

BYM FAITH AND PRACTICE REVISION COMMITTEE

Visit to Baltimore, Stony Run Meeting

February 24, 2013

Margaret Stambaugh, Convener

Riley Robinson, notetaker

Approximately 22 people were present, two from Homewood Friends Meeting.

Margaret announced to Friends present that this was to be a listening session. She handed out copies of an article called "Proposed Faith And Practice: A Guide For Discernment," by Betsy Meyer, which had been published in the fall BYM *Interchange*. We used the four queries in that article to frame our work.

• *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?*

- Appreciation was expressed for the emphasis on the experiential, for the attention to the individual, and the individual's experience in corporate worship
- concern was expressed for readers new to Friends:
 - o Can newcomers understand the terminology? Our terms like Quaker beliefs and testimonies readily clear to them?
 - o Prominent use of the word "belief" may be problematic for religion that has no creeds and allows for continuing revelation
 - o The experiential nature of who we are matters
- Thanks was expressed to the committee for its long labor of love and for its openness
- There was an appreciation for the current *Faith and Practice* because of its simplicity and accessibility, though acknowledging that it does need to be updated. The new "tome" is a lot to take in, although much is useful. It is "wordy."
- The book as constituted may not answer the question for newcomers, "Who are Quakers?" in an accessible fashion.
- Some of the writing, including new the beginning, might be discouraging to newcomers from other faith traditions including Buddhism and the Jewish faith. The language used to describe the Christian nature of Quakerism needs to have a quality of openness to it so that it does not seem like a litmus test or a barrier. A more Universalist perspective is needed. People who come from other traditions may have things of value to bring to us.
- Appreciation was expressed for the diversity of perspectives in the Voices section. These seemed like an invitation to further investigation.
- However the question arose if this much diversity of expression could be confusing for newcomers. It was acknowledged that while someone is searching some amount of confusion can be expected.

- The presentation of the book may make it difficult to read. The format is problematic. Could the committee get a professional consultation on the look of the book? The format does not feel as welcoming as it might
- 16 queries are a lot
- The *Faith and Practice* for Britain Yearly Meeting is beautifully laid out with paragraphs numbered.
- This *Faith and Practice* does not have much to say about alcohol or gambling, if these issues have not left us. (Margaret responded that this is being worked on)
- Not much is said about Quaker discernment except for some scattered references. Do we as Friends arrive at decisions?
- The concern was raised that the book consists of adults of a certain age talking to each other. There is little for or about children, young Friends or young adults. (Margaret pointed out that Young Friends have recently brought this issue to the Committee and are working on the material)

• *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?*

- The writing about Monthly Meeting membership was discussed. The differing ways that Monthly Meetings handle the membership for people under 25 years of age was discussed. *Faith and Practice* needs to find the best balance it can to suggest what wisdom friends have accumulated about these procedures without being overly directive. This is complicated as well because individual members of Meetings have their own opinions about this topic. Great sensitivity must be taken to be mindful of the full humanity and the potential talents of children, teens, and young adults and to offer support for them on their spiritual pathways while remaining clear about what is required to be a fully responsible member of a Monthly Meeting. It is important for Meetings to be attentive to the abilities of each young individual and to respond accordingly. It was suggested that a definition of successful youth membership should be included. Friends were referred to page 138.
- *Faith and Practice* can speak in two ways. One is descriptive and one is prescriptive. BYM can certainly speak descriptively, but prescriptive writing may be less appreciated and care must be taken to allow for the other sensings of individuals and Monthly Meetings to their own situations. We were reminded that F and P is not the Manual of Procedure.
- A Friend mentioned that that hopefully *Faith and Practice* can do its basic job and to put people in touch with the culture of Friends as well.
- The glossary is working toward brevity, but could be more concise. We are cautioned not to be too strict about our definitions, either.
- But a glossary can't explain everything, anyway. People really do need to read the book as a whole and not assume that this or that part works as a shortcut.
- It was noted that Advices and Queries is really quite different than the procedural sections, and the suggestion was made that the book be split. (Margaret commented that the suggestion had been made the Voices could be put in a separate booklet)

- This *Faith and Practice* speaks as though what BYM does is what all Friends do. It would be helpful to find the right place to say that practices and ways of relating to the Holy Spirit do vary among Friends.
- *Does the Faith & Practice provide sufficient explanation and guidance for our Quaker process?*
 - We were asked to appreciate the fact that some teenage Friends do figure out our processes and learn what to do.
 - It is important to make clear that there is accumulated wisdom in our Quaker practices that can be useful in a very practical way, that many of these are distinctive to Friends, and work well for Friends.
- *Does Faith & Practice provide guidance and structure while inviting the work of the Spirit and continuing revelation?*
 - This is not really a “pick up and read” book, although that might be more useful. True, few people like instruction manuals, but it’s not just the procedural parts that are a rough ride.
 - Most Friends in Baltimore Yearly Meeting are convinced Friends. Making Quakerism clear and accessible to them (and prospective Quakers) is of prime importance for our continued existence. We not only need to respect diversity, we need our Faith and Practice to help us be inclusive.
 - There’s just too much to take in. It’s hard to find things. Maybe there too many voices. Maybe there too many ideas. It’s hard to figure out what to do with it all.
 - One Friend said it really can be okay to examine a long-held Quaker position and its wording and to decide that still holds true, still works well and doesn’t need to be changed.
 - One Friend reflected the Friends do have some trouble talking about the individual spiritual journey, and that the book does not really talk about worship or daily practices. What have Friends found to be helpful?
 - Regarding the first query, a Friend felt drawn to the expression of our faith as experiential, also appreciating that voices expresses both the experiential and demonstrate some of our diversity.
 - It was however noted that there is not much material about diversity involving gender and sexual orientation, particularly in the Equality section.
 - There are many lists in the back of the book. It doesn’t seem like the order of those documents has been thought out, and it’s not clear that they all need to be there. The Wills and Bequests section is lodged near the end, but is actually quite important to the Yearly Meeting. The reading list will change over time and may need to be a separate document. Is a glossary actually needed?
 - References about Living Our Faith at the end of some sections may not be helpful.
 - The section on “Important Minutes,” however, is very helpful.
 - *Faith and Practice* not only needs to lay out a landscape, but needs to suggest how Friends may actively reflect and respond to Friends testimonies and practices through the entire life cycle in a way that leads us to a more whole sense of the Spirit and to a more vibrant daily practice.