

BYM Faith and Practice Revision Committee

Visit to Carlisle Meeting

April 21, 2013

Margaret Stambaugh facilitated the session and Riley Robinson recorded.

The meeting began with nine Friends and attenders present.

Margaret introduced the queries to be used today. She asked everyone present to work together in a worship sharing framework.

• 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 noted that the Greek word “fidelitus” means “trust.” However, he said, it gets translated as “faith.” He’s comfortable with the term trust, but less so with faith. He said, “I trust God.”
- A Friend said, “I found that the quotations in Voices and in other sections inspire and lift me up,” saying that it’s a rich selection.
- When asked about book process, Margaret responded that there are now five people on the Faith and Practice Revision Committee. She said that individuals write sections or choose sections and bring them to the Committee for group consideration, and that there is much discernment. There will be a new addition at Annual Session 2013. It’s possible that the various Monthly Meeting comments may be displayed.
- A Friend asked what the major changes to the book are.
- Margaret answered that there are more subjects. She also said that the Committee felt that the queries needed change. She pointed out that if one asks if you do something, it can invite a “yes or no” answer. Asking how someone does something can require a more thoughtful response. She added that there are now more queries, and said that Friends have been using these for worship and for conduct of Meeting for Business.
- A Friend said that he liked both the queries and the Voices sections. He thought that the first query may be the most difficult to respond to. He felt that the queries’ format is useful as a guide.

• 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 Friend said that she had been a member for 30 years, but actually hasn't used *Faith and Practice* a lot, rather just for a question here and there. She said that this current process has led her to spend much more time with it. She likes the history section. She likes the section "Life of the Spirit," particularly "Healing the Meeting Community." The "Important Minutes" section is very good. She said that she may use the book more in the future than she has in the past.
- It was noted that it's even nice to see, on page 221, Carlisle Meeting's conversion from Preparative to Monthly Meeting in 1988.
- The fourth query on alcohol and drug abuse was of interest to one Friend. He appreciated how it was written, but would not want it to imply that Friends have thoroughly considered what substances should or should not be legally available. He expanded by noting that there were repeated references to justice and equality, but the book is fairly silent about the cost of achieving those goals. He would like Friends to consider as part of our process a considered balancing of both freedom and equality. He feels that Friends tend to go for equality over freedom in writing but be more balanced in practice. He was concerned that, if Friends take positions that are too rigid, there can be less vitality of thought in the community and sometimes a little less honesty.

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

- One Friend was generally content with the book and its guidance. Others seemed to agree.
- It was noted that the section about minutes on page 146 brought some attention, because the book suggests that Friends do not record the steps along the way to a decision, whereas Carlisle sometimes does. It was also noted that Carlisle had not had the Clerks sign the minutes previously, but has started to do so. Carlisle has also had a group of Friends who are willing to serve as recorder, but saw more clearly now some of the reasons why having one regular recorder for a period of time may be more helpful. They may have someone who's now willing to take that on.
- A Friend said that the flexibility suggested in committee structure is useful. Meetings need to find clarity and then decide what they need.
- A Friend brought copies of the section on Membership of Children from both 1988 and 2012. She did not see where the new book addresses birthright members, and feels that it's ambiguous. The older text is more helpful when it comes to that point. This became an issue at Carlisle at one point.

1988 - e. Membership of Children

When children reach the point at which they can have the understanding to make the commitments of membership, they may apply. Children too young to make this commitment may be recorded as junior (associate) members at the request of member parents or guardians. Some Meetings record minor children as full members upon the request of member parents or guardians, or at birth.

Children are equally a part of the Meeting, whether they are junior (associate) or full members, and should be encouraged to be active in the Meeting.

As children mature, the Meeting through its appropriate committee should consult from time to time with those who did not themselves make the commitment of membership, both junior (associate) members and full members by parental request, to determine if they are committed to the spiritual and practical responsibilities of adult members. If they do not indicate interest in full adult membership during the Meeting's contacts over a period of several years, their names should be removed from the membership rolls and they should be so notified.

2012 - Membership of Children

When a young person has the understanding needed to commit to full membership in the Quaker Meeting, he or she may apply. Children too young to make this commitment may be recorded as junior/associate members at the request of member parents or guardians. Children are an invaluable part of the Meeting and should be encouraged to be active in the Meeting.

As our youths mature, the Meeting should consult with them to determine if they are committed to the spiritual and practical responsibilities of adult members. If they do not indicate such an intent during the Meeting's contacts over a period of several years, the names of junior/associate members should be removed from the membership rolls and they should be so notified. Young people who do not wish to become full members may continue to be welcomed as attenders.

- One person asked about marriage and divorce, noting that there is not much said on same gender marriage. It was pointed out that Baltimore Yearly Meeting doesn't have an approved policy on same gender marriage, although most Monthly Meetings do have approved policies for same gender unions. Margaret noted, for instance, that one Monthly Meeting said gays and lesbians are welcome to worship, but that it does not anticipate a time when it would approve same gender unions.

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

- There was general agreement that it does.

The meeting ended with silent worship.