

Committee Member: Margaret Stambaugh

Recorder: Robinne Gray

Eight Friends were present for the session.

1. ...does Faith and Practice adequately articulate Quaker beliefs and testimonies...?

I am a newcomer and I find F&P useful, helpful for getting my brain ready. I can't speak to the experience of longtime Friends. Reading the queries can help me get to a new place.

Margaret reminded Friends that the Testimonies have been significantly altered from the previous version. Some Monthly Meetings read queries at Meeting for Worship, and some at Meeting for Business. Using them for worship was the original intent of Britain Yearly Meeting. They don't need to be read in order.

A Friend said that Pipe Creek Friends recently reopened the question of whether to continue the weekly reading of the queries at Meeting for Worship, and the answer was a definite Yes.

2. ...Does F&P provide sufficient resources...to assist us in accountability in our Monthly Meetings and the Yearly Meeting?

A visiting Friend noted that when serving on the facing bench recently he had looked to *Faith and Practice* for guidance about vocal ministry. It was difficult to find a positive approach to the question rather than a cautionary approach. The purpose of self-reflection before offering vocal ministry is intended to be positive. It would be helpful to have a section that goes beyond telling Friends what *not* to do.

A Friend said that she is new to the Friends community, and sometimes attends a semi-programmed Meeting in New York state that is quite different from unprogrammed worship here. F&P has been helpful but she feels intimidated to offer vocal ministry based on what is in the book. She would like to see Friends simply getting together to talk with others about our spiritual journeys.

Margaret noted that the section on page 43, formerly titled Fixing the World, will be called Evolving Testimonies, recognizing that testimonies are intended to change to speak to their times.

A Friend said that Pipe Creek Friends Meeting tends to be fully silent during worship. Perhaps we shouldn't question this, but he has wondered whether it is due to reluctance to speak, or no motivation/leading? We don't know, and we haven't looked at this question as a Meeting. It is somewhat perplexing for us.

A Friend said: I welcome hearing others share. I sit here humbled by the experience of remaining in the Light. I have only spoken one or two times in worship. Being silent is a leading in itself if you come from the Episcopal tradition of "smells and bells"! I've never felt like I've come to worship with an agenda. I'm still absorbing the silence.

A Friend said: I've found section other than the testimonies and queries to be useful, such as the sections on clerking, marriage, and funerals. They are well put together and helpful to me in my role as clerk.

Margaret asked whether Friends had any comments to offer on the history chapters.

A Friend said: I've been a member of the RS of F for over 60 years. My recollection of the versions of *Faith and Practice* that existed from earlier times, and through the years, is that they were not nearly as lengthy as this one. The more recent drafts have been much more helpful than the older volumes. I read the earlier drafts and thought the history was excellent; but it is so thorough that some might be deterred from tackling it.

A Friend said that a member of Pipe Creek Meeting has explored the history of local Quakers in and around Union Bridge, and has done research with historic documents and in the records at Swarthmore.

3. Does Faith and Practice provide sufficient exploration and guidance...?

Margaret let Friends know that the next edition may include an explanation of Quaker process in the glossary.

A Friend said: I've found it very helpful, since I come out of the Protestant church. I came to Friends knowing the popular reputation Quakers have but not really knowing anything about Quaker process.

A Friend said: Faith and Practice was my first and only introduction to the Quaker faith. I found it compact enough to be helpful; however it is still difficult for me to understand vocal ministry.

Margaret reminded Friends that the queries in F&P are just suggestions; they are not written in stone. Every Meeting must decide for itself whether to use this guidance or to proceed another way.

A Friend said that Quakers are an eclectic, diverse group of "doers" in religion, life, and social experiences. We've used F&P not as strong guidance but as a Light to carry us forward and to be adapted appropriately.

A Friend said: We have a Monday night book club that uses worship sharing. We've read a couple of Philip Gulley's books. Oftentimes people will say things in small groups that they may not say in a full Meeting for Worship.

4. Does Faith and Practice provide...while inviting work of the Spirit and continuing revelation?

Margaret also asked: Does the new draft strike the right balance between guidance and [freedom]?

A Friend said: I think it does. I think of the quote from George Fox about walking cheerfully over the world. We joke about Fox being the first born-again Christian! Fox said that "Christ has come to teach his people himself."

Margaret noted that in this context the word "cheerful" did not mean what it does today [implying happiness or a good mood]; it meant something more like "encouragingly".

The Friend responded that it's still nice to think of George walking *cheerfully* (as in happily) through the world. There isn't much that is humorous about Friends. You don't hear jokes about Quakers like you do about other religions!

A Friend raised a concern about the use of, and reference to, the Bible in Faith and Practice. In the list of references, the Bible isn't mentioned. Maybe I haven't seen all the references made to it. There is no guidance of how the Bible is used as an instrument. I'm trying to get a sense of whether there is a uniqueness to Friends in this regard.

Margaret responded that other Friends have raised this concern. The new draft F&P uses quotes from the Bible in the Voices. The [revision] Committee worked with five different versions of the Bible as they were making revisions, and used quotes from the version they thought was best in each case.

A Friend said one could liken *Faith and Practice* to the Episcopal tradition in which people talk about what Book of Common Prayer they prefer. Fox's quote reminds me of St. Benedict. I trust in the process and don't expect perfection.

A Friend said: I've had similar questions about the place of the Bible among Friends. In our faith environment we share worship space with people of other faith traditions. *Faith and Practice* functions as our theology, it's how we share our space and organize ourselves as a community. I've done a search [in the electronic version of F&P] and the Bible is mentioned several times; also it is the only religious book referenced directly.

A Friend said: F&P strikes a good balance because it points us in a direction but it doesn't tell us how to get there. We all rely on revelation of some kind, whether from the Bible or not. The balance of biblical references in F&P is good for Friends. Maybe as a group we should speak more openly with each other about our spiritual lives.

A Friend said: We are a loving community. Everyone seems to feel safe and to enjoy each others' company even though we don't often speak during Meeting for Worship.