

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

Stewardship

Stewardship of Personal Resources: Advices

“To turn all we possess into the channel of universal love becomes the business of our lives” - this, in the words of John Woolman, is the meaning of Quaker stewardship.

This applies to all that we have and are, as individuals, as members of groups, and as inhabitants of the earth. As individuals, we are obliged to use our time, our various abilities, our strength, our money, our material possessions, and other resources in a spirit of love, aware that we hold these gifts in trust, and are responsible to use them in the Light.

Investment of assets and consumption of resources require our careful stewardship. As friends, we can direct our investments toward socially desirable ends, avoiding speculation and activities wasteful or harmful to others. We should seek to participate constructively and without greed in the economic life of the community and to refrain from undue accumulation of wealth as well as irresponsible borrowing.

Stewardship of Personal Resources: Queries

Do we regard our time, talents, energy, money, material possessions and other resources as gifts from God, to be held in trust and shared according to the Light we are given?

What are we doing as individuals and as a meeting to nurture our gifts?

How do we encourage the members of the larger community to be careful stewards of their gifts?

Stewardship of Personal Resources: Voices

To turn all we possess into the channel of universal love becomes the business of our lives.

John Woolman

Of the interest of the public in our estates: Hardly any thing is given us for our selves, but the public may claim a share with us. But of all we call ours, we are most accountable to God and the public for our estates: In this we are but stewards, and to hoard up all to ourselves is great injustice as well as ingratitude.

John Woolman, 1720 (quoted by North Pacific YM)

As Christians, all we possess is the gift of God, and in the distribution of it we act as his stewards; it becomes us therefore to act agreeably to that divine wisdom which he graciously gives to his servants.

John Woolman, “A Word of Remembrance and Caution to the Rich”

In reading those short last essays of John Woolman, which are little treatises on economics, I have been struck by his intuition that wrong roads were being taken by his contemporaries, upon which we their descendants should find our direction almost irreversibly fixed. Unrighteous use of other human beings, unrighteous use of one’s own powers, irresponsible use and waste of land and other natural resources - he touches on them all. It is evident that he was convinced that the spiritual life of men and women is deeply conditioned by their economic life.

Mildred Binns Young, What Doth The Lord Require of Thee?

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

London Yearly Meeting, 1945

To “stretch beyond one’s compass” grasping at shadows, and encumbering oneself with more than is needed for simple, wholesome living, is at variance with all our best traditions.

Caroline Stephens, Quaker Strongholds

Stewardship of the Earth: Advices

Friends have connected with the earth and all it holds as part of their spiritual development. From George Fox walking throughout England searching for his spiritual identity to current times, we are aware that we are only stewards, not owners of this land. We need to be constantly aware of how our actions affect the rest of the world. By not using more than we need and by sharing with others, we ensure that the earth will continue to support everyone.

Stewardship of the Earth: Queries

How do we exercise our respect for the balance of nature?

How do we avoid misusing the land, air, and sea and use the world's resources with care and consideration for future generations and with respect for all life?

In what other ways do we carry out our commitment to stewardship?

Stewardship of the Earth: Voices

Sustainability as a concept has recently acquired new spiritual depth of meaning to include a resolve to live in harmony with biological and physical systems, and to work to create social systems that can enable us to do that. It includes a sense of connectedness and an understanding of the utter dependence of human society within the intricate web of life; a passion for environmental justice and ecological ethics; an understanding of dynamic natural balances and processes; and a recognition of the limits to growth due to finite resources. Our concern for Sustainability recognizes our responsibility to future generations, to care for the Earth as our own home and the home of all that dwell herein. We seek a relationship between human beings and the Earth that is mutually enhancing.

Approved at Quaker Earthcare Witness Annual Meeting, October 1998

The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age.

John Woolman, 1772

As a Religious Society of Friends we see the stewardship of God's creation as a major concern. The environmental crisis is at root a spiritual and religious crisis; we are called to look again at the real purpose of being on this earth, which is to till it and keep it so as to reveal the glory of God for generations to come.

London Yearly Meeting, 1988

That the sweat and tedious labor of the farmer, early and late, cold and hot, wet and dry, should be converted into the pleasure of a small number of men – that continued severity should be laid on nineteen parts of the land to feed the inordinate lusts and delicate appetites of the twentieth, is so far from the will of the great Governor of the world, [it] is wretched and blasphemous.

William Penn, 1669

The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious Creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the Earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age.

John Woolman 1772