it is Saturday (recreation), Sunday (worship), or Monday (work). The attempt is made to level up, even though in practice we sometimes level down; the underlying faith is that at all times our behavior should reflect the conviction that God is at work in those with whom we mix, and in ourselves; that every human encounter can fan or quench the divine spark in another; and that our lives are at all times lived in the presence of God.

Hugh L. Doncaster, *The Quaker Message : A Personal Affirmation*, 1972

Guided by the Light of God within us and recognizing that of God in others, we can all learn to value our differences in age, sex, physique, race and culture. This enables mutual respect and self-respect to develop, and it becomes possible for every one to love one another as God loves us... Jesus stressed the unique nature and worth of each individual. It is unreasonable to expect assimilation or to ignore difference, claiming to treat everyone the same. This denies the value of variety. Personality, sex, race, culture and experience are God's gifts. We need one another, and differences shared become enrichments, not reasons to be afraid, to dominate or condemn. We need to consider our behavior carefully, heeding the command of Jesus that we should love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Meg Maslin, *Britain Yearly Meeting*, 1990

And oh, how sweet and pleasant it is to the truly spiritual eye to see several sorts of believers, everyone learning their own lesson, performing their own peculiar service, and knowing, owning and loving one another in 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 than if he walked in just that track wherein I walk.

Isaac Pennington, 1660

Our experience [is] that God speaks to and works through children as well as adults. Religious education needs to respect, affirm, and value children's insights.

The Quaker understanding of Christianity includes:

The experience that it is possible to have both a strong faith commitment and an open mind, to take other positions seriously without trivializing them, and to value the people who differ from ourselves.

The belief that the same God known through Christianity is also present in other faiths. The study of other faith positions is therefore important, not only for its own sake, but as a contribution towards humility before the mystery of truth....

The belief in the equality of all human beings of whatever sex, race, class, or age. This is firmly grounded in God's love for each individual, rather than in social fashion. This requires policies, not of equal opportunities (which redistribute inequality) but of equality, and implies that schools be reorganized for cooperation rather than competition, and for affirming people in their successes rather than their failures.

Janet Scott, 1988

In the days ahead we must not consider it unpatriotic to raise certain basic questions about our national character. We must begin to ask, "Why are there forty million poor people in a nation overflowing with such unbelievable affluence? Why has our nation placed itself in the position of being God's military agent on earth...? Why have we substituted the arrogant undertaking of policing the whole world for the high task of putting our own house in order?"

Dr. Martin Luther King

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At the centre of Friends' religious experience is the repeatedly and consistently expressed belief in the fundamental equality of all members of the human race. Our common humanity transcends our differences. Friends have worked individually and corporately to give expression to this belief. We aspire not to say or do anything or condone any statements or actions which imply lack of respect for the humanity of any person. We try to free ourselves from assumptions of superiority and from racial prejudice....To liberate ourselves from pervasive attitudes and practices of our time and social environment requires new perceptions and hard work.

Meeting for Sufferings' Statement of Intent on Racism, 1988

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody helps ME any best place. And aint I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm. I have plowed, I have planted and I have gathered into barns. And no man could head me. And aint I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man – when I could get it – and bear the lash as well. And aint I a woman? I have borne children and seen most of them sold into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me. And aint I a woman?

Sojourner Truth (born Isabella Baumfree), 1851 at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio

It is time for the preachers, the rabbis, the priests and pundits, and the professors to believe in the awesome wonder of diversity...It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength. We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter their color; equal in importance no matter their texture. Our young must be taught that racial peculiarities do exist, but that beneath the skin, beyond the differing feature and into the true heart of being, fundamentally, we are more alike, my friend, than we are unlike.

Maya Angelou from "Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now," 1993

In those first days in the South...a white kid of nine or ten was hanging over the roof of the Royals' dugout. Above the chorus of boos, [Jackie] Robinson could hear him shouting, "Atta boy, Jackie, nice try! Atta boy, Jackie!" ...He knew that never in his life would he forget the face of this boy who was honest at heart, not yet filled with the poison of prejudice, who shouted a word of encouragement above the cries of the mob.

Carl T. Rowan, 1960