

## Faith and Practice Visit

### Floyd Friends Meeting

April 14, 2013

Presenter: Sheila Bach

Recorder: Riley Robinson

Eight people were present from Floyd, one a first-time visitor.

Sheila gave a brief history about the work on this project. She explained that we would proceed in the manner of worship sharing, and gave a handout with the four queries.

**• *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?***

A Friend answered that, as one who had been a friend for 15 years, the answer was definitely yes.

Another Friend answered that, as someone new to Friends, the answer was also yes, that the book works as a good starting point.

A third Friend said that as a member of the Meeting for six years, and as Clerk of the Meeting, it has been her reliable reference guide for quotes for protocol and for a number of needs. She also said that the word "adequately" is important. Although faith may be too deep for words, she does need something in words, and this book is more than just adequate.

Another Friend said that she had been given a *Faith and Practice* when she came to this Meeting, and that having come from churches where there were creeds, the *Faith and Practice* is very helpful in that it helped her to get an articulated sense of who Friends are and how we operate.

Another Friend said, "I first came about five years ago. I came with an adamant position that faith was beyond words. I joined when I felt the Quakers would not tell me what to believe. This book gives me that room. We looked at this book for eight months. We then put an advertisement in the local paper supporting same gender marriage. This book was very helpful and grounding us in that process."

**• 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 yes, and then said that the word “assist” is important it implies that the material is not directive. There is an important difference. There are many helpful things in the book, and that’s what is needed.

The Clerk said that the quotes are “helping me to be guided, not just as the Clerk, but as a Friend as I reach out to members of the Meeting. I refer to the listening part, which is a challenge for me, but which is very helpful.”

An attender said that the issue of accountability can be a difficulty. “Our culture is not strong on it. People are not always comfortable with it. However, if we are not accountable, I’m not sure how much good we can do, or how effective the book can be. What is accountability when it comes to this book?” The attender then asked who are we accountable to, and where does it say that? He allowed as how he had not spent a lot of time with the book yet.

Riley gave some examples of how Friends incorporate accountability into the way they work.

- He said that when an individual feels that they might have a leading or calling, they season it with the community, often in the form of a clearness committee. And if they go on to do some work, especially if it’s in the name of the Meeting, then there is usually some kind of support committee that meets with them regularly.
- Another example is that no one can speak for the Meeting without the approval of Meeting for Business, and that no one can speak for a committee without the approval of the committee.
- Riley also said that for Friends, our practice and our deeds are our accountability as well. It matters less what we say about issues and problems and matters more that we actually do something creative and constructive about them.
- Friends’ practices, such as membership and marriage, are both purposeful and meaningful, clarifying and establishing relationships between individuals, couples and the Meeting.
- He gave the example of the American Friends Service Committee’s policy on civil disobedience. This is very careful process about making that choice, and a very clear distinction about when and how one might choose not to obey a law. It’s made very clear that the laws are made by the wider community in which we all

participate, and that it's all the more important to respect and live with established laws in the event that we are spiritually led to civil disobedience.

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

A Friend noted that the section on marriage speaks as though there is an assumption that both parties being married are Friends. Some queries might help for the circumstance when one member the couple is not a Friend. She also noted that as a former Clerk of the Meeting, the description of Meeting for Business tends to sound as though unity on a decision is not achieved until the position is unanimous. Other sources on clerking certainly say that that's the ideal, and emphasize importance of hearing everyone who wishes to speak, but the sources emphasize that the Meeting may decide to go forward on a decision even if one or two members are uncomfortable with it by using the process of allowing someone to stand aside, for instance. The Friend may submit some wording that might be helpful.

An attender talked about the index and table of contents. He noted that on page 48, the section on equality speaks of Friends leading the way on social issues. He would appreciate more specificity in the index and elsewhere. He said it's important to enumerate issues to make visible our concerns. He couldn't find much visibility on LGBTQ issues, an area in which Friends have led. He noted that lack of visibility in our society is a big part of the problem. People try and make uncomfortable issues go away by ignoring and obscuring them.

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

Friends felt that this was definitely true.

One Friend felt that having more queries is better, and appreciated that the Voices section offers much guidance while making it clear that you have to decide for yourself.

A Friend said that she always feels like she's being guided by her inner Spirit as she goes through the book. It's different than other books. "This is spirit led, and I'm drawn to it."

An attender asked what might be done about clarifying references to gender identity and sexual orientation. Sheila said that content is being added about those concerns.

Sheila went on to say that material has been added in a number of areas, including aging. She noted that the index has been increased greatly. She expanded on this, noting that some people like the 1988 queries better, but that these seem to invite "yes or no" answers, which is not always very challenging. Sheila said that the committee is

planning on a meeting in late June or early July, probably at Langley Hill Meeting, for Friends from Monthly Meetings to comment on and discuss the *Faith and Practice* in each other's presence.

A newer Friend commented that it's an interesting experience reading a book of this length where most of the actual writing is not attributed. It was explained that Friends corporate business process means that, when a minute or other piece of writing is approved by the body, it then speaks for all Friends in that body and is of the body. Sheila pointed out that on page 285 there is a history of the *Faith and Practice* and on page 287 is a list of people who have been involved.