

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

Integrity: Advices

Integrity implies a harmony within, a music created through attentive listening to expressions of God in ourselves and each other. When we live with integrity, alone or as a faith community, our words and deeds ring true. We are able to hear when there is discord between our values and our words or actions, and we often sense when others in our community are “out of tune” with their own truth, or when, as a community, we do not seem to be following the same conductor.

When we live with integrity, our sense of self is lit from within by the same steady Light whether we are with our family, in meeting, or at work. When we live with integrity, we do not allow fear or desire for approval to shape the face we present to the world. We may express the truth we know differently so that different people can better hear it, or we may be silent because we feel it is not the time for certain words; but we are willing to allow the Inner Light to guide us in ways consistent with the truth as we understand it. Rooted in an awareness of God’s guiding presence in all times and places, each of us finds the strength and nourishment we need to be faithful – in the Psalmist’s words, “like a tree planted by the water.”

Community plays a critical role in discernment. Integrity calls us to recognize our gifts and our flaws alike with humility, helping each other to “let our lives speak,” lovingly, the truth as we know it. When we live with integrity, we hold the imperfections and dark places in our selves and our communities to the Light, remembering that our mistakes and flaws may help us understand the pain and burdens of others or even become a spring for ministry. Living with integrity requires that we not “outrun our guide.” Rather, as Carolyn Stephens wrote, we do our best to “live up to the Light we have,” knowing that “more will be given” when we are ready.

Integrity: Queries

How do we seek truth by which to live? How do we know it when we find it?

In what ways does my life speak of my beliefs and values?

In what way is my life out of harmony with truth as I know it? Why?

Integrity: Voices

The essence of early Quakerism is precisely in a demand for complete integrity of the individual in relation to God, to other people, to self.

Cecil Hinshaw, *Apology for Perfection*

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

George Fox, 1653

The truthfulness which we owe to God must assume a concrete form in the world. Our speech must be truthful, not in principle but concretely. A truthfulness which is not concrete is not truthful before God.

Bonhoeffer, *On Telling the Truth*

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Live your life on the basis of truth and let truth have its say in everything, and let what is right be heard too. Let what is just and holy be acted on, without any guile, fraud, or deceit...In whatever work you do for a living speak the truth, act on the truth, do what is just and right in all your actions, in all your practices, in all your words, in all your buying, selling, exchanging and commercial dealings with people. Let truth be your first concern and put it into practice...Living in this power and life of God in which you have justice, you also have truth and equity and rightness, and these things become quite natural for you.

George Fox (modern English rendering by Rex Ambler)

For a Quaker, religion is not an external activity, concerning a special "holy" part of the self. It is an openness to the world in the here and now with the whole of the self. If this is not simply a pious commonplace, it must take into account the whole of our humanity: our attitudes to other human beings in our most intimate as well as social and political relationships. It must also take account of our life in the world around us, the way we live, the way we treat animals and the environment. In short, to put it in traditional language, there is no part of ourselves and of our relationships where God is not present.

Harvey Gillman, 1988, Britain Yearly Meeting

A neighbor...desired me to write his will: I took notes, and, amongst other things, he told me to which of his children he gave his young negro: I considered the pain and distress he was in, and knew not how it would end, so I wrote his will, save only that part concerning his slave, and carrying it to his bedside, read it to him, and then told him in a friendly way, that I could not write any instruments by which my fellow-creatures were made slaves, without bringing trouble on my own mind. I let him know that I charged nothing for what I had done, and desired to be excused from doing the other part in the way he proposed. Then we had a serious conference on the subject, and at length, he agreeing to set her free, I finished his will.

John Woolman, 1756

Any great issue has transformative power, once we engage it. Slavery led John Woolman through a lifetime of spiritual transformation, of renewal in his own heart. Whether our own faith is centered on Christ or other core beliefs, our journey can be animated as Woolman's was by compassion and a love of truth.

David Morse, Testimony: John Woolman On Today's Global Economy, p. 11

Christ's way of propagating the truth – the way that inherently fits the inner life and spirit of the gospel of the Kingdom – was the way of personal contagion. Instead of founding an institution, or organizing an official society, or forming a system, or creating external machinery, He counted almost wholly upon the spontaneous and dynamic influence of life upon life, of personality upon personality...It was His faith that, if you get into the world anywhere a seed of the Kingdom, a nucleus of persons who exhibit the blessed life, who are dedicated to expanding goodness, who rely implicitly on love and sympathy, who try in meek patience the slow method that is right, who still feel the clasping hands of love even when they go through pain and trial and loss, this seed-spirit will spread, this nucleus will enlarge and create a society...

Rufus Jones, 1916

We all need other people to invite, amplify, and help us to discern the inner teacher's voice for at least three reasons:

The journey toward inner truth is too taxing to be made solo; lacking support, the solitary traveler soon becomes weary or fearful and is likely to quit the road.

The path is too deeply hidden to be traveled without company; finding our way involves clues that are subtle and sometimes misleading, requiring the kind of discernment that can happen only in dialogue.

The destination is too daunting to be achieved alone: we need community to find the courage to venture into the alien lands to which the inner teacher may call us.

Parker Palmer, A Hidden Wholeness

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. Then to the Lord God you will be a sweet savour and blessing.

George Fox

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Note on the meaning of the word “cheerfully” in the above passage:

Regarding the quote from George Fox, “Walk cheerfully over the word, answering to that of God in everyone”: The word “cheerfully,” in addition to the way we use it, had another meaning in 17th century England. It meant “encouragingly” (this is the way Shakespeare used it) as in our modern sense of “to cheer someone on.” If I were to paraphrase a small part of Fox’s message it might go something like this: “Always be examples of your best conduct and behavior where ever you are. Then you will come to walk through the world, encouraging others to do likewise.” This is a very different message from how cheerfully is usually understood in our time, but it is much more consistent with the rest of Fox’s writings.

Bruce Folsom, San Francisco Meeting, in Friends Bulletin, March 1994, p. 99

George Fox... felt the need for integrity in daily life. ... there must be a correspondence between one’s faith, between what one professed on the Sabbath, and what one does during the daily work week.

Wilmer Cooper, The Testimony of Integrity, 1991

Integrity is one of the virtues for which Quakers in the past have been praised. It is a quality worth having, but it is doubtful if it can be reached by self-conscious effort or by adherence to a principle.... Integrity is a condition in which a person’s response to a total situation can be trusted: the opposite of a condition in which he would be moved by opportunist or self-seeking impulses breaking up his unity as a whole being. This condition of trust is different from the recognition that he will always be kind or always tell the truth. The integrity of some Dutch Friends I have met showed itself during the war in their willingness to tell lies to save their Jewish friends from the Gestapo or from starvation.

Kenneth C. Barnes, 1972

Friends consider integrity a way of life. In the stillness of worship we come into the Divine Presence and open ourselves to the Light; we hide nothing of who we are. In keeping with that openness of spirit, Friends express themselves with honesty in their dealings with others. Plain truth needs no decorative flourishes. We speak with simple clarity to reflect in our words the reality of our perceptions and thoughts.

Intermountain Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice

Dear Lord and Father of mankind
Forgive our foolish ways!
Reclothe us in our rightful mind,
In purer lives thy service find,
In deeper reverence, praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard
Beside the Syrian sea
The gracious calling of the Lord,
Let us, like them, without a word,
Rise up and follow thee....

John Greenleaf Whittier, 1872

Sing and rejoice, ye children of the day and of the light; for the Lord is at work in this thick night of darkness that may be felt. And truth doth flourish as the rose, and the lilies do grow among the thorns, and the plants atop of the hills, and upon them the lambs do skip and play. And never heed the tempests nor the storms, floods nor rains, for the seed Christ is over all, and doth reign. And so be of good faith and valiant for the truth: for the truth can live in the jails.

George Fox, Epistle 227