

Baltimore Yearly Meeting - Faith and Practice Revision Committee

Abingdon Meeting visit

April 27, 2013

We met on Saturday evening at the home of the Strawbridges. Eight people from Abingdon were present, along with a visitor from Roanoke. There was also a brief period of discussion the next day after meeting for worship with a few Friends who had not been able to make it on Saturday evening.

Sheila Bach led the session, and Riley Robinson took notes.

Sheila asked us to work together in worship sharing mode and introduced the four queries being used by Faith and Practice Revision Committee for these visits.

• *Understanding that our faith is too deep for words, does the Faith & Practice adequately articulate our Quaker beliefs and testimonies, in order both to inform those new to Friends and to inspire and challenge those with long experience of Friends?*

One person said they were familiar with the queries from New York Yearly Meeting. This person found the BYM queries particularly enriching, along with the number of quotes, and felt that they applied for friends new and old.

One person said that, as a new Quaker, she doesn't have a library. She liked that she could look into *Faith and Practice* for something to focus on. She said, "I appreciate a compendium of Quaker knowledge."

A new attender said that the book is very helpful. She said, "I wrote down sentences. I still find something's elusive, but it's the first thing I've ever read regarding Quakers. I liked the history, including discussion of conflict."

Another person said that it was very clear and practical. The Voices section is good. She said though, that she missed clear references to the non-Christian Christian aspects of Quakerism.

Another person said that as a newcomer, "I appreciate the clarity of language in the expression of ideas - it's clear and simple. "

A Friend said that he was familiar with the New York Yearly Meeting *Faith and Practice* and the 1988 Baltimore Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice. He said, "It's hard to fathom all the work that's gone into this. It looks good, feels good, and speaks well about both Monthly Meeting and Friend to Friend interactions. It has what it takes.

• Does the Faith & Practice provide sufficient resources, such as queries and advices, to assist us in accountability one to another in our Monthly Meetings and as a Yearly Meeting?

A person said, "They are sufficient and helpful."

Another person said, "I think so. The queries were thoughtful and thought-provoking."

There was a period of discussion about using queries before worship and Meeting for Business, and how this can be helpful.

The Clerk of the Meeting said that he finds it invigorating to have so many queries. "One of them may give you a direction that you hadn't thought about." He also liked the greater number of queries in this book.

A person said that she had heard Webster's dictionary referred to as "a living work." She sees this book in the same way. She said "it can help people evolve as they read it."

• Does the Faith & Practice provide sufficient explanation and guidance for our Quaker process?

A person said, "This is a tricky one for me as a new person. There were some things I didn't find in it." Riley responded that since this edition was published, the index has been further developed. Sheila spoke to the process of the committee meeting monthly for 11 years, and lately meeting biweekly and now weekly, so more evolution has taken place. She invited everyone to attend a June 22 listening session about Faith and Practice at Langley Hill Meeting.

Riley pointed out that during this year the committee visited Young Friends Executive Committee, who pointed out that for an organization with such an emphasis on children and youth, there was very little in the book about that. It had also been pointed out the although BYM has a year-round staff of nine, and 120 more employees in summer at camps, very little is said about roles of staff or the relationship of staff to the organization.

A Friend who had read the new book *Quaker Process* by Mathilda Navias pointed out that she refers to *Faith and Practice* as something not to hit anyone over the head with, but instead to be used as a walking stick. He said that Quakerism is evolving and experiential. *Faith and practice* is a guide and that it helps Quakerism breathe. He said that *F&P* gives a good balance and foundation for Quaker process.

• Does Faith & Practice provide guidance and structure while inviting the work of the Spirit and continuing revelation?

A Friend said, "I turned that around a bit. This query for him is hard. I get invited by the spirit to do work, I go toward revelation, and then I go to F&P to get guidance."

A Friend said that after reading *Faith and Practice*, "I'm engaging my spiritual energy"

A Friend said that it's a helpful resource.

A person said, "I'm having trouble with the word structure. It feels heavy, but the book does not feel so confining. It does not tell me exactly what to do or how to do it."

A person said, "If you are on a desert island, this book would not help you start from zero to presume some experience and/or other guidance. But it always leaves room for the breath of spirit. Other generations will also have new ideas." Riley pointed out that it has been said that *Faith and Practice* functions as a handbook.

It was asked if all other Yearly Meetings have Faith and Practice books. Sheila said that most do.

There was some discussion about the difference between Yearly Meetings, and how some are more hierarchical and more structured than others, and that this tends to have some correlation with the degree to which Friends espouse theological literalism and a stricter sense of authority.

BYM "NOTE TO SELF": There was not much discussion about actually making use of specific practices and procedures in the way that other Meetings had done in these sessions. After Meeting, one Friend talked about Abingdon having been made a full Monthly Meeting instead of starting as a Preparative Meeting for a while as outlined in *F&P*. The suggestion was that the experience might have developed more understanding about Quaker process and how it differs from secular processes, including consensus, thereby saving some growing pains. Abingdon meets at the ElderSpirit retirement community, and many attenders are a part of both.