

March 3, 2013: Faith and Practice Comments from Gunpowder Meeting

From the Committee: Jim Rose

Recorder: Susan Hills Rose

Birthright Friends

At Gunpowder meeting, newborns are often recorded as members of the meeting, and there are no levels of membership. Children of people who join the meeting are also considered members at the request of their parents or guardians, though older children often write their own letters seeking membership. The statement in F and P that indicates that birthright Friends are obsolete should be changed.

Testimonies

One Friend was disappointed that a paragraph she used in teaching from the 2011 edition had been removed in the 2012 edition and strongly suggested adding it back in. It is on p.42 in the 2011 edition and refers to testimonies as “not belief, but committed action that arises out of our beliefs.” The whole paragraph is helpful.

That paragraph reads:

“In the Religious Society of Friends, the word *testimony* is used to refer to the ways in which Friends testify or bear witness to their beliefs in their everyday lives. In this context, the word testimony refers not to the underlying belief, but the committed action which arises out of our beliefs, and testifies to our beliefs. Commonly Friends are said to testify to simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and stewardship (SPICES).”

We heard that the SPICES acronym is a helpful mnemonic even though these are not an unchanging list of the only testimonies. The Friends Council on Education and FGC both make use of the acronym. The meeting uses the acronym in teaching the meeting’s children and finds it very appropriate.

Business and Testimonies

A Friend observed that early Faith and Practices always had advice about how friends were to conduct their businesses. For example, they were cautioned to be mindful of conditions under which goods and services were produced and the role Friends could have in mediation or arbitration in addressing labor and management disputes. Today we still have Friends schools, retirement communities, and other businesses Friends are responsible for and it would be helpful to address how to conduct business in a Friendly way. Some think Friends do poorly at applying the testimonies to their own businesses, especially personnel issues. Several Friends agreed this was a difficult area for Friends and it would be good to address it. Perhaps philanthropy could be touched on in the same section.

Advices, Queries, and Voices

We heard that Ministry and Council used some of the queries in preparing the State of the Meeting Report.

One weighty Friend said it was a great good that the book has been expanded to include voices.

The newsletter editor has been putting the advices in the newsletter. A Friend said they were very good, adding that the voices are helpful in interpreting the advices. A Friend said she discussed the advices and queries with her children and they lead to good discussions.

A Friend said it was good to hear the voices of non-Friends as well; the Friend said it makes a statement about our willingness to listen to spiritual truths wherever they come from. Another Friend also liked the “balance” of voices.

The Clerk reads the queries on business meeting Sunday before the children leave. They are helpful in keeping the meeting centered and in a place for spiritual discernment.

A Friend said she appreciated the way queries have evolved so that there are now few yes/no questions. She explained that when she heard the yes/no queries read she felt “inadequate.” Another friend said all the queries, yes/no or open, are intended to invite exploration and growth and set up a spectrum of possibilities. The Friend said he appreciated the effort that has gone on in this area. Another Friend said that queries have the purpose of reaching beyond where we are; living up to the sense of the queries is not an easy matter. The purpose is to nudge us and make us conscious of our practice. The yes/no queries also help in this way.

A Friend said there were few voices of women. Also, there were no voices of Friends of color outside the equality section. She suggested looking again for voices that reflect diversity (e.g., Valerie Brown and Howard Thurman).

Growth of Meetings

We heard that the number of meetings is growing in this area. Faith and Practice should say this and list all meetings, fellowship groups, and worship groups.

Burial Grounds

A Friend referenced a letter he had written earlier about the care and location of burial grounds. It would also be good to have this as a separate document.

Quaker Vignettes

A Friend suggested that although it is beyond the scope of the Faith and Practice it would be good to have a collection of Quaker vignettes and parables.

Worship

A Friend said the worship section was beautifully written and helpful.

Practices

A Friend said it was helpful to have practices explained and explored. It was very helpful to have support and clearness committees described separately.

When some hurt feelings occurred in the meeting, a lot of pieces from the Faith and Practice were used and they were helpful.

Committees and Communication

A Friend suggested that the section on meeting functions address email as a form of communication, perhaps giving guidance on what should be handled face to face rather than in email. Email is an “uninflected form of communication,” said another Friend, and is easy to misunderstand. Friends can say things that cause hurt that they would not say face to face.

Life of the Spirit

A weighty Friend liked the section very much. He said as Quakers, we both seek and find, and also do. We often need to seek again and refind our connection with the Spirit. Sometimes, this Friend said, “I slip and stumble and I am temporarily out of God’s reach. I am seeking all the time to get back in the depths of spirit.” A Friend said we “call ourselves the seekers not the finders” and we all seek differently in different ways.

Christocentric and non-Christocentric Friends

A Friend found “Jesus” language more helpful than “Christ,” which implies a “Messianic historical thing.” A Jewish Quaker said she was attracted to Quakerism in part because Quakers like and accept diversity (in general). At the same time, Christ is important to our heritage and should not be shut out.

Equality

A Friend said queries in the equality section should dig deeper. In what ways are we participating in privilege and supporting injustices? “Fit for Freedom...” helped us see that we did not always lead the way. She added that FGC Central has a beautiful epistle regarding lesbian, gay, and bisexual Friends we might quote.