

Meeting on *Faith and Practice*

Alexandria Virginia Meeting, 1/13/13

Visitors: Jim Rose & Susannah Hills Rose

Eleven people were present through most of the meeting, but numbers grew toward the end to as many as seventeen or eighteen.

Jim was asked to comment on the relationship of this Faith and Practice to the 1988 version. Jim explained the history; he noted that the Queries and advices were not integrated in the previous version, and that voices were added. The new version was not intended to be a change in direction, but rather an expansion.

A Friend said that in 2009 the meeting had carefully reviewed the existing draft and provided a detailed commentary that pointed to “serious omissions.” She said, fighting back tears, that the meeting’s suggestions were not acknowledged and apparently were not heard, as no changes seemed to have been made in response. Reading from the original letter, she pointed to a number of concerns that were of great importance to the meeting, including:

1. Addictive behaviors (dangers of addiction/response, abuse of tobacco and drugs; the traditional testimony against gambling)
2. Civic participation (the meeting in the life of larger community)the need to avoid partisan assumptions and rhetoric
3. Gender and sexual diversity, including a separate section on equality and marriage equality that was omitted from the 1988 version
4. Economic and social class (the lack of diversity in many meetings should be explored)
5. Gossip (are you careful of the reputation of friends; the danger of tale bearing and gossip; the importance of being helpful and truthful)
6. Family and sexuality (responsible sexuality) (see p. 23, 1988 version, separate section)
7. Marriage and childbearing, child rearing (see p. 23, 1988 version, for separate section)
8. Participation in interfaith and ecumenical fellowships, for example around shared social concerns
9. Listening to God, not just to each other

A Friend who underlined everything that was in the 1988 version but not in the new one said that 80 to 90 percent of the old appeared to have been left out. She said the previous queries were powerful and well expressed and felt that all of them should have stayed. She gave numerous examples of a number of queries in which important words were left out in the revision (e.g., “understanding and forbearance”) or in which entire queries were left out that spoke to the meeting, and on which there was no replacement version.

Saying the first Friend was “putting in nicely,” a second Friend said the newer edition appeared to be diluting what it means to be a Quaker and trying to make it easier. One of the things that attracted this Friend to Quakerism was the striving of Friends to live a disciplined moral life, including looking at ourselves to see if we are really living our faith.

Another Friend did not understand why the new version tilts toward open ended questions. Jim explained some of the history. Numerous Friends responded:

- The 1988 queries were personal challenges.
- One Friend said there was room for both types of queries; if the heartfelt answer to a key query is “no,” then one moves to personal exploration.
- A Friend said the two types of questions represent “fundamentally different processes.” This Friend saw open-ended questions as exploring, “are the techniques I am using effective?” The format of the older, traditional queries is a to challenge the heart first, and engage the mind second. These questions are the start of the process, not the end. If a query asks, “in what ways do you prepare for meeting?” you could make a list and feel self-satisfied, but the truthful answer to the question “do you come to meeting with heart and mind prepared” might still be “no.”
- The yes/no queries are clearer and more telling. The newer type ones are more like “filling out insurance forms.”
- The “prophetic voice” comes through in the older version of the queries and is largely missing from the new ones. “The prophets were not diplomats.” They held up an ideal and asked people to sit with themselves: “are you living up to this ideal? Do you live in accord with your spiritual convictions?” They asked the questions that get Quakers quaking. In the 1988 version, there was a prophetic voice that reflected radical mysticism; it made me “stop.” I don’t get that sense from this.
- When Jim said the new queries promoted introspection, a Friend repeated the word “thinking”, meaning the queries were activating the thought process rather than heart and spirit.
- A Friend came up after the discussion and said it appeared that the old queries had been changed because the committee did not understand how the traditional queries worked'

A Friend said that the new Faith and Practice added to his knowledge, but that currently he needs to use both versions to get what he needs.

A Friend was concerned that the new version on membership appears to introduce a change in procedure. The 1988 version says that children may be recorded as full members. This one does not. Is this practice no longer in accordance with Faith and Practice guidelines? (See p. 51, 1988 version.) This Friend would like an explanation of why this change was made.

Friends were also concerned that there might be other changes like this one that may “slip by.” The Friend would like to know where substantive changes have occurred and why those changes were warranted before it is approved. The Friend suggested that a subject-by-subject comparison was needed to enable Friends to know for sure what they were approving.

Friends said they did find many of the new sections valuable, including the sections on divorce. However a Friend seemed to speak the sense of the meeting in saying that it was not ready to accept the new version. The major obstacle was the omission of the queries members found heart-piercing in the old and the lack of a summary showing where changes were made.