

Faith and Practice

of Baltimore Yearly Meeting
of the Religious Society of Friends

First Adopted by Baltimore Yearly Meeting Sessions, 1988
With changes through 2025

Baltimore Yearly Meeting
17100 Quaker Lane
Sandy Spring, MD 20860

This manual of Faith and Practice of Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends is composed of statements of faith and of advice on organization and practice considered relevant for this present time. It is issued in the expectation, however, that another generation of seekers on the road toward Truth will make changes.

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Vision Statement

Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by; but that all, with a measure of the light, which is pure and holy, may be guided: and so in the light walking and abiding, these things may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not in the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.

(The Quaker Elders at Balby, 1656, quoting 2 Corinthians 3:6)

Baltimore Yearly Meeting is a worshiping community, gathered in the presence of the Divine, affirming that of God in every person. The Yearly Meeting knits together Friends from the Chesapeake to the Appalachians into the larger Religious Society of Friends. As Quakers, we seek to know and follow God's will for us as a gathered people, to speak the truth that is revealed to us, and to listen to the truth that is revealed to others.

We aspire to listen deeply and inclusively to each other, to actively welcome all, and to attend in joy and faith to the Inward Teacher, whom some call Light, some call Spirit, and some call Christ.

We Friends are of many skin colors, ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, gender identities, sexual orientations, abilities, stages of life, and socially constructed racial identities. We are all seeking the Spirit's presence in our lives, and in our life together. We recognize that some of us have experienced oppression and marginalization in ways that others have not. We aspire to live as members of the blessed community, which is one of liberation, equity, and great diversity across all differences.

We aspire to teach and nourish Quaker ways of worship and service for this and future generations, to uphold and promote Quaker values, and to support Friends Meetings in our region.

We seek to expand opportunities for Friends to meet together and know each other in that which is eternal.

We seek to serve others in love, to share our gifts and resources, to reach out to those in need, both friends and strangers, and to witness in the world to our shared experience of the infinite love of God.

Vision Statement approved by Baltimore Yearly Meeting in Session 2011 and revised in Session 2016.

Introductory Statement

The Religious Society of Friends holds as the basis of its faith the belief that God endows each human being with a measure of the Divine Spirit. The gift of God's presence and the light of God's truth have been available to all people in all ages.

Friends find this manifestation of God exemplified in Jesus of Nazareth. The Divine Spirit became so wholly Jesus' own that his teaching, example, and sacrificial life reveal the will of God to humanity.

As within ourselves we become conscious of the same Spirit (the "Inward Light" or the "Christ Within"), and as we submit ourselves to its leadings, we also are enabled to live in conformity to the will of God.

Love, the outworking of the Divine Spirit, is the most potent influence that can be applied in human affairs, and this application of love to the whole of life is seen by the Society of Friends as the core of the Christian gospel.

The immanence of God implies that all persons are children of the Divine and brothers and sisters one of another. All have the capacity to discern spiritual truth and to hold direct communion with God. No mediator, rite, or outward sacrament is a necessary condition of worship. Inspiration and guidance may be realized through meeting with others in group worship, where vision is made dearer by the shared experience of those present.

The Society of Friends has no formal creed. Over the years Friends have made many attempts to set down the nature of their faith. Some of these statements, like the letter of George Fox to the Governor of Barbados in the 17th century or the Richmond Declaration drawn up by one group of Friends in the late 19th, have been grounded in Christian orthodoxy. Others, like the writings of Isaac Penington in the 17th century or of Thomas Kelly in the 20th, have a close kinship with the insights of mystics of many ages and many religious traditions. None speaks for all Friends or for all times. We are a religious fellowship based

on common religious ideals and experiences rather than on creed or liturgy.

Each person must prayerfully seek individual guidance and must follow the Light found within. Each will be helped by studying the developing interpretations of God in the Bible and the ideas of the great spiritual leaders of all faiths.

Especially will help be found as one ponders the life and the teaching of Jesus. All seekers who in spirit and in truth try to find and follow the will of God and who are in sympathy with the principles and practices of Friends, we welcome to our fellowship.

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Part I: Faith

A. Historical Sketch

The seventeenth century was a time of political and religious ferment in the British Isles. The formalism of the Church of England had become a hindrance to many spiritual seekers, and new sects were coming into being. The Church itself was in some confusion between Puritan and anti-Puritan tendencies. In mid-century the Puritans prevailed, both politically and religiously. They dethroned and beheaded King Charles I and instituted the Commonwealth, which ruled the British domain for more than a decade. It may have been significant in the religious controversies that the “authorized” version of the Bible, the so-called “King James” Bible of 1611, had made the Scriptures available to more English-speaking people than ever before.

George Fox, who initiated the gathering of the people later called Quakers, was born in Leicestershire in 1624. He was an unusually serious boy. As a teenager he troubled his parents by refusing to attend Sunday services, preferring to spend the time in Bible reading and solitary meditation. From the age of nineteen, George Fox went on frequent walking journeys over the midland counties of England, talking about spiritual matters with those he met along the way. Clergymen were often confounded by his incisive interpretation of Scripture, and could provide little guidance for the young man. After much searching and despair, he heard an inner voice that said:

There is One, even Christ Jesus, who can speak to thy condition.

(George Fox, 1647)

Here and there he found kindred spirits, and he continued to experience “openings,” such as:

...I saw the infinite love of God. I saw also that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. And in that I also saw the infinite love of God...

(George Fox, 1647)

And again:

Now the Lord God hath opened to me...that every [one] was enlightened by the divine light of Christ...and that they that believed in it came out of condemnation and came to the light of life, and became children of it...

(George Fox, 1648)

Such revelations led to a belief in a “seed” of the Divine in every human being, usually called by Friends the Inner Light, or the Light of Christ. Fox taught that those who led their lives in strict obedience to God’s will would come to “walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.” No clergyman, no intercessor, no liturgy or ritual was required. The only need was to experience the Divine Presence—nothing else mattered. That Presence became so real to the early Quakers that they marveled that “Christ was come to teach his people himself.” They also discovered that divine revelation came equally to women, men, and children. Some of the most active and intrepid ministers were women.

At first Fox and his followers called themselves Children of Truth, or Children of Light, or sometimes Friends of Truth. Because of persecutions they were often in courts and prisons. Judge Bennett of Derby first dubbed them Quakers in 1650 because in their earnestness they bade him tremble. So, they came to be known as Quakers, although they eventually adopted the name Society of Friends, or the Religious Society of Friends. The name “Quaker” first given in derision has become a badge of honor and is used interchangeably with “Friends.”

On a journey northward in 1652, George Fox climbed Pendle Hill in Lancashire near the border of Yorkshire and saw a vision of “a great people to be gathered.” He continued northward about thirty miles to Preston-Patrick Chapel. There he found the people, congregations of “seekers” who had been gathering for worship. These people, including their ministers, responded to Fox, and within two years he had sparked the emergence from the area of more than sixty Quaker ministers, men and women, on fire with an old faith become new. Within two more years their gospel had been carried to every county of England, to Wales, to Scotland, to Ireland, to several countries of Europe, and to such distant places as Constantinople and the American colonies.

Margaret Fell, wife of Judge Fell, was “convinced of the Truth” in 1652. Swarthmore Hall, the Fells’ home on the northwest coast of England, became a meeting place and refuge from persecution for George Fox and other Quaker ministers. Margaret Fell corresponded extensively with Friends everywhere and helped sustain the equality of women with men in the Society of Friends.

1. Quakers in Maryland and Virginia

The first Quaker known to visit the colonies of Maryland and Virginia was Elizabeth Harris, who came in 1655 or 1656 and found an immediate response. She was followed by a stream of others traveling in the ministry of the new faith. Many people of Maryland and Virginia joined the new movement. Although few early records of Virginia Yearly Meeting exist, it appears that George Fox initiated the first movement toward organization in that colony during his visits in 1672 and 1673.

In Fourth Month 1672, John Burnyeat, who was about to return to England after a lengthy ministry, called a General Meeting (to last several days) on West River, south of present-day Annapolis, for all Friends in the Province of Maryland. It happened that George Fox and several other English Friends had been visiting in Barbados and Jamaica and arrived in Maryland in time for that historic meeting, which marks the beginning of Baltimore Yearly Meeting of Friends.

In his *Journal* George Fox recorded this event:

Then there was a meeting appointed by John Burnyeat about three score miles off, which held four days, which we went to though we were weary. And there came to it...many considerable people of the world, and a glorious meeting we had. After the public meeting there were men's and women's meetings [for business] and I opened to Friends the service thereof and all were satisfied.

(George Fox, 1672)

Although little opposition was met in Maryland, which tolerated any Christian sect, the situation was different in Virginia, where only the established Church of England was allowed. There was much persecution, particularly on the Eastern Shore, forcing the Quakers to migrate northward into Maryland. Elsewhere in Virginia, the Quaker movement prospered in spite of opposition.

By 1700 there were about 3,000 Quakers in Maryland, possibly the largest religious body in the colony at that time. The Yearly Meeting for Maryland held two sessions annually, one at West River and the other at Third Haven (now Easton) on the Eastern Shore. After 1774 sessions were held but once a year, alternating between the eastern and western shores of the Chesapeake Bay. In 1785 the western shore meeting place was transferred from West River to Baltimore.

With the building and improvement of roads on the Eastern Shore, Friends there were drawn toward Philadelphia as a center of commerce. At the same time the Friends from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting who were migrating to Northern Virginia, Western Maryland, and adjacent parts of Pennsylvania and establishing meetings there, found Baltimore to be their urban magnet. In 1790, by mutual agreement of the two yearly meetings, all Maryland's Eastern Shore meetings were assigned to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and all meetings in Northern Virginia, Western Maryland, Nottingham Quarter and meetings farther west in Pennsylvania were assigned to Baltimore Yearly Meeting.

2. Compensation of Native Americans

Unlike Friends settling with William Penn, who purchased their land fairly with freely signed deeds, those moving into the Shenandoah Valley found no natives remaining with whom to negotiate. As early as 1738, Quaker settlers in that area were pricked by their conscience as to how their lands had been procured, and by 1778 many of them had subscribed to a fund designated "for the benefit of the Indians who were formerly the Native Owners of the lands on which we now live, or their descendants, if to be found, and if not for the benefit of other Indians." Likewise, English Friends of tender conscience helped add to the fund. In 1795, Baltimore Yearly Meeting first appointed an Indian Affairs Committee, one of its charges being to administer these funds. This endowment remains to this day, as does the concern of these early Friends, and the effort for mutual understanding and cooperation continues to be actively pursued.

3. Slavery, Civil War, and Reconstruction

Many Friends in the southern colonies, and some in the North, were slave

owners. However, through the labors of John Woolman (1720-1772) and other concerned Quakers, members of the Society gradually became convinced that it was contrary to the love exemplified by Jesus that any human being should be held in bondage. Baltimore Yearly Meeting in 1777 concluded that any members holding slaves were to be disowned; Virginia Yearly Meeting made the same decision in 1784 after Friends persuaded the Virginia legislature to pass a law permitting manumission, and by 1790 nearly all Quaker slave-holders had indeed freed their slaves. Life in slave states became difficult for those who had freed their slaves. For this and other reasons, many Quakers from Georgia, the Carolinas, Virginia, and some from Maryland migrated west. The Society disappeared in Georgia and South Carolina and became greatly reduced in North Carolina and Virginia.

As a result of the westward movement, Baltimore Yearly Meeting set off Ohio Yearly Meeting in 1812, the first Friends Yearly Meeting west of the Alleghenies. In 1844 the remnant of Virginia Yearly Meeting decided to become a Half-Year's Meeting within Baltimore Yearly Meeting, Orthodox.

During the Civil War Baltimore Yearly Meeting Friends suffered not only because of their refusal to participate, but also because many of their farms and homes were in the path of the fighting. Young men faced disownment by their Meetings if they enlisted in the army, or imprisonment if they refused to be drafted or hire a substitute. In the North, President Lincoln's understanding of the dictates of conscience moderated the persecution somewhat, but in the South many Friends died in prison because of their refusal to join the army. After the war Friends responded to the overwhelming need of the freed slaves for food, clothing, and education. They also provided aid to Quakers in the devastated states of the South, particularly North Carolina, during the Reconstruction Period.

4. "Quietism," division, and reunion

Through the 18th and part of the 19th centuries the Society changed from a vital movement of convinced Christians bent on spreading the Light of Truth, to a group feeling threatened by contamination from an indifferent world. The emphasis shifted to discipline for survival, so that the Truth as seen by their forebears would not be lost. Marriage outside the Society or before a "priest,"

being seen in a church, participation in war or militia drill, failure to attend meeting, incurring debts, drunkenness, brawling, and fornication were typical grounds for the disownments which greatly reduced the Society.

But new ideas inevitably crept through the walls built around the Quaker communities. Tensions arose between Friends: sometimes between younger and older, rural and urban, or wealthy and less well-to-do Friends. Sometimes there were divisions even among Meetings in a Yearly Meeting. Theological controversy arose over Christian authority. Which should have primacy—the direct revelation of the Inner Light, or the Scriptures? One’s direct experience of God, or personal salvation through Christ’s sacrifice? Elias Hicks became the apostle of Christian authority through the Inner Light.

In 1827 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting split into “Hicksite” and “Orthodox” Yearly Meetings, and the following year Baltimore and several other Yearly Meetings did likewise. Four-fifths of the constituency in Baltimore became Hicksite. This controversy did not divide the small Virginia Yearly Meeting, which remained Orthodox.

A further division occurred in the 1840s and 1850s between a conservative branch of Orthodox Friends associated with the name of John Wilbur, and a more evangelical branch of Orthodox Friends who had come under the influence of traveling evangelists, notably Joseph John Gurney from England. This Gurneyite movement partly accounts for the existence today of Friends with an evangelical theology. The Wilburite group long maintained the testimonies of plain dress and speech, and continued the traditional worship based on silence, as did all Hicksites. After 1870 a number of Meetings adopted a programmed form of worship and engaged the services of pastors. This movement only slightly influenced the two Baltimore Yearly Meetings, though it is still widespread elsewhere.

Feelings ran high between the two principal groups, and Meetings not inclined to divide were eventually forced to choose sides. Not until 1866 were the two Baltimore Yearly Meetings able to appoint committees to work together amicably on the sale of the Yearly Meeting pastureland in the city. The fact that two members of the Janney family, each representing one of the separated

Yearly Meetings, served on these committees, illustrates the depth of the division.

With the passing of years, the early bitterness between the two Baltimore Yearly Meetings gradually became less acute. Both Yearly Meetings participated in service groups such as the Associated Committee of Friends on Indian Affairs and the American Friends Service Committee. Eventually the annual sessions of the two Yearly Meetings were held simultaneously, enabling them to have some joint sessions and to appoint some joint committees. After World War II some new Monthly Meetings affiliated with both Yearly Meetings, and most divided local Meetings reunited, taking dual affiliation with both Yearly Meetings.

In 1957 the two Baltimore Yearly Meetings began holding their sessions jointly in the same location. Finally, on January 1, 1968, after 140 years of separation, including three years of intense planning for reunion, the two Baltimore Yearly Meetings became again one Yearly Meeting.

5. Statement on Spiritual Unity, 1964

During the process of reuniting, the following statement from the Committee of Ten, 1964, was accepted:

The Committees appointed by the two Baltimore Yearly Meetings to study together the question of what in our religious experience would justify the union of the Yearly Meetings see that much spiritual basis for unity now exists among us. This is evident in the uniting of a number of local meetings, so that at present almost half the membership of the two Yearly Meetings is in united Meetings; in our Young Friends movement; in the joint work of our committees; in our cooperative efforts of many kinds; and in many shared experiences of worship. All these joint activities obviously would not exist without some measure of unity of spirit.

Our two Yearly Meetings have a wide, rich, and diverse heritage, chiefly from historic Christianity interpreted by Quakerism. We not only tolerate diversity, we encourage and cherish it. In every local Meeting we struggle, usually patiently, with the problems that arise from our

divergent convictions, and we usually find ourselves richer for our differences. In most if not all of the Monthly Meetings within the two Yearly Meetings will be found, successfully coexisting, persons as far apart in religious vocabulary and practice as there are anywhere in the Yearly Meetings. Yet these Friends worship together every Sunday, and share nourishment for their spiritual life. Such association is beneficial and even necessary.

Friends in our two Yearly Meetings are clear on certain principles which are so basic and essential that we tend to take them for granted and forget that they are essential and probably the only essentials. We all are clear that religion is a matter of inward, immediate experience. We all acknowledge the guidance of the Inner Light—the Christ Within—God’s direct, continuing revelation. All our insights are subject to testing by the insight of the group, by history and tradition, and by the Bible and the whole literature of religion. All the Meetings for Worship of our Monthly Meetings aspire to openness to God’s communication directly with every person. Worship is primarily on the basis of expectant waiting upon the Spirit, a communion with God in which mediators or symbols are not necessary. We are all clear that faith is directly expressed in our daily living. We all seek to move toward goals of human welfare, equality, and peace.

We have a profound, often-tested, durable respect for each individual’s affirmation of [their] own religious experience, which must be judged not only by [their] words but also by [their] life. From the stimulus of dissimilarity new insights often arise. Each Friend must, as always, work out for [themselves] their own understanding of religion; and each Monthly Meeting must, as always, fit its practice to its own situation and the needs of its members.

The consolidated Baltimore Yearly Meeting continued affiliation with both Friends General Conference (FGC) and Friends United Meeting (FUM), two organizations founded near the turn of the century by the two main branches of Quakerism, Hicksite and Orthodox respectively. The Yearly Meeting office was moved from Baltimore to Sandy Spring, Maryland.

6. Early Quaker Testimonies

The testimonies of Friends are a witness by which principles of the Society are translated into a mode of behavior sometimes contrary to the prevailing customs or law. While some of the testimonies adopted in the vastly different culture of seventeenth century England may seem quaint or obscure now, others are as vital today as when they were adopted. Some testimonies emerged later as Friends responded to conditions in a changing world which tended to deny the presence of God in every person or in which complete truthfulness or openness was being avoided. That every individual possesses a seed of the divine is the basis for most Quaker testimonies. In addition to the testimony against slavery, there are others which should be noted here.

One of the first testimonies articulated by Fox and adopted by early Quakers was that of equality of men and women before God. The testimony was evident in their marriage ceremony where both parties recited identical vows, their encouragement of women as ministers of the gospel, and the setting up of separate women's meetings for business. The latter was resisted by many at first, but ultimately adopted because it was felt that women would not speak in a mixed meeting. Women, along with the men, suffered imprisonment in the early years for their adherence to the testimonies and sometimes for simply having meetings for worship. Although women Friends have been recognized ministers throughout the last 300 years, the testimony of equality of both sexes has been fragile. The separate women's meetings were rarely equal to the men's and paralleled Quaker women's status in their homes. The actions of the women's business meetings were subject to final approval by the men while the men's business meetings controlled the money and property. Inspired by the original testimony, Quaker women in the nineteenth century rose to the forefront of the antislavery, women's suffrage, and temperance movements, often evoking the express disapproval of their meetings. In Lucretia Mott's words:

Let women then go on—not asking as a favor but claiming as right, the removal of all the hindrances to her elevation in the scale of being—let her receive encouragement for the proper cultivation of all her powers, so that she may enter profitably into the active business of life...Then, in the marriage union, the independence of the husband and wife will be

equal, their dependence mutual, and their obligations reciprocal.

(Lucretia Mott, 1849)

In response to a plea that "...the entire equality of women be recognized..." the Hicksite branch of Baltimore Yearly Meeting in 1870 restructured its committees to allow fuller participation by women. In 1890 the Orthodox branch deemed separate women's meetings to be no longer needed, and by 1903 the Hicksite branch had also merged the separate meetings for business.

It was the practice in the 17th century for men to remove their hats in the presence of their social superiors and even of their peers, but not of their inferiors. Friends refused hat honor in the presence of anyone, a practice which caused them much trouble, especially when they went before the king with their petitions. The practice in meetings for worship was to sit with hats on, but to remove the hat while speaking or praying.

Another sign of inequality of the times was in the use of personal pronouns. The flattery of the plural forms you and your was regularly used in address to a single person of equal or higher rank, but to one of lower rank the terms thou, thee, and thy were used. Friends used the singular, more familiar "plain speech" to all. This practice set them apart in succeeding centuries as the rest of the English-speaking world took the other course and came to use the plural forms indiscriminately.

The peace testimony was stated in 1660 in England when Friends declared they would not fight for any cause whatsoever. This testimony of non-participation in war in any form has been maintained by the Society of Friends ever since. In a world in which social, economic, and political conditions often lead to conflict and war, the peace testimony remains central to the broad structure of social concern.

The testimony of plainness in speech and living was adopted from the beginning. Friends wore clothes that were merely modest and functional, avoiding ostentation and decoration. The same principle carried over to their homes, meetinghouses, and furnishings. Art, music, drama, and dancing were considered vanities which took the minds of Friends away from the sober, godly

life or were a reminder of the excesses of the established church. Since the period of Quietism, when plainness was a badge of a “peculiar people” and a hedge against an evil world, the emphasis has shifted to simplicity and informality.

A testimony against the taking of oaths came directly from the New Testament, Matthew 5:34-37 and James 5:12.

Above all, brothers and sisters, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “Yes” be yes and your “No” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

(James 5:12)

Speaking the truth on all occasions has been a cardinal Quaker principle, and Friends believe the practice of taking oaths implies that a person might be telling lies on other occasions. This testimony caused Friends much distress, for in the first half-century of Quakerism, a neighbor could accuse a Quaker of being disloyal to the crown and have the accused taken into court and asked to swear the oath of allegiance. Refusal to take the oath might be followed by forfeiture of property, half going to the informer. In spite of such consequences, the testimony against taking oaths was generally observed. Most jurisdictions today acknowledge anyone’s right to affirm rather than swear.

Friends were always aware of the evils resulting from the consumption of alcohol. Drunkenness was considered to be a condition in which a person was not his or her true self. Friends became part of the temperance movement in the nineteenth century and maintained committees on temperance until recent times. Temperance meant abstinence, which was felt by many to be the only sure way to avoid addiction.

George Fox reminded Friends that the days of the week and the months of the year are named for pagan gods and ancient Roman emperors. As Christians they should not pay homage to these gods in the conduct of their everyday lives. Thence developed the custom of numbering the days of the week as First Day, Second Day, etc., and the months as First Month, Second Month, etc.

Holidays, Friends maintain, are no more holy than other days. Some, particularly

Christmas and Easter, had retained many of the trappings of the pagan holidays which had occurred at nearly the same time of year as the Christian ones, so Fox admonished Quakers to conduct their business on the supposedly holy days as they ordinarily would, and some Friends schools continued to hold classes on Christmas into the twentieth century. Gradually, however, recognition of major Christian holidays has become accepted by most Friends.

Many other activities commonly engaged in by the rest of humanity have been considered to be contrary to the testimonies of Friends. One example is gambling and speculation, because the gains therefrom are not earned through one's own labor and can cause serious loss to others; another is membership in secret societies because they are not open in their activities, are exclusive, and may tend to encourage the formation of conspiracies or may reduce sympathy for some portion of society.

Another corollary of the fundamental Quaker belief that there is the seed of God in every person is the testimony against paid ministry. George Fox in his early searching found the established clergy to be both corrupt and incompetent in spiritual matters. The Society recognized from its early times that some members possessed gifts of ministry, but abhorred any monetary reward for the practice of ministry as a trade rather than a calling. Friends might be released to travel in the ministry by provision for expenses and support of their families, but any sort of salary for such service was unheard of until the late nineteenth century.

For further discussion of current Quaker testimonies, see below under "The Life of the Spirit."

7. Enforcement of Testimonies

During the earliest period little need was felt for formal enforcement of the observance of the testimonies, although many controversies about them did arise among Quakers in the 17th century. But in the 18th and 19th centuries, conformity was enforced by threat of disownment, a measure often carried out. At the same time, rather than creedal statements to which members were required to assent, "Queries"—a set of penetrating questions—were used to remind Friends of the tenets of their faith. In the 20th century there has been

considerable variation in the use of queries.

For further information about the history of Baltimore Yearly Meeting, see *A History of Baltimore Yearly Meeting of Friends*, the tercentenary volume by Bliss Forbush. (Published by Baltimore Yearly Meeting of Friends, 17100 Quaker Lane, Sandy Spring, MD 20860, 1972, 155 pages.)

B. The Life of the Spirit

1. The Quaker Experience

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

(1 John 4:16)

Quakers directly experience a loving Spirit guiding us to live justly and peaceably; this Spirit is available to all.

Friends use many terms to refer to this inward spiritual reality. A few of these are Spirit, the Inward Light, Christ, the Divine, the Seed, Truth, and that of God in everyone. Ultimately this spiritual reality is beyond words. When Friends encounter names for the Divine that do not speak to their condition, they are encouraged to receive them with an open heart.

The first Friends experienced the dynamic reality of the Inward Light through the lens of the Bible.

The early Quakers explained that they were guided by the Light of Christ within them, the divine Light that existed in the beginning, incarnated in Jesus, and animates all created beings. Looking carefully at Scripture, they found many referees that described and confirmed their experience. They did not claim to have received something new, but...to have rediscovered the vibrant original form of true Christian faith. At the same time, they recognized that this divine Light is active not only in Christians but [active in] everyone as an Inward Teacher.

(Marcelle Martin, 2016)

Today, within BYM, a wide range of theologies are represented. The third paragraph of the BYM 1964 Statement on Spiritual Unity which addressed the 1828 division in BYM (see page 17 for the context), suggests an answer to what unites us as Quakers: We all acknowledge the guidance of the Inner Light—the Christ Within—God’s direct, continuing revelation. All our insights are subject to testing by the insight of the group, by history and tradition, and by the Bible and

the whole literature of religion. All the Meetings for Worship of our Monthly Meetings aspire to openness to God's communication directly with every person. Worship is primarily on the basis of expectant waiting upon the Spirit, a communion with God in which mediators or symbols are not necessary. We are all clear that faith is directly expressed in our daily living. We all seek to move toward goals of human welfare, equality, and peace.

Quakers wait in expectant silence to hear the voice of God. Whether in the silences between spoken messages in Meeting for Worship, in study, in meditation, in prayer, we practice patient attention to the spiritual ground around us. Often, by listening attentively, we are able to hear the Spirit in the authentic words of others.

Simple, respectful, prayerful listening is at least as good for the soul of the listener as for the person listened to.

(Pat Loring, 1997)

The Quaker experience can be challenging as we try to discern the Light in ourselves and in our interactions with the secular world, which may include work for justice, equity, peace, care for the earth, and the wellbeing of all. We often struggle as we work to deepen or re-deepen our faith and seek to love one another. When we open ourselves to the Spirit, especially as we struggle, we are inevitably changed.

We are transformed individually and collectively in order to become agents of transformation in the world. That's what it means to be a Quaker.

(Ben Pink Dandelion, 2014)

2. Meeting for Worship

The silence we value is not the mere outward silence of the lips. It is a deep quietness of heart and mind, a laying aside of all preoccupations with passing things—yes, even the workings of our own minds, a resolute fixing of the heart upon that which is unchangeable and eternal.

(Caroline Emelia Stephen, 1891)

a. Introduction

Meeting for Worship is the heart of every Friends meeting, usually held on First Day (Sunday). In addition, many Friends make time for daily worship and reflection. Major life events, such as Quaker marriages and memorial services, are based in worship, as are our monthly meetings for business and committee meetings. Sometimes, Friends ask a small group to worship with them for personal healing. Friends may also organize worship as part of public witness. Our youth develop their faith and find their voices as they worship in monthly meetings, Quaker camps, schools, and youth programs.

b. Quaker Worship

Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts, and then thou wilt feel the principle of God...

(George Fox, 1658)

Friends have a living, growing faith. Over centuries, Quaker worship has evolved. Many Quakers in the world today, including some in BYM, practice a primarily vocal form of worship, facilitated by designated ministers. These worship services may include exuberance, Bible verses, hymns, praise singing, prepared and spontaneous messages, and a planned movement through the time together. Most Friends meetings within BYM practice waiting worship grounded in silence which is described in detail below. In all forms of Quaker worship, Friends transcend self and together enter into unity with the Spirit.

Early Friends trusted that the guidance of the Inward Teacher could be discerned directly and that Truth continues to be revealed. In worship, we enter into stillness in order to feel the Spirit of love within us and among us, to give ourselves over to it, and discern what it would have us do in our lives.

Reaching this place of stillness is sometimes referred to as “centering.” Some people center by focusing on their breathing; some by remembering a poem or song or prayer; some by silently welcoming each person in the room, surrounding them with love and light; and, some Friends directly enter the silence and center. Centering allows us to join together in worship, opening our hearts to the Divine.

It is not a time for “thinking,” for deliberate, intellectual exercise. It is a time for spiritual receptivity, so it is important not to clog one’s mind with its own busy activities. Nonetheless, thoughts will occur in the silence. Some thoughts will be distractions and should be set aside...But some thoughts or images or feelings may arise that seem to come from a deeper source and merit attention.

(Chel Avery, 2011)

Quaker worship is a communal process. It is more deeply grounded when Friends come prepared for worship by staying in touch with Spirit throughout the week with daily prayers, spiritual readings, and seeking to connect with that of God in each person with whom they interact in work, school, family, and community.

We expect to encounter God in our lives, in our worship, in our work, in our lives together.

(Carl Magruder, 2021)

c. Vocal Ministry

Sometimes during worship, the Spirit leads one or more Friends to speak out of the silence. Vocal ministry arises from a leading, a persistent sense that one is being compelled to rise and allow the Spirit to speak through us. Before speaking, Friends go through a process of discernment: Is this a message for me? Is this a message to be shared privately with others? Is this a message from Spirit to be shared with all present? Sometimes a message is not yet ripe, or comes clearly but is meant only for the person receiving it, not for the group.

Once I sat in meeting for worship absolutely certain that I had a message which needed to be shared. However, I felt no leading...that I was the one to give the message. I waited and waited, feeling I would burst from the tension, until a woman across the room got up and gave

my message much better than I could ever have given it.

(Shirley Dodson, 1980)

Some Friends are led to speak frequently, and others only rarely; yet the message of a whispering child, a gurgling baby, or an adult who seldom speaks may be as moving and helpful as that of a person more practiced in ministry. Visitors and newcomers, who may be less familiar with Quakers, can also offer powerful messages.

Friends do not come to meeting prepared to speak or not to speak. If physically able, Friends stand to share messages; they are encouraged to speak clearly and loudly enough so all can hear, with as few words as possible but as many as necessary. Typically, Friends speak only once. If afterwards a message feels incomplete, perhaps the rest of the message is meant to be shared by another. Friends who do not speak aloud uphold the meeting by their worshipful presence. Even if not a word is spoken, the meeting for worship can be profoundly nurturing.

In Meeting for Worship, we open our hearts so the Spirit may heal us, teach us, lead us, and enfold us in infinite love and peace. In worship, we can feel the profound connections we have with each other and the rest of the natural world; we can experience repentance, forgiveness, and guidance. During worship, the Light may reveal impediments to giving and receiving healing and love. Worship can renew and strengthen us to return to the world with inspired vision and commitment to live faithfully.

It is wondrous when Friends experience what is called a “gathered meeting,” when participants unite on a deep level.

In the Quaker practice of group worship...come special times when an electric hush and solemnity and depth of power steals over the worshipers. A blanket of divine covering comes over the room, and a quickening Presence pervades us... an objective, dynamic Presence which enfolds us all [and] nourishes our souls...

(Thomas R. Kelly, 1944)

d. Challenges

Even when Friends experience spiritual emptiness, their presence adds to the community and completes it. Journals and writings of past Friends describe long periods of spiritual dryness, when Spirit seemed distant or even absent. Continued participation in worship and in the life of the Meeting can ease the feeling of disconnection from the Divine presence. Over time, a renewed and deepened sense of spiritual grounding may occur.

Open unto me — light for my darkness. Open unto me — courage for my fear. Open unto me — hope for my despair. Open unto me — peace for my turmoil. Open unto me — joy for my sorrow.

Open unto me — strength for my weakness. Open unto me — wisdom for my confusion. Open unto me — forgiveness for my sins. Open unto me — tenderness for my toughness. Open unto me — love for my hates. Open unto me — thy Self for my self. Lord, Lord, open unto me!

(Howard Thurman, 1953)

Sometimes there can be disruptions to the flow of worship. Friends may experience a particular message as jarring or challenging, yet the words shared may ultimately deepen the worship experience. A message may be given that doesn't speak to your condition. Let it go; it may be meant for someone else.

If the nature or frequency of messages becomes harmful to the health of a meeting community, the committee in your meeting responsible for worship is tasked with responding. The BYM Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee is also a potential resource. With effort and reliance on the Divine, Friends trust the meeting community can be healed and even grow stronger.

True worship is a living experience. By and through it we enter into a life so vital, so vivid, so large and glorious that, by comparison, our life of ordinary activities seems narrow, dull, dead. By bodily action the body comes alive. By mental action the mind comes alive. So by spiritual action the spirit comes alive. Worship is spiritual action. By means of it our spirits awake, mature, and grow up to God.

(Jean Toomer, 1947)

3. Use and Nurture of Gifts

You are my friends if you do what I command you.

(John 15:14)

Every Friend is called to be a servant of God. Each of us has God-given gifts or talents, which we are obliged to develop and use to the glory of God. Each of us is encouraged to seek the ways in which we are called to minister to others. “Speak, for your servant is listening” is our prayer (I Samuel 3:10).

We are obliged also to recognize and nurture the gifts of other Friends. The spiritual quality of our meetings for worship deepens when those who are led to speak out of the silence receive encouragement and help. The fabric of the Meeting community and the larger community is strengthened when Friends who serve the community receive loving support from other Friends.

Monthly Meetings may wish to recognize in some way the special gifts of certain Friends, in the ministry of the word, in Bible interpretation, First Day School teaching, peace witness, prison visiting, counseling, or the like. One way is to acknowledge the gift in the minutes of the Meeting. Such formal recognition expresses approval of the Friends’ contributions and may affirm their suitability to interpret the Society of Friends to the larger community.

Some Meetings may choose to continue the historical practice of recording ministers. Meetings wishing to acknowledge gifts in ministry by recording may consult the Yearly Meeting Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee.

4. Prayer and Meditation

I think a quiet spirit before the Lord and not always looking out for “concerns,” but knowing how to be still, is a very great point in the religious life.

(Elizabeth Fry, 1847)

Nurturing the life of the Spirit requires frequent communication with the Divine Spirit. It is not sufficient to rely solely on an hour (or less) on First Day mornings, or on brief moments of silence before meals or committee meetings. We should make room in each day to know that of God within ourselves. God’s help and healing can be sought in many ways, including vocal or silent prayer, meditation,

visualization, silent listening, and confident affirmation. Friends seek harmony with the Divine Will, individually or in groups, sometimes laying our concerns before God, sometimes asking for guidance, sometimes giving thanks for the beauty and blessing in our lives.

5. The Scriptures

George Fox had a profound knowledge and perceptive understanding of the Bible. From the very beginning Friends put much emphasis on the Scriptures. They used the Bible in private devotion and in the study of what it reveals of God's dealing with people throughout history. However, the Bible was read less often in Quaker meetings than in most other forms of Christian public worship. When used in meeting it was usually quoted from memory rather than read, although in modern times it is sometimes read, often as a basis for a message to follow.

Many differing attitudes toward the Bible can be found among Friends, but a few statements find general acceptance:

In the experience of Friends, the Bible can be rightly understood only in the light of the Spirit which inspired it—the same Holy Spirit which is available to all. Although the word of God can be found in the Bible, inspiration may also be found elsewhere. The closing of the canon of Scripture did not signal the end of Divine inspiration.

Any part, any verse of the Bible can best be understood in the light of the whole, so that care should be taken in the use of passages removed from their contexts. Detailed understanding of the Bible can be reached only through study of the times and circumstances of the writing, in the light of various commentaries and translations. A few Friends have become known far beyond the boundaries of the Society as Biblical scholars.

In the 20th century, Friends, like many other Christian groups, deplore the diminished knowledge of and interest in the Bible. Study of the Bible, especially in the light of modern scholarship, can be most rewarding. Meetings are encouraged to include Bible study in religious education.

6. The Practice of the Life of the Spirit

In the experience of Friends, faith in God finds its expression in a way of life based on spiritual rather than material values. We place authority of the Divine Spirit above any outward authority. By testing the perception of conscience against the personal and collective experience of others, we hold our plans and concerns up to an Inner Light which will stand the trial of time. A good friend who can support one's search may be helpful with such testing; Friends may choose to set up "spiritual friendships" designed to encourage and mutually uphold their spiritual journeys. We respect the insights found in the lives and writings of spiritual men and women of all ages and take particular inspiration from the ministry of Jesus. Jesus' command to love one another is the ideal of Friends' practice.

7. The Meeting as Caring Community

The guidance of the Inner Light has generally led Friends to common standards of conduct. We believe that a vital faith must apply to daily life. Through sharing personal spiritual experiences with others, our own insights are clarified and our convictions undergirded. Meetings can help each of us to gain spiritual strength for the good ordering of our lives and the right direction of our energies.

We must be concerned about the welfare of every member of the Meeting community. While Friends need to guard against prying or invasion of privacy, it is nevertheless essential that Meetings be aware of the spiritual and material needs of members of the community and express caring concern in appropriate ways. Many Meetings have found that specially formed support or clearness groups, either appointed by the Meeting or informally gathered, are a helpful way to minister to special needs within the Meeting.

While Quakers believe that a seed of God is in every human being, it is sometimes easier to believe this of persons at a distance than it is of those near at hand. This is particularly true when the need arises to address contentious issues. A meeting community should always seek to consider openly matters at issue, seeking a loving resolution of conflict, rather than to preserve a semblance of community by ignoring issues. Even when resolution is not immediate, the Meeting should make room for different expressions of

continuing revelation while persisting in earnest search for unity.

At the same time, it is well for Meetings consciously to cultivate fellowship and unity. The goal, in George Fox's words, is to "know one another in that which is eternal, which was before the world was." Religious education programs for Friends of all ages are a primary bond. In the common experience of worship we draw together in a most essential way. The discussion of matters of concern, as well as fellowship based on recreation, intellectual pursuits, music, and other aesthetic interests, can help unify the Meeting community. Working together also builds bonds of trust, understanding, and communication. In all things the principle of simplicity suggests that leisure activities, working, and faith be compatible and complementary.

8. Personal Life

The individual Friend should lead a life rooted in an awareness of God's presence in all times and places. Although special times and locations may provide helpful reminders of the need for spiritual communion, they cannot take the place of turning daily to God for guidance. The foundation for all our personal life and social relations should be the consciousness of the Holy Spirit.

Sincerity, simplicity, and moderation are vital to all the dealings of life. We advise the observance of care in speech and the use of only such statements as convey truth without exaggeration or omission of essential fact. Taking legal oaths implies a double standard of truthfulness and is contrary to the teaching of Jesus.

Self-indulgent habits and luxurious living dull our awareness and make us insensitive to the needs of others and the leading of the Spirit. Ostentation and extravagant expenditure should not be a part of Friends' lives. Friends should be particularly aware of this in planning marriages, funerals, social gatherings, or public occasions. True simplicity does not consist of particular forms or the absence of grace, symmetry, and beauty, but of avoiding over-indulgence, maintaining humility of spirit, and keeping material surroundings in proportion to human needs.

Friends' longstanding testimony against the use, production, or sale of tobacco

and alcoholic beverages is not fully accepted by some. For many, however, complete abstinence is the only effective way to avoid the dangers of the use of these materials. Friends are in unity against illegal narcotics and mind-altering substances, now readily available. Use of any of these materials has adverse effects which reach beyond the individual to harm the family and the community; dealing with illegal drugs also supports a criminal underground. Even legitimate prescription drugs can be used inappropriately and excessively. All these usages deaden the individual to life and spiritual values.

For those trapped in substance abuse, such advice may seem hollow. Commonalities exist between addictive behaviors with these substances and other compulsive actions, such as in the areas of eating disorders, gambling, overwork, and physical abuse. The causes go deep and may not be fully understood, but the resulting pain, fear, desperation, and denial, damaging the abuser and all those around that person, need to be supportively recognized. A Meeting community should be ready to listen non-judgmentally, offer information about sources of help, refuse to enable people to continue in harmful patterns, and continue to offer an environment free from addictive practices.

We are faced at every hand with enticements to risk money in anticipation of disproportionate gain through gambling. Some governments employ gambling as a means of raising revenue, even presenting it as a civic virtue. The Religious Society of Friends continues to bear testimony against betting, gambling, lotteries, speculation, or any other endeavor to receive material gain without equivalent exchange, believing that we owe an honest return for what we receive. Indulgence in games of chance blunts a proper sense of obligation.

How we use our working hours, our leisure, and our resources has direct bearing on our spiritual life. Time for recreation is needed to refresh spirit, mind, and body. Our use of time may determine whether the Divine Spirit grows within us or is crowded out.

We are called upon to be stewards of the rich provisions which God has made for all creation. As Friends we are advised to consider the effects of our charitable gifts and of all our expenditures, in the light of our concern for the

right and fair sharing of the world's resources.

9. Home Life

a. Living with Self and Others

Friends have a loving concern for the varieties of supportive relationships that exist. We realize that the range of long-term mutual commitments is now wider than traditionally accepted. Our Meeting communities now include persons living alone, two-parent families, single-parent families, married and unmarried couples, homosexual and heterosexual couples, single adults or extended families sharing a household, and larger communal groups. At present Friends are divided on the wisdom or rightness of some of these relationships. Nevertheless, we recognize that there are many kinds of domestic living situations in which individuals have made long-term commitments to each other and in which a caring, sharing, supportive relationship can grow. We are all called to make our primary relationships responsible, loving, mutually enabling, and spiritually enriching.

The efforts of making a home should be shared with tender regard for the needs and abilities of all members and appreciation for their unique contributions. As we strive to create the peaceable kingdom at home we need to be particularly careful about anger and its expression. Stressful situations should be addressed openly and lovingly. Anger is an index of our discontent that needs to be heeded and carefully channeled. We should find the difficult middle way between uncontrolled anger, which erupts in violence and oppression, and suppressed anger, which may result in silencing individuals to avoid confrontations, ultimately amounting to a greater violence to all involved. Meetings can help by being open and supportive to victims of anger and abuse as they seek healing even though it may lead through emotional chaos.

Meetings should be aware of situational stresses some families must deal with. Such stresses may arise in any household, but especially where children have only one parent, all the adults work outside the home, families contain members of different faiths, or the household includes ill or infirm elderly members. These families, as well as others in our midst whose members have special needs because of physical or mental illness, developmental disability, or

handicap, may require extra loving support and sensitivity to their needs.

We need to be mindful of those who, for any reason, live alone. While such individuals often live rich, full lives and contribute much to others, they need to be particularly included in all aspects of the Meeting, for frequently the Meeting is their family. Times and places should be provided for them to find and know each other. Single young adults need reassurance as they make life choices, which may run counter to parental or societal pressures. We also need to be aware of circumstances such as illness or unusual stress, in which those living alone may require assistance or companionship.

Our Meetings and communities are composed of persons who live in many kinds of home situations. All of us as individuals, as well as our Meetings collectively, need to create an atmosphere that is accepting, supportive, and caring toward all the persons in our midst, whatever their domestic groupings, enabling all of us to grow and share with each other.

b. Quaker Marriage

Marriage is a joyful, serious, and lasting commitment based in love. Early Friends believed that marriage was based upon a spiritual leading from God, therefore no priest or minister was needed to sanctify the marriage. To this day, Friends marry each other without an intermediary. A wedding is at once the occasion for the partners to enter in to matrimony and the monthly meeting's act of witness and loving support of the marriage.

Marriage is carried out in the context of traditional Quaker worship. The wedding begins with a brief overview for those who may not be familiar with the process. Then, everyone present enters in to worship. When ready, the partners stand to share their vows; they sign their marriage certificate, and it is read aloud. Worship continues with messages and prayers of support and love for the couple shared out of the silence. At the rise of meeting, each person present, including children, signs the wedding certificate as witness to the commitment made signifying their ongoing support. The certificate is usually a beautifully calligraphed document that is framed and hung in the home.

When people wish to marry under the care of the meeting, they write a letter to

the clerk of the monthly meeting. A clearness committee is appointed to meet with them to help them explore issues related to their relationship and their future together. When both the couple and the committee are clear that all is in good order, it is reported back to the meeting for business and a marriage committee helps with planning and organizing the wedding. Occasionally a decision is made that it is not the right time for marriage.

Friends did and do emphasize equality in marriage. In 1849, Lucretia Mott said that "...in the marriage union, the independence of the husband and wife will be equal, their dependence mutual, and their obligations reciprocal." The roles and responsibilities of each partner within a marriage may change over time and differ in each relationship.

The many details around clearness committee responsibilities and the process of preparing for and conducting a wedding are included in Part III (The Quaker Wedding and Marriage, page 80).

c. Sexuality

The human reproductive process is one of life's great miracles. Sexuality, much broader than the act of reproduction itself, is a channel for perception, communication, and enjoyment. Friends are aware both of the joy of human sexuality in its proper context and the need for its restraint outside this context, together with its limitations and problems when treated casually rather than as a precious gift of God to be used responsibly. We recognize too that celibacy is a special gift, a calling, and an act of free will to be practiced joyfully by those who have received that gift.

Education in matters of sexuality is an area in which the home should be the dominant influence. Children should be given factual information to suit their growing understanding on sexuality, family planning, and their responsibilities in this area.

d. Raising Children

Friends should take responsibility for family planning, which may sometimes include adoption or provision of foster care. When the number of children exceeds the financial, physical, and even spiritual capacity of the parents, a

hardship is worked on all involved. Thoughtful decisions either to have or not to have children should be accepted and supported by the Meeting.

As children acquire much by imitation and absorption, family members should watch carefully their own words and actions, curb indulgence, practice forbearance, choose worthy companionship, recreation and television viewing, and subscribe to worthwhile publications. Children tend to become what is expected of them; they are susceptible to the influences of their surroundings, and early impressions are most lasting. Therefore, love and mutual respect in the home are vital. Adults should be conscious of the harmful effect on children of rigid or unrealistic expectations. We should seek to discover and nourish that of God in each child and to foster the child's own talents and leadings.

Self-discipline is the foundation on which character is built. Loving counsel and direction rather than compulsion should be the basis of development. Love, consideration, service, and the acceptance of responsibility form a basis for ordered and satisfying family relationships. Children should share in the tasks of the home and in the exchange of ideas. As parents we can foster confidence and candor between ourselves and our children. Casual, wide-ranging, honest conversation within the family, a natural means of introducing children to perplexing issues and new concepts, is a potent way of communicating ideals.

Children should be taught early to speak and listen to God in their own way. Understanding and acceptance of meeting for worship can come to children early in life through attendance and parental participation. Full appreciation may come later, but uplifting reading, religious discussion, and quiet waiting upon the Spirit can be practiced early.

Prayer is a precious and important part of daily life. The recognition that answers may come in unexpected ways not always understood is essential to our religious experience. Reading of the Bible and other religious literature provides opportunities for the spiritual growth of all family members, and for binding the family together. The family itself is a precious spiritual community.

The resources of the Meeting can be important for families undergoing crises. Friends should be particularly mindful of the needs of children who are

experiencing pain or loss. A Meeting can provide care and understanding, acting as an extended family. Not only are we brothers and sisters in the spirit, but we may be beloved aunts and uncles of all the children in the Meeting. The resilience of the Meeting as a nurturing community encompassing many generations supports each of us throughout the many stages of our lives.

10. Fellowship and Community

The life of a religious society consists in something more than the body of principles it professes and the outer garments of organization which it wears. These things have their own importance: they embody the society to the world, and protect it from the chance and change of circumstances; but the springs of life lie deeper and often escape recognition. They are to be found in the vital union of the members of the society with God and with one another, a union which allows the free flowing through the society of a spiritual life which is its strength.

(William Charles Braithwaite, 1905)

a. Within the Local Meeting

It is not easy to find community and fellowship in the modern world. Many Friends view relationships within the local Meeting as similar to partial relationships established with people met regularly at work, at play, and in the neighborhood. It is perhaps too much to expect that we all will make the Meeting central to our lives. But unless the Meeting fellowship can be made to speak to something deep in our lives, our Society falls short of fulfilling the true spiritual needs of its members.

Typically Friends come together in meetings for worship from diverse neighborhoods, seeing one another rarely except on First Day or on special occasions. Many Meetings find it helpful to encourage groups to meet in one another's homes for worship, recreation, study, or fellowship. Committees provide opportunities for other kinds of relationships within the Meeting. But all too often these contacts fail to satisfy our yearning for community. Sometimes a glimpse of the meaning of community comes as Friends work together in projects of social service, peace education, religious education, or pastoral care for fellow members. Each Meeting should have as an active concern before one

or more of its standing committees the nurture of the Meeting community in whatever ways may open.

b. Within the Society of Friends

Friends who restrict their experience of the Society to their local Meeting are missing rich experiences of fellowship in the wider community. Quarterly, Half-yearly, and Yearly Meetings as well as larger gatherings provide opportunities for Friends of all ages to broaden their experience of the Society and the circle of their spiritually-based friendships. Attendance at such larger Meetings should be seriously considered by each of us as a benefit of membership, an opportunity for spiritual nourishment and a means of widening our community.

Another rich resource within the Society which provides opportunities for fellowship and community is the variety of service committees and action organizations established to further our testimonies. Involvement in these endeavors can help to knit us one to another in common effort. The Society also sponsors study, conference, and retreat opportunities at various centers. Meetings should assist the attendance of members and provide opportunity to share the fruits of such experiences in the local Meeting.

Finally, the Friendly tradition of intervisitation, whether under the weight of specific concern or in the interest of wider Quaker fellowship, should be fostered among our local Meetings. (See Appendix C.)

c. With Other Religious Bodies and Persons

Our belief in that of God in every person requires that we cooperate with other religious bodies. We are aware that we have much to learn from the religious experiences of other groups, Christian and non-Christian. We believe also that we have a rich and unique experience from which we can contribute. The Friends World Committee for Consultation brings us into contact with Quaker groups worldwide, often different from our own in culture, theology, or practice. Through Friends United Meeting and Friends General Conference our Yearly Meeting is affiliated with national and international ecumenical movements. In addition, many of our local or area Meetings cooperate in community councils or associations of religious groups. In all these affiliations we make clear that our

faith is one of experience rather than one of creed or doctrine. In sharing that experience with persons from other backgrounds through common worship and shared service we enrich our sense of community.

d. With All Humanity

...there is an evangelical and saving Light and Grace in all, the universality of the love and mercy of God towards mankind (both in the death of his beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the manifestation of the Light in the heart)...

(Robert Barclay, 1678)

Our belief in the universality of the Inner Light requires us to “walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone” as George Fox urged. No human being is excluded from our sense of community, for we are led by our faith to view human beings as children of God rather than as stereotypes of cultures, nations, or ideologies. It is individual people with whom fellowship must be established, and each Friend must seek in the quiet of worship the personal strength to work at the establishment of community.

11. Education

Education has long been important to Quakers. Friends feel that education is a lifetime effort to develop an open and informed mind and a seeking and sensitive spirit.

It became apparent to early Friends that some form of education would be necessary for leadership and ministry if the Society were to be effective in promoting Truth. In 1668 George Fox urged that schools be established for girls as well as boys. John Woolman cautioned Friends to “watch the spirit of children” and “nurture them in gospel love.” And, in 1831, Joseph John Gurney exhorted, “We shall never thrive upon ignorance.”

Friends are concerned to educate for individual growth, community responsibility, a knowledge of God’s world, and a sense of wonder at continuing revelation in this changing universe.

a. Religious Education

Friends hold that specific instruction in religious topics is vital in the preparation of the human spirit for living a whole life. The goal of our religious education is to strengthen the awareness of the presence of God and so build Quaker spiritual values and conduct. We learn these through experience and study.

Religious education begins early in the home as the child participates in family silence, prayer, readings from the Bible and other religious works, and in family discussions. We set an example in our own lives and seek actively to guide our children's development of sensitivity to God and the world. Thus children can learn to know how God works through and among all of us as exemplified in the life and ministry of Jesus.

As children grow, they broaden their religious experience through participation in meetings for worship and for business. In First Day School classes conducted by the Meeting, the Bible, religious history and ideals, the world of nature, and the history, principles, and testimonies of Friends are more formally taught. As children are guided to an understanding of history and science, they are enabled better to understand religious Truth. A secure awareness of our role in God's world frees us for more sensitive responses to the leadings of the Inner Light.

b. Adult Education

Adult First Day School classes began among English Friends in the late 19th century and are continued by many Meetings all over the world. The main purpose of Friends' educational activities for adults is the development of spiritual depth in the meeting for worship.

Meetings should foster activities that bring all age groups together. Conferences, workshops, and retreats, organized by Monthly, Quarterly, or Yearly Meetings or other Friends' bodies, provide contacts with a variety of Friends' viewpoints. We should encourage adult members to follow their leadings in seeking education of all kinds and should be sensitive in offering the financial assistance sometimes needed to take advantage of such opportunities.

c. Friends' Educational Institutions

Formal education among Friends was developed early. In 17th century England,

Quakers as dissenters could not attend local church schools or the universities. Friends designed their own schools to provide an education in “whatsoever things were civil and useful in the creation,” as George Fox put it. Some of these schools were open to all and became the forerunners of the free schools which developed in the 19th century on both sides of the Atlantic.

In America, Meetings sponsored elementary and, later, secondary schools to provide education in a religious atmosphere designed to prepare the pupils for active membership in the Society of Friends. Many Friends’ schools survive as elementary or secondary schools, or as colleges. Baltimore Friends were involved with Philadelphia Friends in the founding of Swarthmore College. As in other well-known colleges such as Bryn Mawr and Pomona, some Quaker connection continues. Others, such as Haverford, Earlham, Wilmington, Guilford, Malone, Whittier, William Penn, George Fox, Friends University, and the more recently established Friends World College, retain a more direct connection with one or more Yearly Meetings.

Friends’ schools traditionally offer opportunities to put ideals into practice. They nurture students spiritually and intellectually. They seek to create an environment where pupils can grow together toward Truth through a wide range of experiences. They promote a way of life compatible with the Quaker interpretation of Christianity and are a means of Friends’ outreach. While each Friends’ school is unique, each is a caring community based on belief in that of God in each human being. Respect for the individual and a spirit of give and take among pupils and teachers characterize Friends’ schools.

For many years Friends have been concerned about the problem of exclusivity in private schools, especially in those carrying the name of Friends. Those concerned with any Quaker-related school would agree that each institution has a continuing responsibility to discourage snobbishness and feelings of false superiority, to encourage economy and simplicity, and to cultivate a realization that with special opportunities go special obligations. A Meeting that has direct responsibility for a Friends’ school, or that has any Friends’ school in its community, should assist the school to maintain its Quaker character.

d. Public Education

Friends have supported public education from its inception, recognizing that Truth prospers best among a populace that is “led out” from illiteracy and ignorance. In local Meetings we share responsibility with our communities for public education. Through involvement as teachers, school administrators, parents, or interested citizens, Meeting members can work to improve the programs of public schools. Opposition, for example, to overemphasis on competition, to military exercises in schools, or to overly lax or overly severe discipline can be a prelude to positive suggestions of alternatives. We should continue to use our influence as citizens to elevate the standards of the public schools, recognizing that the crux of education is how the school system treats the individual. The Quaker ideal is to develop each child’s spiritual strength as well as intellectual and practical skills.

12. Science and Religion

Religion and science are approaches to the universe and our relationship to it. There need be no conflict between these approaches. This Quaker view is well reflected in the following statements by Friends:

...William James described Quakerism as “a religion of veracity rooted in spiritual inwardness.” Veracity is indeed the Truth of the heart; the renunciation of lies, deceit, guile, deception, and pretense. The whole knowledge explosion which is a result of the development of scientific subculture, depends quite closely on the tradition of veracity which is so strong there.

(Kenneth E. Boulding, 1970)

As a scientist and as a person, I recognize the co-existence of two worlds, two systems. For want of better names I will call them the world of matter and the world of spirit—not independent, yet capable of independent description. The world of matter is the world that we apprehend with our five senses, the world we can measure, the world of time and of space, the world of natural laws that we believe operate without being spoken....The world of the spirit is the world of love and of hatred, of imagination and illusion, the world of fear and suffering, of ecstasy and of memory, of gratitude, of resentment, of hope, and of happiness. No two people have the same inward experiences, although understanding comes from shared experiences. There are laws in this

world which do not cease to operate although they are broken every day...These two worlds are interlocked. God makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust. Even if we take an aeroplane and travel around the world with the speed of its rotation, so that we experience a continued sunrise, we cannot escape "the starry heavens above," and "the moral law."

(Kathleen Lonsdale, 1957)

There is a truth that lies beyond scientific theories and religious doctrines which are always being disproved and outmoded. Religion should welcome every discovery of science, which in rolling back the boundaries of the known world makes the miracle of creation that much more wonderful, that much more divine. Personal religion, like science, should always be rolling back the boundaries—making new discoveries, discarding inadequate concepts, enlarging its vision.

(Bradford Smith, 1963)

13. The Arts and Religion

Early Friends believed in simplicity, avoiding ostentation and adornment in their clothing, furnishings, homes, and meeting houses. However, they often achieved a beauty of line, proportion, and, workmanship which, later, non-Friends also came to appreciate.

Historically, the fine arts have been relatively undeveloped among Friends. Many early Friends questioned the value of fine arts, often regarding them as superfluous or distracting, if not worse. But Friends have come to realize that art may carry spiritual force. The arts can serve to increase understanding among people, carrying their messages across human barriers of language, dogma, or politics. Many have found in artistic creation an avenue for personal growth and fulfillment. Friends may express their own creative spirit through whatever media or in whatever ways seem appropriate. Those who become artists are urged to realize that art constitutes a great force in society and to be mindful of their social responsibilities. Friends in the unprogrammed tradition rarely include music in their worship, but enjoy singing and instrumental music in other contexts. Spontaneous musical contributions, however, may be appropriate in a meeting for worship.

14. Social Responsibility

It seems to me that the moving force behind the Quaker social witness has got to be some vision, however faint and tantalizing, of what the world would be like if we really were obedient to God.

(Deborah Haines, 1978)

The basic Quaker trust in the Light within leads to our trust in the inherent dignity and sacredness of each person. This trust, combined with our Society's own history of persecution, underlies our social witness.

Some concerns which once drew the witness of Friends are obsolete today, but still we have many challenges. War, violence in streets and homes, injustice in the justice system, prejudice and discrimination, the plights of starving, homeless, and disadvantaged people, and business conduct which involves exploitation of people or nature's resources—all these still call us to action in obedience to the Spirit.

15. Peace and Non-Violence

Since their beginnings over 300 years ago, Friends have been led by their commitment to the ideal of peace to renounce wars and violence, as in the declaration made to Charles II by George Fox and other Friends on November 21, 1660:

...we...utterly deny...all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretense whatsoever. And this is our testimony to the whole world...That the spirit of Christ, by which we are guided, is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing as evil and again to move unto it; and we do certainly know, and so testify to the world, that the spirit of Christ, which leads us into all Truth, will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdoms of this world.

(George Fox, 1660)

God's law of love, as taught and lived by Jesus Christ, applies to all the levels of

society. Wars break the law of love as do violence in communities and families and fighting between individuals. Friends have a settled intention to practice love and to make peace.

As peacemakers we hold that attitudes of justice and compassion are basic. A peacemaker must be able to identify with others. Peace cannot be attained at the expense of others. “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Matthew 7:12) is indeed a Golden Rule.

We are called as peacemakers to deal with the violence and aggression within ourselves, to find ways of living in harmony with ourselves and neighbors. A simple lifestyle is useful in this connection, since the pursuit of excessive material wealth or power entails competition and exploitation of others. As John Woolman urged, “May we look upon our treasures, the furniture of our houses and our garments, and try whether the seeds of war have nourishment in these our possessions.” The development of inward peace is part of the process of making outward peace.

Friends need to wage peace boldly and positively. The promotion of peaceful methods of conflict resolution, of international exchanges, of peace education and research, of world law, and of world-wide standards of human rights—all are positive ways.

One important aspect of our peace witness is refusal to serve in the military or in activities contributing to military preparedness. Friends who face the draft or registration for it should consider prayerfully their alternatives. Their Meetings should stand ready to counsel and support them. Friends of all ages may witness by acts ranging from refusal to pay war taxes to non-participation in war-related work to demonstrations and other public witness. All should be aware of the tragic consequences of indifference, timidity, and procrastination.

16. Civic Responsibility

Friends believe that the aim of government is to preserve a community in which justice, peace, good order, and individual development are possible. Members of our Society are also citizens of the community and the nation. Quakerism is not intended to be a refuge from the disturbing events of our times, but rather a

source of strength and support in facing them. The free institutions under which we live give many of our members a direct share in the responsibilities of government and in forming a healthy public opinion.

Friends have supported the state as long as its requirements have not opposed the leadings of the Inner Light. They have generally believed that:

...if any be called to serve the commonwealth in any public service...with cheerfulness it be undertaken, and in faithfulness be discharged unto God...

(The Quaker Elders at Balby, 1656)

Whether or not directly involved in government, we need to consider carefully our responsibilities in influencing legislation and educating fellow citizens on public issues. Friends should work with people in other churches and in the community to bring about desirable ends through the institutional resources of society.

From the beginning, Friends have found that loyalty to God results at times in refusal of the demands of the state, as in opposition to war and unjust laws, and have supported decisions of conscience taken by individual Friends. Before deciding on a course which involves civil disobedience, a Friend should consult with persons of trusted judgment who have sympathy with the individual's sense of duty. Clearness committees within the Meeting are valuable in such situations.

17. Vocational and Financial Decisions

The relationships, decisions, and actions of our working lives should reflect a calling to the service of God. Our witness will be unconvincing unless we seek and heed Divine guidance. Individual leadings vary with differences in talents and interests. Each Friend's talents, however, should be fully used.

Investment of assets and consumption of resources require our careful stewardship. As Friends we can direct our investments toward socially desirable ends, avoiding speculation and activities wasteful or harmful to others. We seek to participate constructively and without greed in the economic life of the community. We should refrain from undue accumulation of wealth as well as

irresponsible borrowing.

Friends' Meetings and concerns require money and time. Non-pastoral Meetings do not need as much financial support as churches with paid ministers, but our concerns do call for considerable funding. We are required to give generously of our time, since our way of serving the Spirit depends on our personal efforts. For every Friend, the responsibility to give generously of both money and time is real. Monthly Meetings should provide regular opportunities for us to discuss our practices in the use of money and time. Wills should be made and periodically revised with care; this avoids difficulties for heirs and beneficiaries. The needs of our own family members and the merits of contributions to worthy causes should be considered in a spirit of love. Selection of a capable and understanding executor is encouraged.

18. Prejudice and Discrimination

From its earliest days, the Society of Friends has supported the equal right of all individuals to be treated with dignity and respect. The opposition of Friends to slavery is well known. Less well known is their support of the rights of women. Quakers, particularly Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony, and Alice Paul, were in the forefront of the American suffrage movement. We oppose all forms of prejudice. Prejudice should never be allowed to keep any persons from a chance to develop or use their abilities, or deprive them of their political, economic, or social rights. We are called to work creatively for equal opportunity in education, employment, justice, housing, and the like.

Since thought and action are reflected in words, we should take care to use language that reflects the equal dignity and worth of all human beings. We support an ongoing search for broader language to express the continuing revelation of the nature of God. Use of masculine or feminine forms when referring to God perpetuates gender-specific images. With terms such as the Inner Light, That of God in Everyone, and the Seed, Friends already have an inclusive vocabulary.

19. Those Requiring Special Care

We must be sensitive to the need for an institutional and societal framework

within which disadvantaged individuals can achieve dignity and can experience a purposeful life within the limits of their capabilities. Aging is a natural part of human life. At no time should people be considered to be on the periphery of society because of their age. Older persons, who represent an increasingly large portion of the population, have varied talents, interests, and concerns. Friends have a long tradition of appreciation of the gifts of older members, and our Meetings should continue to encourage participation of all ages in Meeting activities.

The same concern for human dignity, and opposition to the use of physical force and violence, has motivated Friends to work toward improvement in institutions and services for the elderly and for those who are facing psychological or physical challenges. Employment of members of these groups is encouraged, as well as special education and training.

The Society of Friends has long worked toward improvement in the treatment of offenders. While continuing to press for programs of rehabilitation inside prisons, Friends also recognize a need for pre-trial justice and the elimination of police brutality. Friends are led to oppose capital punishment by our belief in the sanctity of life.

20. How do we live our faith in care of the Earth?

The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age.

(John Woolman, 1772)

Early writings show that Friends treasured the beauty of our world, encouraged members to know its wonder, and urged caution in our use of its gifts. What then is the spiritual relationship to our Earth that sustains Friends now?

For some Friends, Biblical accounts provide valuable insights for today about the beauty of God's creation and our subsequent responsibility to care for it. In Psalm 19:1 we read:

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims

his handiwork.

Other Friends believe that we arose from nature and belong to nature, and nature reveals the Divine in us. Thus, as part of the natural world, we must treat the rest of creation with respect and be in partnership with it.

Whatever the understanding, it is clear that Friends have not adequately cared for what we have been given nor lived in complete harmony with the Earth. We are part of a social system that has overused resources, decreased biodiversity, polluted land, water, and air, created a climate crisis, and separated us from the beauty, diversity, and abundance of the natural world.

The Earth graciously and freely provides for us. If Friends restore right relationships - align ourselves with the Earth and all living beings with kindness, harmony, and care - we can connect more fully with the beauty of nature and the bounty it provides. Through nature we also can deepen our connection with the Divine, which provides healing, inspiration, and delight.

Quakers, along with many others, want to preserve and heal our Earth so that future generations can thrive. In our rapidly changing world, we must be creative and forward thinking in our actions for this to happen. If we are to succeed, governments, corporations, humanitarian organizations, scientists, and faith communities must work together.

As we consider the enormity of what we are led to do, and how it will change over time, we can prayerfully consider queries to help us stay true to our values as Quakers and live our faith in the world.

- How do we live simply using only what we need?
- How do we care for the Earth and all of life in ways that don't burden marginalized communities?
- How do we live peacefully, respecting the dignity of each person and their communities, while we also work to alleviate environmental injustices and all that harms nature?
- How do we encourage our youngest Friends to continue our efforts to live peacefully with the Earth?

It is critical that Quakers live in harmony with the Earth, continue to

cultivate love and respect for it, and teach our children to do the same. If we are attentive to the Spirit within and even the Earth itself, they can teach and guide us. They can offer us meaning in our existence and offer spiritual lessons that we can use to rebalance our relationship with our sacred home, the Earth.

Part II: The Queries

A. Introduction

The Queries are a device used within the Society of Friends for prompting both corporate and individual self-examination. They have varied through time and from Yearly Meeting to Yearly Meeting, reflecting current regional insights as to the best way for Meetings and individual Friends to live their spiritual and temporal lives. It is the practice in most Monthly Meetings to read and consider a query at each meeting for business. We urge consideration of these queries by all Friends.

Following each Query, one or more references relevant to that Query are given. Friends may wish to use selections from these passages, or others, to read as Advices with the Queries.

B. Queries With References for Advices

1. Meetings for Worship

Are meetings for worship held in expectant waiting for Divine guidance? Are Friends encouraged to share spiritual insights? Are special gifts of ministry recognized and encouraged?

Do you come to meeting with heart and mind prepared? Are you careful not to disturb the spirit of the meeting by late arrival or in other ways?

(‘Meeting for Worship’ on page 26; ‘Vocal Ministry’ on page 27)

2. Meetings for Business

Are meetings for business held in a spirit of worship, understanding, and forbearance? When direction seems lacking, is this seen as a challenge to a more prayerful search for truth? Do we humbly set aside our own preconceived notions as to proper action, seeking instead Divine guidance as to the right course? Is the Meeting aware that it speaks not only through its actions but also through its failure to act?

Do you participate regularly in meetings for business, discharge faithfully your committee responsibilities, and assume your share of financial support of the Meeting?

(“Principles of Organization and Conduct of Business” on page 58; “Decision Making in Friends Meetings” on page 61.)

3. The Meeting Community

Are love and harmony within the Meeting community fostered by a spirit of open sharing?

Do you endeavor to widen your circle of friendships within the Meeting, seeking to know persons of all ages and at all stages of the spiritual journey?

Does the Meeting provide for the spiritual refreshment of all members and attenders? Do Friends provide spiritual and practical care for the elderly, the lonely, and others with special needs?

(“Statement on Spiritual Unity, 1964” on page 41; “The Meeting as Caring Community” on page 32; “Fellowship and Community” on page 39.)

4. Personal Spiritual Life

Do you make time for meditation, prayer, and worship? Do you read the Bible, the writings of Friends, and other inspirational works, seeking new light? Do you regularly seek God’s guidance? Are you open to guidance and support and do you give thanks for them? Do you share your spiritual insights with others and willingly receive from them in turn?

(“Prayer and Meditation” on page 30; “The Scriptures” on page 31.)

5. Personal Way of Life

Do you live in accordance with your spiritual convictions? Do you seek employment consistent with your beliefs and in service to society? Do you practice simplicity in speech, dress, and manner of living, avoiding wasteful

consumption? Are you watchful that your possessions do not rule you? Do you strive to be truthful at all times, avoiding judicial oaths?

Do you strive to develop your physical, emotional, and mental capacities toward reaching your Divinely given potential? Do you cultivate healthful and moderate habits, avoiding the hazards of drugs, intoxicants, and over-indulgence generally? Do you try to direct such emotions as anger and fear in creative ways?

(“Early Quaker Testimonies” on page 19; “The Practice of the Life of the Spirit” on page 32; “Personal Life” on page 33.)

6. Home and Family

Do you make your home a place of affection where God’s presence is felt? Do you practice family prayer? Do you share your deepest beliefs and interests with all in the family? Do you grow together through sharing prosperity and adversity? Can you keep a sense of humor and avoid taking yourself too seriously? Do you establish family standards including the mutual obligations of children and adults?

Are you as children learning to be accountable for your own actions? Do you as parents help your children to grow in independence and responsibility? Do you consider the needs of grandparents and older members of the family circle?

(“Home Life” on page 35.)

7. Caring for Others

Do you respect that of God in every person? Do you search yourself for and strive to eliminate prejudices such as those related to race, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, and economic condition? In what ways do you accept and appreciate differences among your friends and associates? Do you avoid exploiting or manipulating others to accomplish ends, however worthy?

(“Prejudice and Discrimination” on page 35; “Those Requiring Special Care” on page 46.)

8. Outreach

Do you, as the way opens, share Friends’ principles with non-Friends? Do you witness to your Quaker faith by letting your life speak? Do you make non-Friends welcome in your meetings for worship? Do you find ways to encourage their continued attendance?

(“Fellowship and Community” on page 39.)

9. The Social Order

Do you promote social justice and make your life a testimony to fair dealing? Do you seek to understand and appreciate differing cultures and social values? Do you support fair treatment of all regardless of race, gender, age, and other differences? Are you concerned for those in our society who are disadvantaged? Do you take your full share of civic responsibility by voting and giving service? Do you oppose the use of land, labor, technology, and capital for human exploitation or in ways destructive to other living things?

(“Civic Responsibility” on page 48; “Vocational and Financial Decisions” on page 49; “Social Responsibility” on page 46.)

10. The Peace Testimony

Do you endeavor to live “in virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars”? Do you work to make your peace testimony a reality in your life and in your world? Do you weigh your day-to-day activities for their effect on peace-keeping, conflict resolution, and the elimination of violence? Are you working toward eliminating aggression at all levels, from the personal to the international?

(“Peace and Non-violence” on page 45.)

11. Education

Do you provide religious education, including study of the Bible and of Friends’

history and practices, in your Meeting? Do you ensure that schools under the care of Friends exemplify Friends' principles? Do you support and strive to improve the public schools?

("Education" on page 41; "Science and Religion" on page 44; "The Arts and Religion" on page 46.)

12. The Environment

Are you concerned for responsible use of natural resources and their nurture for future generations? Do you try to avoid wasteful consumption and pollution? Do you seek to pre- serve the beauty and balance of God's world?

("How do we live our faith in care of the Earth?" on page 50; "Civic Responsibility" on page 48.)

Part III: Practices and Procedures

A. Organization and Business Procedure

1. Principles of Organization and Conduct of Business

The Society of Friends began not as a structured organization, but as a fellowship of Friends of Truth. As the need arose for service to members or others, Meetings were established and named for the times or intervals of their regular sessions, as Monthly Meetings, Quarterly Meetings, or Yearly Meetings. Meetings, in the Society of Friends, are thus both gatherings of persons for a purpose and units of the structure of the Society. All organized Meetings normally have gatherings for worship and other gatherings for the conduct of business.

Meetings for business are held in a spirit of worship. This does not mean they must be overly solemn or devoid of humor. It means they should be conducted in a spirit of inward recollection out of which will come a flexible and informal dignity fitting to the conduct of the work of a Religious Society.

Friends believe that the right and satisfactory decision in any matter is reached when those present understand and consent in the proposed judgment, finding it in accordance with their understanding of the will of God for the Meeting's action. Therefore, they act on a basis of the "sense of the Meeting" rather than by decision of the majority.

2. General Organization

The basic unit of Friends' organization is the Monthly Meeting. The recording of membership and its transfer or termination, the solemnization of marriage, the consoling of Friends bereaved, the nurture of young people, ministry and worship, pastoral care of members, fellowship, inspiration and recreation, outreach and social concern, the raising of funds needed for the work of the Society, are all basically the responsibility of the Monthly Meeting.

For purposes which cannot properly be served by single Monthly Meetings, Friends group themselves into larger and less frequently convened units

covering larger areas. The next larger unit after the Monthly Meeting has traditionally been the Quarterly Meeting, and the largest unit the Yearly Meeting. In Baltimore Yearly Meeting some of the traditional Quarterly Meetings have reorganized as Half-yearly or other Meetings. In this book all such intermediate Meetings are referred to as Quarterly Meetings. Membership in all such wider Meetings is conferred upon all members of their constituent Monthly Meetings. Information about Quarterly and Yearly Meetings is given more fully in the section on page 102. There are now many national and international organizations of Friends organized for different purposes, and Baltimore Yearly Meeting is affiliated with a number of them which the Manual of Procedure describes.

3. Preparative and Allowed Meetings for Worship¹

Monthly Meetings which find the geographic area from which their members gather too large, or the numbers of their attenders too great, from time to time establish Allowed Meetings for worship or organize Preparative Meetings for the preparation of business to be brought to Monthly Meeting. A Friends' worship group may also begin independently of an existing Monthly Meeting. Such a group may apply to a Monthly Meeting for recognition as an Allowed or Preparative Meeting under the care of that Monthly Meeting.

A Preparative Meeting is a meeting for business subordinated to a Monthly Meeting. It is normally established in conjunction with a separate worship group which handles its own local business matters and which prepares business of more general concern for submission to the Monthly Meeting. Membership decisions and financial responsibility reside with the Monthly Meeting. Sometimes it is helpful to have a simpler relationship between the newly formed group and the parent Monthly Meeting than a Preparative Meeting. In such cases, the Monthly Meeting recognizes the new group as a meeting for worship and appoints a committee to provide guidance. Such an Allowed (or Indulged) Meeting is under the care of the Monthly Meeting and does not conduct its own business meetings.

Many Monthly Meetings in England and the United States have existed for long

¹ See Appendix G

periods as groups of two or more Preparative Meetings. However, the more common pattern in Baltimore Yearly Meeting is for an Allowed Meeting which achieves both growth and stability to advance to the stage of Preparative Meeting, and then to full, separate Monthly Meeting status.

The establishment of Allowed and Preparative Meetings is the concern of the sponsoring Monthly Meeting. In addition, the laying down of these subordinate Meetings is the responsibility of the Monthly Meeting in the event that a Preparative or Allowed Meeting becomes unable to fulfill the purposes for which it was established.

4. Establishment of Monthly Meetings²

An Allowed or Preparative Meeting which feels itself ready for Monthly Meeting status applies to its Monthly Meeting. The Monthly Meeting, if it concurs, forwards the application with approval to its Quarterly Meeting. Following its action, the Quarterly Meeting forwards the application to Interim Meeting for its consideration and recommendation to the Yearly Meeting. The Yearly Meeting in session approves or, rarely, disapproves the establishment of a new Monthly Meeting.

Unaffiliated worship groups or organized Friends Meetings within the historic boundaries of Baltimore Yearly Meeting may wish to affiliate with the Yearly Meeting. Application may be made to the most convenient Monthly Meeting for acceptance as an Allowed or Preparative Meeting. They may also apply directly to the Yearly Meeting through Interim Meeting for Monthly Meeting status.

A worship group or organized Meeting that is already affiliated with another Yearly Meeting or Quaker body, or that is not within the boundaries of Baltimore Yearly Meeting may wish to establish a formal relationship with Baltimore Yearly Meeting. In such cases application is made directly to the Interim Meeting, which will recommend appropriate action to the Yearly Meeting in session.

5. Discontinuance of Monthly Meetings

A Monthly Meeting which has so little business or member interest as to be

² See Appendix G

unable to hold meetings for business at least four times per year should apply to its Quarterly Meeting or to Interim Meeting for assistance. The Quarterly Meeting or the Yearly Meeting may initiate steps to lay down a Monthly Meeting which is entirely inactive. Any real property of a Monthly Meeting which is laid down is normally transferred to the Yearly Meeting. Capital or Trust Funds under the care of a Monthly Meeting which is laid down should be transferred to the Yearly Meeting for appropriate administration. Remaining members of Monthly Meetings laid down are encouraged to join another Meeting.

6. Decision Making in Friends Meetings

As we approach our business we need to put aside how the world reaches decisions in temporal affairs and to recollect that we have come together to seek not equity, nor compromise, nor even the most “democratic” solution to the matter at hand—but the Truth as God gives us to see the Truth. We believe that God is revealed and gives guidance to all who seek. Thus, in business meeting, we should listen to the views of all, just as we do in meeting for worship. We further believe that as Truth emerges we will have substantial unity in recognizing it, for Truth is undivided and that of God within each person responds to its presence.

We need to allow sufficient time for the conduct of the affairs of our Society. In our modern hurried life it may be hard to take time to search thoroughly for a right course of action. Failing unity, we may defer action until we can all see the Light together. Yet the practical business concerns we address in monthly meeting are as important to our individual and corporate life as the more directly spiritual concerns addressed in our meetings for worship.

Major items of business to be submitted to the Meeting should be prepared as carefully as possible by a Meeting committee or by preparatory work on the part of the Clerk so that pertinent facts and records of previous Meeting actions will be available to facilitate the discussion. Members not involved in the preparatory work should trust and value the work of preparation. Care should be taken to avoid re-working in a way that belittles the work already done.

When a matter requiring decision is placed before the Meeting by the Clerk or any other member, all who feel concerned to express their views should be

heard. The Clerk should make sure that all points of view are clearly stated so that the Meeting may have all it needs to arrive at a right decision. Words and spirit should be those of loving helpfulness in search for the right way, the Truth, the best solution to a problem, rather than a position dogmatically asserted and adamantly held. All the time needed for deliberate consideration, including silences for prayerful reflection as needed, should be allowed. When it appears that there is general unity in the Meeting, the Clerk states what appears to be the sense of the Meeting. If the members approve, a minute expressing the sense of the Meeting is immediately written and is read and approved before the close of the session. In matters which are particularly important or complex it is best for the Meeting to compose, and request approval of, a minute before passing to other business.

A minute should express clearly the decision reached by the Meeting and should cite relevant information explaining the Meeting's judgment, but it need not detail or even summarize the views expressed in arriving at unity. The final judgment of the Meeting is of greater importance than any tentative or interim judgments.

The Clerk and Recording Clerk may be given authority to edit minutes already approved if, being re-read, they seem in need of clarification. Any change so made should, however, be reported to the members of the Meeting through publication or by reading at the next business session. When finally approved, a minute becomes part of the Meeting's permanent record.

Members should exercise forbearance in discussion and should seek Divine guidance, realizing that Truth will often transcend the understanding of any single individual. When the judgment of the Meeting appears to be tending away from the opinion of a member, that Friend should consider whether to stand aside or to prevent the consensus required for the Meeting's action. When the Meeting cannot unite upon a minute, no action is taken on the matter, which may be postponed for further consideration. Any previous action or policy of the Meeting in the same area stands in the absence of a specific Meeting decision to change it. Friends are reminded that failure to act is also a form of judgment and are urged to consider seriously the nature of their guidance to stand opposed to a view which has clearly received the assent of

most Friends in the Meeting. At the same time Friends are mindful of the many occasions when the leading of one or a few has proven to be the way of Truth. When action appears to be blocked by one or a few Friends, the Meeting may find it useful to appoint a special committee to labor with all concerned for a resolution of the impasse.

These principles of decision making apply also to decisions reached in other Friends' gatherings for business such as committees or boards of trustees.

B. The Monthly Meeting

1. Membership

Membership in the Religious Society of Friends is a spiritual commitment. To become a member, an applicant should have come experientially into general agreement with the Society's principles of belief and testimonies.

Baltimore Yearly Meeting has no binding creed. Its principles of belief are based on its Judeo-Christian heritage and adherence to the Spirit of Christ (the Inward Light, the Divine Seed, That of God in Everyone). The testimonies spring from respect for truth; for peace, harmony, and a settled intention to practice love; for simplicity, community, and the equal worth of all people.

Membership carries with it spiritual obligations. Each member is called to participate in the Meeting's spiritual life and to attend worship regularly. Members need to nurture each other's God-given gifts and talents. They seek guidance from one another and the Meeting in discerning God's will for themselves. They pray for one another.

The basic spiritual commitment creates practical obligations. The vitality of each Monthly Meeting depends on its members' investments of time, energy, and financial support. Friends put practical meaning into their spiritual commitment through regular participation in meetings for business, service on committees or as officers, regular financial giving, taking part in service projects under the care of the Meeting, assisting in maintenance of Meeting property, and representing

the Meeting in community and wider Friends' organizations.

a. Application for Membership³

It is essential that those desiring to join the Monthly Meeting have regularly attended meetings for worship and have attended some meetings for business. They also need to review carefully Faith and Practice and other writings of Friends to gain an understanding of the Quaker mode of worship and transacting business, the meaning of Friends' testimonies, and the responsibilities of membership.

Applicants for membership should address a letter to the Monthly Meeting stating their desire to enter into membership. It is helpful for the letter to explain why the applicant feels drawn to the Religious Society of Friends. The application is considered by the appropriate Monthly Meeting committee, which either meets with the applicant or appoints a clearness committee to fulfill the function and to report back. At the clearness meeting with the applicant, loving consideration is given to the applicant's spiritual journey, familiarity and agreement with Friends' principles and practice, commitment to fulfill the spiritual and practical responsibilities of membership, and relationship to any other religious body. If the applicant is a minor, the parents' attitudes toward the application should be determined.

If the committee feels that the applicant is not yet ready for membership, action may be postponed. It is then the responsibility of the committee to become better acquainted with the prospective member and to offer instruction and guidance as seems appropriate.

In rare cases, the committee will conclude that for this person, membership in the Society of Friends is not appropriate. The committee should be sure that the applicant understands the reasons for their conclusion.

If the committee finds no obstruction, it brings the application to the Monthly Meeting with a recommendation for acceptance. Some Meetings follow the practice, particularly useful for larger Meetings, of postponing final action until a

³ See Appendix E.

subsequent meeting for business in order that Friends may become acquainted with the prospective member. When any application is approved, the Monthly Meeting minutes the acceptance into membership.

When the Monthly Meeting accepts any adult or child into membership (including transferring or sojourning members), it should arrange for an appropriate welcome of the new member and for particular Friends to accept a continuing responsibility to embody the Meeting's ongoing concern for the welfare of the new member.

The necessary statistical data concerning each new member required for the Meeting records are obtained by the Recorder.

b. Sojourners

A Friend residing temporarily at a distance from the Monthly Meeting where membership is recorded, and not wishing to transfer membership to the Monthly Meeting which it is convenient to attend, is welcomed to all the meetings and activities of the "host" Monthly Meeting. Such a sojourner may request the home Meeting to supply a minute addressed to the host Meeting, asking for sojourner status in that Meeting. The host Meeting normally acts on such a request at the business meeting at which it is presented. Formal sojourner status is not recorded in the absence of a communication from the home Monthly Meeting. The host Meeting does not include sojourners in its statistics of membership. Sojourning status terminates when the sojourner leaves the area of the Meeting, which should then notify the home Meeting.

A sojourner who continues to reside in the area of the Meeting for an extended time should consider transferring full membership to the Meeting. A Meeting which perceives that sojourning is continuing for an extended time should discuss with the sojourner the possibility of a change in status to regular member.

The appropriate committee should inform members moving away about the Meetings near their destination, and inform such Meetings of the arrival of the members. The appropriate committees of Meetings so informed should get in touch with such new arrivals and inform them of the Meeting activities.

c. Transfers

Members moving beyond the limits of the Monthly Meeting are advised to transfer their membership to the Monthly Meeting within whose limits they propose to live, in order that they may be able to assume the full responsibility of membership. Friends moving to a place where there is no Meeting may, of course, retain their existing membership and should maintain contact with their Meeting.

Members wishing to transfer notify the Monthly Meeting in which they hold membership. Following the Meeting's approval, the Clerk of that Monthly Meeting will, by a certificate of removal or by letter, forward the request to the Clerk of the receiving Monthly Meeting. The receiving Meeting normally acts upon the transfer request at the business meeting at which it is presented. When the transfer has been accepted and recorded and the issuing Monthly Meeting notified of the acceptance, the Friend becomes a member of the receiving Meeting. Suggested formats for use by Meetings involved in transfers are contained in Appendix B.

Transfer members should be welcomed into the Monthly Meeting in the same manner as other new members.

d. Attenders

Meetings should encourage attenders to become acquainted with the Meeting and its members and to be active in the life of the Meeting. The Society of Friends depends in a unique way on the shared efforts of all in the meeting for worship, meeting for business, committee tasks, and the Meeting's concerns. Attenders are welcomed into all Meeting activities, but generally do not serve on Ministry and Counsel, Trustees, Overseers, or Nominating Committee, or as Meeting officers or clerks of committees.

An attender whose service on a Yearly Meeting committee is considered appropriate by the Monthly Meeting may be suggested to the Yearly Meeting Nominating Committee for such service.

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.

f. Isolated Members

It is the responsibility of each Monthly Meeting, through the appropriate committee, to keep in touch with its members. It is recommended that, at least once a year, each Meeting write to those members who reside at a distance, and particularly to those who are remote from any Friends Meeting. This letter should express kindly interest and inquire as to their religious life and activities.

g. Resignations

Should a member offer a resignation of membership, the Monthly Meeting is advised, if the way opens, to request the appropriate committee to visit the member in a spirit of loving care to inquire into the cause of the resignation. If a member does resign, the minutes should reflect that the release is being made at the member's own request and the member should be informed of the action.

h. Termination of Membership

Members who substantially disregard the obligations of membership should be visited by the appropriate committee to inquire about their interest. If extended

efforts are unavailing, or the member cannot be located after five years of absence, and the Monthly Meeting concurs in the judgment of the committee, the member may be dropped from the list of members, and if possible, notified by the Clerk of the Meeting.

If a member's conduct or publicly expressed views appear to deny Friend's beliefs and testimonies or bring the Society into disrepute, the appropriate Meeting committee should appoint a few well-qualified Friends to meet with the member. These Friends should labor with the member lovingly and patiently in a spirit of reconciliation for as long as there is reasonable hope of benefit from their labors. If such efforts are unavailing, the Friends appointed to labor with the member may recommend to the committee which appointed them that the person's membership be terminated. If the committee agrees, it should so recommend to the Monthly Meeting after notifying the person of its decision. The Monthly Meeting, if it agrees, records the termination of membership for cause in its minutes. A copy of the minute should be delivered to the person whose membership is terminated.

One whose membership has been terminated may subsequently apply for membership in the usual manner.

2. The Officers

The Monthly Meeting meets regularly for business, normally at monthly intervals. It appoints suitable persons for stated terms as Clerk, Treasurer, and Recorder. Other officers such as Recording Clerk, Assistant Clerk, and Assistant Treasurer may be appointed as needed.

All regular appointments by the Monthly Meeting, except those to the Nominating Committee, are made on the basis of nominations from a Monthly Meeting Nominating Committee. The Nominating Committee itself is composed of members chosen directly by the Monthly Meeting or through a special nominating procedure.

a. The Clerk⁴

⁴ See Advices for Clerks, Appendix A.

The Clerk is the servant of the Meeting for the execution of its business affairs, convening regular or specially called meetings for business, guiding deliberations, and carrying out the Meeting's instructions for actions between business sessions. The Meeting reposes great trust in its Clerk and can be greatly assisted if that officer understands the peculiar functions of the office. There is great virtue in giving several members the experience and the tempering which comes with the responsibility of the clerkship. Hence it is desirable that the occupant of the position be changed at reasonable intervals.

b. The Recording Clerk

Part of the decision making process in the Society of Friends is the recording in the minutes of those decisions made by the Monthly Meeting. This is the responsibility of the Recording Clerk (sometimes called the Assistant Clerk). The Recording Clerk works closely with the Clerk in preparing for Meetings for Business and in formulating proposed minutes. The Recording Clerk is responsible for the preparation of an accurate final copy of the minutes, which becomes a permanent record of the Monthly Meeting.

c. The Treasurer

A Treasurer, nominated by the Monthly Meeting Nominating Committee and appointed by the Meeting, is responsible for the custody and disbursement of Meeting funds as directed by that body. The Treasurer should keep accurate records and report to the Meeting periodically or on reasonable request. The Meeting should provide for an annual audit of the Treasurer's records. The Meeting may appoint an Assistant Treasurer or a person to function in the Treasurer's absence. These officers are, ex officio, members of the Stewardship and Finance Committee. It should be noted that bonding of the Yearly Meeting treasurer is written to include bonding within specified limits of all Monthly Meeting treasurers for the protection of the Meetings and of the officers.

d. The Recorder

The Recorder keeps records of births, deaths, marriages, and changes in membership and marital status, and prepares and forwards to the Yearly Meeting an annual statistical report. The Recorder also has general charge of all records of the Monthly Meeting, except for current records being maintained by

other officers.

3. Monthly Meeting Committees

In the Religious Society of Friends a committee is a group of Friends who are responsible for specific duties or the pursuit of an inquiry which the Meeting as a whole cannot accomplish efficiently or appropriately. A committee is expected to act for the Meeting which appointed it in matters that come within its charge. It reports to the Meeting such of its business as does not betray confidences, seeking guidance from the Meeting before going beyond its stated charge.

From time to time it is helpful for a committee to state to the best of its ability its understanding of its function and responsibility and to ask the Meeting for guidance as to the correspondence of that understanding with the intent of the Meeting. In most Meetings this will take the form of an annual report. It is also helpful for a committee from time to time to prepare position papers in which the committee states its corporate sense on a particular concern and asks the Meeting's approval of the statement as the basis for further progress. Each Monthly Meeting committee should keep in touch with the equivalent Yearly Meeting committee to report activities and to receive information and assistance.

A committee acts for the entire Meeting and is responsible to the Meeting for what it does. However, it is also responsible to the Spirit which moves in any Quaker meeting, and may sometimes be led in unexpected directions. Sensitivity to the implications of these two responsibilities—to the Meeting and to the Spirit—and to the necessity of carrying the whole Meeting forward toward the Light rather than outrunning the Meeting, is the most challenging part of committee work.

Committee meetings are generally open to any interested Meeting member and, for this reason, are held at stated times and places or, if specially called, should be well announced. While open committee meetings permit general participation, it is expected that non-members of a committee will use appropriate restraint. Some committees, notably Overseers (or Ministry and Oversight) may deal with matters of such confidentiality as to require closed

meetings. The Nominating Committee, because of the need to consider frankly the qualifications of Meeting members for service in various functions, normally meets with only appointed members of the committee present.

Upon receiving suggestions from a duly appointed Nominating Committee, the Monthly Meeting appoints suitable persons to serve as members of a Committee on Ministry and Counsel (also sometimes known as Ministry and Worship), as Overseers, and as members of such other committees as the Meeting may find useful. In some Meetings the Committee on Ministry and Counsel is combined with Overseers as a Committee on Ministry and Oversight.

Officers of the Meeting, Trustees, and committee clerks should be recorded members of the Monthly Meeting. Experience has also shown that Monthly Meetings are best served by having Ministry and Counsel, Overseers, and Nominating committees composed entirely of Monthly Meeting members. Any committee, except Ministry and Counsel, Overseers, Nominating, and Trustees, is free to add, besides its regularly appointed members, any other Meeting member or attender who shows sufficient interest and is willing to attend meetings and perform committee duties. It is important that such co-opting be the considered decision of the full committee and not a casual invitation from the committee clerk. The act of co-opting is recorded in the committee's minutes and communicated to the clerk of the Meeting and the clerk of the Nominating Committee. The Nominating Committee can look at the discharge of responsibilities by co-opted committee members to find candidates for regular appointment to the committee.

a. The Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee of a Meeting carries a heavy responsibility. The effectiveness of the Meeting's operation as a corporate body of Friends is, in large part, dependent upon the sensitive yet forthright consideration by this committee of persons to be recommended to the Meeting for service. The Nominating Committee must consider capabilities, experience, personal attributes, willingness to serve, as well as special gifts and talents. In addition, the committee must be aware of the duties and responsibilities of each office and committee of the Meeting.

The Nominating Committee nurtures different types of ministry through its careful selection of Friends to serve in Meeting positions. By varying the assignments of individual Friends and thus broadening their Meeting experience, the committee helps strengthen the Meeting's corporate life by fostering individual growth.

Because of this heavy responsibility it is desirable to select for the Committee members of the Society, and preferably of the local Meeting. As this committee does not bring in suggestions for its own membership, the Meeting is advised to establish a careful process for the selection of knowledgeable, sensitive, experienced, caring, and forthright Friends to serve on the Nominating Committee.

b. Ministry and Counsel and Committee of Overseers

The Common Purpose

The Ministry and Counsel Committee (in some Meetings called Ministry and Worship) and the Committee of Overseers have a common purpose—to help build and maintain a Christian community which unites all in the Meeting in a shared spiritual life, and which inspires all to walk in the Light. Ministry and Counsel is concerned primarily with what happens when the Meeting gathers for worship or for business. Overseers are concerned primarily with the spiritual well-being of the Meeting's individual members. In some Meetings the two committees may be combined as a Ministry and Oversight Committee.

All Meeting members are called to care for one another and for the Meeting. The two committees described here foster and focus that caring, in a spirit of commitment and love. Their common purpose is central to the life of the Meeting.

Ministry and Counsel

This committee seeks to ensure that each meeting for worship or business begins with quiet and reverent assembling; that it proceeds on the basis of a silent and attentive search for Divine guidance; that the meeting is served by spoken ministry that is inspired as way opens, and is addressed to the conditions of those present. Meetings for worship are ended when it is sensed that those present have been spiritually refreshed. The Ministry and Counsel Committee

should:

Counsel and support those who are led to speak out of the silence in meetings for worship. Inexperienced speakers especially may need to be encouraged and advised. Those who are inclined to speak unacceptably, at undue length, too often, or too soon after another speaker, may need prompt and loving counseling.

- Assure that appointed meetings for such occasions as marriages and memorials are appropriately held.
- Arrange special meetings for worship on behalf of those who are ill or imprisoned.
- Plan retreats, or other gatherings smaller than the regular meeting for worship, to deepen the spiritual life of the Meeting.
- Welcome newcomers and visitors to Meeting. (Leaflets to help newcomers understand Friends' practices and a visitors' book to record names and addresses are useful in this connection.)
- Consider requests⁵ for travel minutes and make recommendations on them to the Monthly Meeting.

Report on the State of the Meeting

Ministry and Counsel annually drafts a report which assesses the Meeting's spiritual condition and needs. The Monthly Meeting should thoughtfully consider this draft and give it formal approval. The report should be prepared with reference to the Queries⁶ and should cover such matters as:

- Spiritual condition of the Meeting; strengths and failings.
- Nature of meetings for worship during the year. Quality of the silence, content and quality of the spoken ministry.
- Meetings for business during the year. Range of concerns considered, attendance of members, implementation of the Meeting's decisions.
- Contributions of Peace and Social Order, Religious Education, Ministry and Counsel, Overseers, and other committees.
- What is most needed to deepen the spiritual life of the Meeting and to

⁵ See Appendix C.

⁶ See Part II, Section B: Queries with References for Advices.

strengthen its witness on behalf of Friends' testimonies to the world.

This report is forwarded to the Quarterly and Yearly Meetings after approval by the Monthly Meeting.

Overseers

Care of the individual members of the Meeting is the responsibility of the Committee of Overseers. Overseers should encourage members to participate fully in the Meeting community's life and to perform faithfully their Meeting commitments. To this end, Overseers should:

- Be acquainted with all members and regular attenders, and be aware of needs for encouragement and support.
- Receive, consider, and recommend Meeting action on requests for and withdrawals from membership.
- Help prospective members and new members to understand Friends' principles and practices.
- Identify members' special gifts and talents. Seek clearness on the special nature of the gift and the way it is to be recognized. When clearness is attained, forward any appropriate recommendations to the meeting for business and any appropriate Quarterly or Yearly Meeting Committee.
- Assist in setting up clearness and support committees for those who need or request them.
- Provide clearness committees to assist couples contemplating marriage under the care of the Meeting.⁷
- Assist with arrangements in time of death.⁸
- Encourage visiting and community life among the Meeting's members, and see that ill, troubled, or needy Friends are visited and helped.
- Get in touch with absent members and keep contact with non-resident members.
- Help to reconcile differences which may arise in the Meeting.

Many duties of Overseers are delicate and personal. In such areas, the committee's proceedings are kept confidential and the dignity of the persons

⁷ "The Quaker Wedding and Marriage," page 80.

⁸ Appendix I.

concerned is respected.

4. Other Monthly Meeting Functions

The Monthly Meeting is free to form such other committees as meet its purposes. Whether special committees are formed or not, the following functions need to be provided for in some appropriate way in each Monthly Meeting.

a. Stewardship and Finance

Monthly and Preparative Meetings should raise from their members and attenders funds sufficient to meet their responsibilities, to expand their interests, to care for their property, and to meet their obligations to the Yearly Meeting. A Stewardship and Finance Committee or Finance and Property Committee appointed by each Meeting is responsible for the preparation of an annual budget for consideration by the Meeting, for raising the funds to meet the approved budget, and for proper care and use of Meeting property. The Treasurer is ex officio a member of this committee.

The Meeting should periodically review its corporate witness with respect to contributions to Quaker and other organizations which reflect Friends' testimonies. The Stewardship and Finance Committee should make suitable proposals to reflect these attitudes or decisions.

b. Trustees

Any Meeting that accepts substantial funds for investment or holds appreciable real property is encouraged to incorporate and to appoint trustees. Those Meetings not incorporated should also appoint trustees to hold title and execute legal business pertaining to property and securities held by the Meeting. Trustees should be appointed in accordance with applicable laws, and for specified terms. A local Meeting is incorporated in the state of its location; therefore the law of that state prevails.

The trustees, like other committees of the Meeting, are selected by the Meeting and are expected to act for the whole Meeting in carrying out their responsibilities under the law. Thus, while trustees must be conscious of their

fiduciary obligation to preserve the assets of the Meeting, they must also be continuously sensitive to the spirit of the Meeting and its wish to fulfill the social testimonies of the Society of Friends. The Meeting, in turn, should be sensitive to the legal responsibilities of trustees which can, in certain circumstances, make them personally liable for actions taken in the name of the Meeting.

The Committee of Trustees alone is held legally responsible for the administration of Meeting property, real and personal. On behalf of the Meeting, the trustees, as its legal representative, may borrow money when necessary. They are the legal holder of property and securities, preserve the principal of donated funds, and have the power to accept stocks, bonds, or other securities in exchange for short-term loans to other Friends' organizations. Trustees and Meetings holding gifts in trust must see that these are appropriated as designated by the donors. If however, these purposes become obsolete, the trustees should seek advice from the Meeting. The Yearly Meeting has adopted a set of specific advices to Meetings and those proposing to leave property to Meetings in their wills.⁹

The trustees shall be directed by the Monthly Meeting's wishes, and shall consider these wishes in their transactions, being ever mindful of the conditions prescribed by donors. The trustees should keep accurate records of the terms of the trusts held by them on behalf of the Meeting and report at least annually to the Meeting.

No Meeting property may be distributed among individual members of a Meeting. If any Monthly Meeting ceases to exist, its property passes to the Yearly Meeting. The Baltimore Yearly Meeting Trustees, in concert with the trustees, if any, of the Monthly Meeting involved, make a recommendation to the Yearly Meeting for the sale or other use of the property.

c. Advancement and Outreach

Some Meetings have a special committee with duties in these areas; in others these responsibilities may be borne by Ministry and Counsel.¹⁰

⁹ See Appendix H.

¹⁰ See Part II, Section B(3)(b) "Ministry and Counsel and Committee of Overseers."

Advancement and outreach are natural and integral aspects of the Quaker way of life. Realizing that we are all children of God means that there is an infinite opportunity to search for God in our relations with others. Our fellowship begins, grows, and is nurtured in home and Meeting. It reaches greater fulfillment as we carry our love of God and humankind to our relationships with persons in the wider community of which our Meeting is a part, with members of other Meetings, and with all persons whom we meet.

While such extensions of fellowship reflect corporate concern, the concern will be manifest to others only if our individual lives are filled with the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control. This type of witness is itself outreach, but when words of witness are spoken from the foundation of such lives, then the hearers are truly called to God. The sharing of our spiritual values with others, from our neighbors to the larger world, makes our outreach and advancement activities meaningful. Without spiritual motivation our witness falls short.

In our communities, witness can be made through public lectures, letters to newspapers, radio talks, and the like. In a wider sphere, friends can reach out through articles, pamphlets, and books. We should constantly search out other appropriate ways to make known our insights, experiences, and testimonies.

Many Meetings have found strength through the attendance and membership of students and faculty members from nearby colleges and universities. Every Meeting should be sure that its ministry is known and open to such groups, but should also be sure that it reaches out to people from all other vocations and whatever racial and ethnic groups are present in its area. The Society of Friends is weakened by its lack of such diversity.

Our efforts for social betterment are a part of our outreach. Committees established to seek peace or social justice are as much involved in the advancement and outreach of the Meeting as the committee bearing this name. It is, however, the special concern of this committee to carry the message of Quakerism to those in the community who are seekers but have not heard of Friends. It is frequently said that someone who joined one of our Meetings “had

been a Friend without knowing it.” This committee seeks to reach such persons.

d. Religious Education

The Religious Education Committee is charged with the guidance and conducting of the formal religious education of the Meeting. Religious education should be broadly interpreted to embrace a continuing experience throughout life. The aim of religious education in the Society of Friends is to enhance opportunities for individuals to experience and be guided by the Inner Light. In a real sense, such education begins in the home from the earliest days of a child’s life. The experiences of love, sharing, doing, and learning within the family can all witness to the extent to which the Spirit of God is manifested in daily life.

First Day School and Adult Discussion Groups provide a continuing opportunity for religious experience. An awareness of the Bible, of Quaker history, of other forms of religious experience and practice, and a personal sense of relationship to God can all come with participation in Meeting-organized religious education programs.

Religious education activities are part of an integrated worship process. To achieve this, it is desirable to have First Day School children share at least a part of the period of meeting for worship.

Members of the Meeting should treat seriously the responsibility and the opportunity to share in First Day School either as members of the Religious Education Committee or as teachers. Care in developing a balanced curriculum suitable to our times, and preparation for teaching, are needed to assure that religious education is a vital part of the life of the Meeting.

e. Peace and Social Concerns

Meetings may vary widely in the extent of their activity and the degree of their organization in these areas and will often differ in the names chosen for service committees. Other names commonly used include Community Relations Committee, Social Action Committee, International Outreach Committee. Such committees are established to ensure that the Meeting makes a suitable corporate contribution to the furtherance of the testimonies of the Society of Friends in the important areas of peace and social concern. Committees

established to address these concerns should keep in close touch with the related committees of the Yearly Meeting for coordination of activities and sharing of information.

5. Visiting Among Friends

Visiting among Friends strengthens our Society. Individual Friends and Meetings are advised to take part in and encourage such visits.

a. Letters of Introduction¹¹

Friends who travel on business or vacation are urged to visit Friends' Meetings and homes as way opens. Such travelers may take along letters of introduction from their Monthly or Preparative Meetings. A letter may be in the form of a minute of the Meeting, confirming the visitor's membership, giving some information about his or her participation in Friends' affairs, and conveying greetings from the Meeting.

b. Minutes for Spiritual Service

A Friend who feels called to travel in Truth's service—to visit with families, make public speeches, speak at called meetings, or the like—should lay the concern before the Monthly Meeting, preferably first bringing it to the Committee on Ministry and Counsel. If the Meeting unites with the concern, it should record a minute describing its member's leading and proposed service, expressing the Meeting's approval and support, and asking for the assistance of Friends to be visited. The Meeting should provide the Friend under concern with a copy of the minute.

The Friend who sets out on such a journey should be accompanied, when practicable, by a Friend in sympathy with the concern and able to give counsel and companionship. The Monthly Meeting issuing the minute is responsible for seeing that the service is not hampered by lack of funds.

c. Endorsements

A Monthly Meeting minute for travel outside the Yearly Meeting should be

¹¹ A sample letter of introduction, travel minute, and endorsement are shown in Appendix C.

approved and endorsed by the Yearly Meeting, or Interim Meeting, if time permits. Clerks of the Meetings visited should be asked to endorse letters of introduction or travel minutes. The travelers should return their endorsed documents to the Monthly Meeting promptly at the end of the journey.

6. The Quaker Wedding and Marriage

Marriage, as understood by Friends, is a relationship involving two individuals, Spirit, and the faith community that witnesses, recognizes, and supports it. We call this marriage of Friends “under the care of Meeting.” Seek to be guided by Spirit in contemplating this important step.

The religious dimension of marriage includes the understanding that we will seek unity with leading of the Spirit and we will take this opportunity to practice love. The love of one another to which we are called is always a journey, a work in progress. Marriage involves a mutual commitment to share life, following a path of love together, requiring growth, integrity, and mutual respect.

Those considering marriage under the care of the Meeting should closely review the process recommended below to gain a clear understanding of the process. See Section 10 for an overview of responsibilities of those who are marrying, the Monthly Meeting Clerk, the Clearness committee, the marriage committee, and the meeting community.

a. Questions to consider when requesting marriage under the care of the meeting

When Friends are considering marriage under the care of the Meeting, it is recommended that they discuss the following questions. A Clearness committee may also use some of these questions in the clearness process. Each partner is unique in their background and experiences. These questions are meant to be a guide; they may not be relevant for everyone. Other topics may arise that are not specifically addressed. Let Spirit guide you, not words.

Beliefs, values, and spiritual grounding

- Do we feel spiritually led to marry? Are we open to seeking Divine assistance both when things are going well and when we encounter

difficulties?

- Do we consider vows made “in the presence of God and these our friends” to be binding?
- What are our plans for nurturing the spiritual basis of our marriage? Do we understand and have sympathy for one another’s religious beliefs?
- What values and beliefs do we hold in common? On what matters do we differ?
- Do we see each other and treat each other as equals? Do we have the willingness to listen to each other and to strive for open communication?

Partnership

- Do we share interests which we can enjoy together? Do we respect each other’s individual interests?
- Do we, in John Woolman’s words, “delight in each other’s happiness”?
- How do we feel about each other’s economic and cultural background?
- Will our professional or family obligations mean that we are apart for short or long periods of time? How will we handle the challenges of these separations?
- How will we uphold and strengthen the relationship with the passage of time? Can we share difficult feelings and deeply listen to one another?
- For those with prior partnerships: Do we have unfinished emotional business with our previous partner(s) that can productively be brought to completion? Are there failures whose acknowledgment might open the way to apologies and forgiveness, the healing of wounds, and new beginnings?

Sexuality

- Have we explored our attitudes toward sexuality and respect for monogamy?
- Have we discussed how we will express our individual sexualities in our marriage?
- What desires do we have in common and where do we differ?
- What are our opinions on contraception and abortion?

Conflict

- Do we know each other's habits, likes, and dislikes? Are we ready to make adjustments and address, with kindness and understanding, areas of possible conflict?
- Have we considered together how we will work to reconcile inevitable differences?
- Are we willing to make a strong commitment to permanence in our marriage?
- Are we open to seeking outside help such as a Clearness committee or counseling if such support seems warranted?

Children

- Have we explored our attitudes and visions for family life, including how many children we want (if any) and whether we might consider adoption or foster care?
- How might our family reflect Friends' testimonies of simplicity and of stewardship of the earth?
- What are our expectations about how we will raise, discipline, and educate our children?
- For those with children already: How will we co-parent with our children's other parents going forward? How do we envision relationships among children we may already have and our new partner? How do we envision that any children we may have together will relate with our other children?

Finances and Responsibilities

- Do we share each other's attitudes on earning, spending and saving money, and the handling of finances and debt?
- How are family responsibilities to be shared?
- Are there prior obligations—legal, financial, or both—that need to be met? If we do not obtain a marriage license, how will we protect each other's legal rights?

Family and Friends

- How do we react to each other's parents, children, friends, and

relatives?

- How will we balance the needs of our marriage with our friendships and responsibilities outside the home, such as work, volunteer activities, and education?
- Are parents and other significant friends and family members supportive of our choice to marry? If not, have their concerns been considered?
- How do we intend to keep close relations with family members who may live far away, especially in cases of illness or old age?

Relationship to the Monthly Meeting

- Why are we asking for marriage under the care of the Meeting?
- What do we anticipate our relationship with the Meeting to be in our life together?
- Are we aware that care of our marriage by the Meeting involves a continuing concern for our life together and the values established in our home? Will we welcome the continuing concern of the Meeting?

Wedding Plans

- What traditions and beliefs (religious, cultural, familial) are important to us? Do we want to incorporate them in to the traditional Quaker ceremony?
- Who (family, friends, community) do we want to include in the process of planning how our wedding will be accomplished? What traditions, beliefs, and values might they hope to see represented as we formalize our commitment in the wedding? How might they differ from the traditional Quaker ceremony? How will we work to reconcile any difference of tradition, belief, or values that might arise?
- How do we feel about expenses for a wedding, reception, and honeymoon? Are our plans in harmony with Quaker testimonies and our own values?
- Who (family, friends, community) do we want present at our wedding as participants? What roles do we see for them? Do the people we are including in the process of planning our wedding have feelings about this that need to be addressed?

- Typically all members and attenders of a Monthly Meeting are invited to a Meeting for Worship for Marriage. How will this affect the planning of our wedding?
- Do we want to hold a reception following the wedding ceremony? What would that look like? Note that typically alcoholic beverages are not served at Meeting Houses.

In conclusion

- Do we know each other well enough to have considered all of the above questions frankly and openly? If not, may we wait—six months, a year—before proceeding with marriage?

b. Starting the Process

The partners write a letter to the Clerk of the Monthly Meeting under whose care they wish to be married. See Section 10a, Responsibilities of the Persons to be Married on page 90, for suggested content of the letter. It is best if the proposed wedding date is at least three to six months in the future to allow the Meeting time to fulfill its responsibilities. The clerk forwards the letter of request to the appropriate standing committee (usually Ministry and Pastoral Care, or care and counsel), which will name a Clearness committee, usually of two or three members. Some meetings establish the clearness committee at Business Meeting.

c. The Clearness Process

As it relates to Quaker marriage, the term “clearness” historically referred to clearness from other marriage commitments. Today, the Clearness committee for a marriage also explores with the couple what it takes to achieve the permanence and satisfaction of a committed, loving relationship, and the extent to which the partners are prepared for the dedication and constancy such a relationship requires.

The Clearness committee meets privately with the partners in a spirit of loving concern as many times as necessary. The Clearness committee members ask thoughtful questions, listen carefully, and leave space for worship. Please see Section 1 above for queries that you may wish to explore with them. If concerns

about the relationship arise during the clearness process, it is important for committee members to speak candidly, recognizing that failure to speak truth with kindness is to risk possible suffering.

The Clearness committee does its best to confirm in the partners a true leading to marry. If both people and the Clearness committee are clear about their leading to marry, the committee reports the recommendation that the Monthly Meeting take the proposed marriage under its care to the standing committee that appointed it.

There may occasionally be a situation where clearness is not reached. If either the partners or members of the Clearness committee do not feel clear, the committee and the couple will address the concerns and issues. This situation may require additional time for the Clearness process, or taking a break with agreement to come back after some interval. It is possible that one partner may feel uneasy, and more time must be allowed. Clearness for older, widowed, or divorced Friends merits special attention. They bring a special set of issues to the relationship. The Clearness committee needs to be sensitive to the complexities of these relationships, and attend to the special concerns raised by the joining of two families. Specific responsibilities of the Clearness committee are outlined in Section 10c, Responsibilities of the Clearness Committee on page 91.

d. Monthly Meeting Approval

A recommendation that the marriage be held under the care of the Monthly Meeting is presented by the standing committee to Business Meeting for approval. Some Monthly Meetings require that the request be held over for a month after the first presentation to the Business Meeting.

e. The Marriage Committee

The marriage committee is responsible for ensuring that the wedding is carried out with dignity, reverence, and simplicity, in the manner of Friends. Those appointed also accept personal responsibility for upholding the Meeting's continuing concern for the marriage, and, as possible, for remaining in touch with the couple after the wedding and reaching out from time to time. Marriage partners who are not members of the meeting are welcomed in to the life of the

Meeting and are invited to attend Meetings for Worship and business and other meeting activities. See Section 10d, Responsibilities of the Marriage Committee on page 92.

f. The Marriage Vows

The traditional Quaker marriage vow is:

In the presence of God, and of these our Friends, I _____, take thee _____ to be my [partner, spouse, husband, wife] promising with Divine assistance to be a loving and faithful [partner, spouse, husband, wife] as long as we both shall live.

The couple will want to review and discuss these vows to decide if they wish to modify them. Any significant changes to the marriage vows can be reviewed with the Clearness committee or marriage committee for approval.

g. The Marriage Certificate

Below is the traditional wording of the marriage certificate. It may be modified as the couple wish to reflect their terminology for one another. At a minimum, the certificate includes the full names of the couple; name and location (city and state) of the Monthly Meeting; date of the wedding; statement of the vows exchanged; signatures of the couple; and the signatures of all in attendance.

If a couple wishes for a certificate with substantially different wording from the standard form below, they will make this known as early as possible to the Clearness committee and/or marriage committee. If this committee feels the changes are substantive, the changes may need to be brought to the attention of the appropriate standing committee for approval.

A Friends' marriage certificate is typically prepared by hand by someone with calligraphic skills using archival paper and permanent ink.

Whereas [full name] of [City, State], [son/daughter/child] of [parent name] and [parent name] of [City, State] and [full name] of [City, State], [daughter/son/child] of [parent name] and [parent name] of [City, State], having declared their intentions to marry each other to _____ Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends held at [City, State], according to the good order used among them, this meeting allowed

their proposed marriage.

Now this is to certify that for the accomplishment of their marriage, this ____ day of the ____ month, in the year ____ , they, [full name] and [full name], appeared in a meeting for worship of the Religious Society of Friends, held at ____ Meeting, and [first name], taking [first name] by the hand, did on this solemn occasion declare that [he/she/they] took [first name], to be [his/her/their] [partner/spouse/husband/wife] promising with Divine assistance to be unto [him/ her/them] a loving and faithful [partner/spouse/husband/wife] so long as they both shall live; and then in the same assembly [first name] did in like manner declare that [he/she/they] took [him/her/them], [first name], to be [his/her/ their] [partner/spouse/husband/wife], promising with Divine assistance to be unto [him/her/them] a loving and faithful [partner/spouse/husband/wife] so long as they both shall live. And moreover, they did as further confirmation thereof, then and there, to this certificate set their hands.

[spaces for signatures of couple, with the names they will use after the wedding]

And we, having been present at the marriage, have as witnesses set our hands.

h. Customary Sequence of Events at a Quaker Wedding

The Meeting for Marriage is a traditional Meeting for Worship with some programmed elements. The usual sequence of events (subject to change by request of the couple and consent of the marriage committee) is as follows:

- If music is desired, it is played or sung during the period when people are gathering.
- At the hour appointed for the start of the Meeting, the marriage committee and the wedding party enter and take their seats.
- After a few moments of settling, a designated person rises to explain the purpose of the Meeting, its nature as a Quaker Meeting for Worship, and of a Quaker wedding specifically (see 9. Introducing Weddings, page

89, for suggested wording).

- The Meeting then settles in to silent worship.
- Following a period of silence, as long or as short as the couple is led to observe, the couple stand, face each other and join hands. Each recites to the other their vows in a loud clear voice so all may hear.
- If there are rings, the couple exchange these after their vows. A kiss is often exchanged at this time.
- The couple sit down and the marriage certificate table is brought before them for their signatures.
- The signed certificate is then read aloud by a designated person to the meeting in its entirety, including the signatures just appended.
- The certificate table is then moved away.
- The Meeting settles in again to a period of worship during which those who are moved to speak do so. The meeting is closed by the designated person.
- After the wedding company withdraws, all wedding guests (including children) sign the certificate under the supervision of designated persons. If desired, spaces may be reserved for the signatures of the wedding company, marriage committee, and family.

i. Introducing Weddings

Some Meetings have used the following language in introducing the Meeting for Marriage. Friends are urged to take it as a guide, making whatever modifications seem appropriate.

Friends, We are gathered here today in a meeting for worship to witness the marriage of ____ and _____. They have asked me to say a few words about what will happen, especially for those who have not experienced a Quaker Meeting for Worship.

When Friends gather for worship, they come together sure in the knowledge that God, also called by some the Inner Light, the Truth, Love, or the Spirit of Christ, will be with us. You are invited to join us in the silent power of this corporate worship.

Because your presence and attention are requested, and to avoid

distracting others, we ask that you not take photographs during the worship. There will be plenty of time later for that.

_____ and _____ have asked me to extend a special welcome to young children, who are encouraged to stay with us as long as is comfortable for them and their parents. Whenever they may prefer it, children are welcome to join in the child care, which is being provided [insert location]. .

When these comments are finished, we will settle together in to a period of silent worship. When they are ready, _____ and _____ will stand and, facing each other, exchange their marriage vows. In the manner of Friends, they will join themselves in marriage without the intercession of a minister or other official. After the vows are spoken, the marriage certificate will be brought for them to sign. When _____ and _____ have signed the certificate, it will be read aloud to us by _____ and returned to its place.

At that time we will enter again in to a period of corporate worship, opening our hearts to the joy of this occasion and reflecting upon our hopes and prayers for _____ and for _____ and for their life together. Out of this second period of silent worship, it may be that some are led by the Spirit to offer a message out of the silence. If you are so led today please stand and speak loudly and clearly so all may hear allowing a period of silence after any previous message so it may settle. Please do not hurry; we will have enough time. Once the time is right, worship will be closed by shaking hands. At that time please remain in your seats until you are invited to sign the wedding certificate.

Let us now enter in to the silence with _____ and _____ with joy and expectation.

j. Overview of Responsibilities

To promote clarity and mutual understanding, the duties and responsibilities of the several persons involved are outlined separately below. Please review these outlines in conjunction with the preceding text.

Responsibilities of the Persons to be Married

- Write a letter, signed by both persons, to the Monthly Meeting under whose care they wish to be married. The letter at a minimum can read something like the following:
We intend to marry and request marriage under the care of _____ Meeting. We have discussed the "Questions to Consider When Requesting Marriage Under the Care of the Meeting." Our proposed marriage date is __/__/__ . (Allow a proposed date at least three to six months in the future).
- Meet with a Clearness committee to explore their leading to marry. This may involve more than one session.
- Review the traditional marriage vows and discuss any proposed changes.
- Identify persons who might serve on the marriage committee.
- Finalize date and mail out invitations only after approval has been granted by the Monthly Meeting.
- Meet with the marriage committee to discuss plans for the wedding.
- Identify persons to introduce and conclude the Meeting for Worship for Marriage and to read the marriage certificate.
- Have any changes to the language of the vows and marriage certificate approved by the standing committee or Monthly Meeting.
- Have the certificate prepared in ample time for the marriage.
- Become informed, with the assistance of the marriage committee, of all legal requirements and forms used in the state in which the marriage is to take place.
- Arrange to secure the marriage license (if applicable) and provide it to the marriage committee prior to the wedding.
- Commit to memory the vows to be made.
- Sign the marriage certificate after the vows have been made.

Responsibilities of the Monthly Meeting Clerk

- Present the letter of request to marry to the appropriate standing committee (usually Pastoral Care or Care and Counsel) at the earliest opportunity. That committee will assure that a committee for clearness

is appointed.

- Arrange for presentation by the standing committee of the clearness committee's report at the next Monthly Meeting for Business following receipt of their report.
- After the report has been accepted and the marriage under the care of the Meeting approved by the Monthly Meeting, ensure that the Meeting names a marriage committee.
- Inform the couple that the marriage under the care of the Meeting has been approved and that they can next meet with the marriage committee.
- Following the wedding, ensure that the marriage committee reports to the Meeting for Business.

Responsibilities of the Clearness Committee

- Arrange to meet with the couple privately, in a spirit of loving concern, at least once, and as many more times as is deemed necessary.
- Learn whether both are clear of any other commitment that is inconsistent with the intended marriage.
- Discuss their responses to the "Questions to Consider When Requesting Marriage Under the Care of the Meeting" (Section 1, page 81).
- Check that the welfare and rights of any children by a former marriage have been properly considered and legally secured.
- Review the conduct of a Quaker wedding, including customary wording of the vows and the marriage certificate.
- Discuss the Quaker regard for reverence, dignity, and simplicity in the Meeting for Marriage and reception.
- Discuss the specific date, time, and location of the wedding to be included in the report to Business Meeting.
- Explain the functions of the marriage committee with whom the couple will discuss wedding arrangements, including that the role of the marriage committee is to provide continuing care for the couple following the marriage.
- Obtain suggestions from the couple of names for the marriage committee to be included in the report to the Monthly Meeting. Please include at least four persons on the marriage committee, of whom at

least half should be Meeting members.

- Report to the standing committee that appointed it regarding the clearness of the couple for marriage, discussing any proposed substantive changes to the vows and certificate. The committee (usually Pastoral Care or Care and Counsel) that named the clearness committee then presents a recommendation to Business Meeting that the marriage under the care of the Meeting be approved, including the proposed date, time, and location for the wedding, and the suggested members of the marriage committee.

Responsibilities of the Marriage Committee

- Arrange to meet with the couple in a timely fashion.
- Make clear the committee's availability to the couple to help them before, during, and after the wedding with ongoing responsibility for continuing care for the marriage.
- At the first meeting of the committee plan a rehearsal date, ideally with all members of the wedding party.
- Make sure that the wedding site is reserved for the rehearsal and wedding; make sure that the reception site is reserved if appropriate.
- Review Section 8: "Customary Sequence of Events at a Quaker Marriage Ceremony."
- Review and approve the vows the couple will exchange at the wedding and the language of the marriage certificate, making sure that the vows are exactly reflected in the certificate.
- Discuss the Quaker regard for reverence, dignity, and simplicity in the Meeting for Marriage and reception. If the couple desires to include elements from other faith traditions check they are in keeping with the simplicity of a Meeting for Worship. Discuss proposed decorations, music, or any arrangements desired by the couple. Remind the couple that photographs are not to be taken during the Meeting for Worship. Express the Meeting's hope that simplicity will also be observed at any reception held.
- Determine who will introduce and conclude the meeting. Discuss what will be communicated by this person at the beginning of the meeting for worship. See Section 9 "Introducing Weddings" on page 89.

- Determine who will read the certificate. (This person does not need to be a member of the Meeting or of this committee.) Let the person selected to read the certificate have an opportunity to read it in advance.
- Discuss whether or not there will be a handout that provides an overview of the Quaker Meeting for Marriage, and, if so, how it will be produced and distributed.
- Decide upon any special seating arrangements, if desired, for families and friends of the couple.
- Be aware of local laws related to Quaker marriages and communicate this to the couple. Make sure that the marriage license and wedding certificate have been secured, that needed signatures can be obtained on the license, and that all legal requirements will be met (as applicable).
- Ensure that weights for the certificate, working pens with permanent ink, and a portable table are available for the certificate.
- Arrange for assistance for those present to sign the certificate after the wedding.
- Attend the rehearsal.
- After the wedding:
 - Arrange for the care of the marriage certificate, give it to the Meeting Recorder to copy for the Meeting records, retrieve it from the Recorder, and return it to the couple.
 - Obtain the needed signatures on the marriage license and mail or deliver it to the proper authorities.
 - Report to the Business Meeting whether the marriage has been suitably accomplished, whether legal requirements were satisfied, and any name changes resulting from the marriage.

k. Care of Marriages and Families

The Monthly Meeting accepts the responsibility to support a marriage under the care of the Meeting in years to come. We celebrate the deepening of marriage relationships over time, and we try to remain attentive to the struggles and concerns that also emerge.

Care of a marriage may occur through regular, supportive interaction with the couple by members of their marriage committee, by a group of couples providing mutual support, by outreach from elders or members of a committee, or simply through loving attention from friends in the meeting. The Meeting may also benefit from the ministry of Friends who offer workshops to help families and couples grow in the Spirit and by having helpful books in the meeting library.

Sometimes Friends believe they want to respect the privacy of the couple or family; at other times the couple does not let anyone know of their need for support. But it is the mark of a true community to pay attention. Denial of the existence of problems and concerns is not an expression of care. Friends may not be able to resolve conflicts or see a way forward; but the single act of paying attention can create a supportive environment to explore problems and concerns.

Frequently only one person in a couple regularly attends Meeting. In these situations, Meeting involvements can affect relationships. Meetings should be mindful of supporting these couples.

Queries for Meetings

The following queries may be helpful for Monthly Meetings and marriage committees:

- Does the Meeting offer resources and events to help couples nurture their relationship?
- In what ways do we as a community celebrate relationships and support couples enduring stressful times?
- Are we attentive to “distress signals”? Are we able to respond to them lovingly and non-judgmentally?

I. Marriages in Distress

Many marriages end in separation or divorce. These situations present challenges to Quaker meetings as they seek to show care and support for the couple and their children. If there is a conflict within a marriage, the couple is encouraged to seek assistance early, long before differences become

irreconcilable. This may take the form of a request to meet with their marriage committee, to meet with a clearness committee, and/or to receive counseling.

Meetings are advised to recognize their role as providing spiritual support. If there is a need for professional counseling, this assistance can be sought outside the meeting. The Meeting is encouraged to maintain a list of qualified counselors who understand Quaker values, as a reference for couples who may desire professional help.

In general, it is important that the Meeting supports both people and that both feel welcome at meeting for worship. Members of the Meeting, especially those who serve on committees that provide pastoral care, strive to keep open lines of communication, avoid blaming individuals, and help each individual act with integrity. Confidentiality is essential.

Not all marriages end peacefully; some unions may end because of physical and/or emotional abuse, toxicity, or power inequality. Special consideration must be given in these circumstances.

The abused partner may need the support of their spiritual home more than ever. When there is clear evidence of abuse, Meetings may discern that the safest and most loving course is to ask the abusive partner to seek worship elsewhere, or find creative solutions to offer support and worship.

The Meeting's role is to support everyone in the family (including children). When there are children involved, the meeting will take care to ensure that they are welcome and feel the loving and practical support of the Meeting. Children may feel bewildered, blame themselves for the difficulties their parents are experiencing, or feel caught in the middle.

If, ultimately, the couple decides to divorce, the couple may want to meet with a clearness committee to consider how the meeting can support them.

Queries for the Couple

- Are you open to seeking spiritual support through a clearness process or asking for professional help?

- Do you seek to keep the Spirit as a vital force in your life to help you deal with the changes that come with separation or divorce?
- Do you avoid hurting your former spouse through your relationships with others, either in or out of the Meeting?

Queries for Couples with Children

- As individuals, are you committed to the reality that you are both still parents of your children and must continue to find creative ways of fulfilling this responsibility?
- Are you mindful of your children's need to continue a loving relationship with each parent?
- Are you mindful of your children's response to the stress in your family?
- Can you avoid both shutting your children out of your own pain and leaning on them too much?
- Are you mindful of the special love between children and grandparents or extended family, and do you endeavor to further strengthen these ties?

Queries for Meetings

- Does the Meeting actively and sensitively reach out to married persons or couples who may be troubled?
- Is the Meeting willing to work to maintain an open perspective regarding the difficulties in the marriage?
- Is the Meeting providing ongoing spiritual and practical support for stability and continuity to children during this difficult time?
- If the Meeting finds itself too emotionally involved to help, will it consider calling on another Monthly Meeting, its Quarterly Meeting, or yearly meeting for aid?

m. Marriages Not Under the Care of the Meeting

Marriages of Members Elsewhere

When Meeting members are married elsewhere, it is requested that they inform the Meeting of their marriage. The Meeting will ask members to contact the newly married couple to express the Meeting's congratulations to the couple.

Marriages of Friends from Other Meetings

Sometimes Meetings will be asked to host a wedding for Friends from other Meetings who wish to be married there, but to have the marriage remain under the care of their home Meeting. Good communication between the two Meetings can help ensure an appropriate wedding.

Wedding in the Manner of Friends

Some Meetings require that at least one of the persons to be married be a member or attender well known to the community. Meetings are encouraged to consider in advance if they are willing and able to offer marriage in other circumstances.

If partners, who are neither members nor attenders, request a marriage under the care of the Meeting, the Meeting may feel clear to offer them a wedding “in the manner of Friends.” These marriages do not require ongoing support of the marriage from the Meeting. For example, Meetings may offer a wedding in the manner of Friends to persons known to the Meeting who live far away, or for children of members who no longer attend Meeting as adults.

The couple should be made fully aware of the nature and procedures for a Friends Meeting for Worship for marriage.

7. In Time of Death

The fact of impending death is one of God’s provisions for our living. Death comes as the culmination of life and is both inevitable and natural. The mystery of death is no greater than the mystery of life. Friends should consider their own death and make appropriate provisions in advance to spare their loved ones trouble, expense, and the pain of unanticipated decisions.

Monthly Meetings should be ready to help Friends facing death, and their families, to prepare for life’s final mystery. Overseers can help with information on legal requirements, simple burials, and cremations. Ministry and Counsel can help the family to arrange a memorial meeting or funeral after the manner of Friends.

Grief is natural after the death of a loved one, whether the death is sudden and unexpected or long-impending. The Meeting should help family and friends to express their grief and work through it to a sense of unity with all creation, so that the deceased can be remembered joyfully. Meetings frequently do this by holding memorial meetings for worship, in celebration of the life of the member or attender who has died.

a. Memorial Meetings¹²

Memorial meetings are arranged as soon as convenient for the family. They are conducted as meetings for worship, with Friendly simplicity. If attendance of non-Friends is anticipated, it is appropriate to appoint a Friend to explain Friends' worship near the beginning of the meeting. A memorial minute may be read early in the meeting. A closed casket or urn may be present if the family wishes.

Memorial minutes are normally read also in meetings for business and entered in the minutes of the Meeting. The family of the deceased Friend should also receive a copy. If the deceased was active in Quarterly or Yearly Meeting affairs, the memorial minute should also be forwarded to those Meetings.

Burial or the scattering of ashes may precede or follow such a meeting, may be separately arranged, or may constitute the only observance. In any case it should be conducted as an act of worship under the guidance of the Spirit. Friends should avoid display or excessive expense in funeral arrangements. The family may wish to suggest that memorial contributions be made for some special concern of the deceased.

b. Wills and Related Matters

Documentation of one's wishes regarding disposition of one's body and possessions after death is a matter which requires forethought and preparation while health permits. Friends are urged to make wills according to the guide in Appendix H (page 116). If a Friend wishes to will some or all of the body for medical purposes, it is strongly urged that this wish be made known to members of the family at the time of the decision, and that it be registered with a

¹² See Appendix I.

memorial society and with the state or other organization authorized to act on such requests. The family should be acquainted with steps to be taken at the time of death, since immediate action is usually required. Overseers should maintain a file of up-to-date information on the preferences of their members on these matters and on the laws of their particular jurisdiction.

8. Monthly Meeting Records

Friends have traditionally taken care to keep and preserve records, and Meetings should give sustained attention to this matter by appointing competent members to keep the records accurate, accessible for current reference, and preserved for future generations.

a. Membership Roll

The Monthly Meeting Recorder is responsible for maintaining the roll of members and keeping it up to date. Care should be taken to record in the Monthly Meeting minutes each change in statistics or membership status. The Recording Clerk or Monthly Meeting Records Committee should review the Meeting membership records each year and report to the Monthly Meeting on their status.

b. Monthly and Preparative Meeting Minutes

Taking minutes of meetings for business and preserving them is the duty of the Clerk and the Assistant or Recording Clerk, and the responsibility should be definitely assigned. The minutes of each business session should be dated and signed by both the Presiding Clerk and the Recording Clerk. Attachments such as the annual budget and financial report, the annual committee assignment list, and other communications of importance, should be kept with the minutes to which they relate, and notations on the minutes and the attachments should cross-reference each other. Each item should be dated and signed.

c. Financial Accounts

The accounts are normally kept by the Treasurer, usually under the direction of the Monthly Meeting's Finance Committee. All accounts are kept in a form which enables them to be reported to the Meeting on a regular basis. Either the Monthly Meeting or the Committee should appoint an auditor or an auditing

committee to examine the accounts each year.

d. Committee Minutes

Minutes of committees should also be carefully kept, in chronological order, and turned over to the Recorder for preservation when no longer needed by committees. As with Monthly Meeting minutes, they should be signed and dated.

e. Other Records

The newsletter may be the most-used record of the life of the Meeting. At least one complete set should be kept for Meeting reference and archival purposes. Other documents important to the life and good order of the Meeting or its members may include legal documents (deeds, notes, trusts, insurance policies), marriage certificates (in reduced-copy form), and correspondence. All such documents should be kept in a safe location known to the Clerk, the Trustees, the Finance Committee, and the Recorder.

f. Preservation of Records

Each set of records, including membership, business meeting minutes, financial records, committee minutes, and the newsletter, should be kept on acid-free paper. No attachments should be made to pages by the use of metal fasteners, paste, glue, or gummed tape, as all will eventually eat through the paper and destroy the record. Each set of records should be kept in chronological order in acid-free folders or binders and boxes. If binders are used, it is best not to allow direct contact of metal with the contents, and it should be possible to remove pages for microfilming.

g. Retention and Disposition of Records

The permanent record copies of membership records, Monthly Meeting minutes and attachments, financial records, committee minutes, and newsletters should go in units of approximately 500 pages to the Maryland Hall of Records, which will make and keep a microfilm copy. Meetings should retain a reference copy of important records during this process. Information on current procedures for further disposition of records is obtainable from the Yearly Meeting Records Committee. The Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College and the

Quaker Collection at Haverford College have jointly served as the official depository for records of Baltimore Yearly Meeting and its constituent Monthly Meetings.

9. Monthly Meeting Responsibilities to the Yearly Meeting

- Annually appoint members to attend Yearly Meeting sessions and report to the Monthly Meeting.
- Annually appoint one person to attend Interim Meetings, and promptly advise the Yearly Meeting office of the appointment.
- Support the Yearly Meeting financially in accordance with the apportionment developed by the Stewardship and Finance Committee of the Yearly Meeting in cooperation with the Monthly Meeting and approved at the Yearly Meeting sessions.
- Annually forward approved Monthly Meeting reports, for example on Peace or Religious Education, to the Yearly Meeting office for use by the appropriate Yearly Meeting committees.
- Forward to the Yearly Meeting office at appropriate times statistical information, names and addresses of officers, committee clerks and members, and other facts which from time to time may be required by the Yearly Meeting.
- At the request of the Yearly Meeting Nominating Committee, suggest the names of persons who would be suitable to serve on Yearly Meeting committees.
- Annually forward to the Yearly Meeting office an approved report on the spiritual state of the Monthly Meeting.
- Forward, either directly to the Clerk of Yearly Meeting or through the Quarterly Meeting, copies of memorial minutes of Friends well-known beyond the Monthly Meeting. These minutes are mentioned in the Yearly Meeting Yearbook. They may be read in whole or in part, as way opens, in a Yearly Meeting session, and they are filed with Yearly Meeting records.
- Respond promptly to calls from the Yearly Meeting office with news items for the Interchange. Regularly forward the Monthly Meeting newsletters and directory to the Yearly Meeting office.

C. Quarterly Meetings

In Baltimore Yearly Meeting the traditional role of Quarterly Meetings as business meetings intermediate between Monthly Meetings and the Yearly Meeting has undergone many changes. Quarterly Meetings (some of which are now Half-yearly or Half-year's Meetings) are primarily held for fellowship and conference purposes bringing together members of all meetings in a geographic area, while some Quarters are adding business sessions. Interest in reviving strong, active Quarters is widespread within the Yearly Meeting.

Certain Yearly Meeting committees are constituted to have representation from each Quarter (see Manual of Procedure), and reports on the spiritual state of the Monthly Meetings and memorial minutes for deceased Friends well known in the Quarter are customarily considered by Quarterly Meetings. This book does not prescribe organization or committee structures for Quarterly Meetings, which may establish such as serve their purposes.

D. The Yearly Meeting

Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends is an organization of the members of its constituent Quarterly and Monthly Meetings. The Yearly Meeting exercises only general oversight and loving care over constituent Meetings, leaving to them the proper ordering of their worship, fellowship, and service. Information on the structure and operation of the Yearly Meeting is contained in the Manual of Procedure and the Yearbook.

Part IV: Appendices

A. Advices for Clerks¹³

You, as clerk, are the Meeting's servant, not its master. The Meeting is likely to repose great trust in you and will usually help you cheerfully if you find yourself at a loss.

You, in turn, can help the Meeting. Your attitude may help set the pattern of worshipful listening which should characterize our meetings for business. If all should come with heart and mind prepared, how much more the clerk?

Do not leave preparation to the last minute. A clerk who comes with facts checked out in advance may help the Meeting avoid fruitless and time-wasting speculation. Consultation with the recording clerk and preparation in advance of draft minutes covering routine and factual items of the proposed agenda can save time.

When introducing business try to provide a brief but sufficient outline of needed background to set the Meeting purposefully on its course. While you may need to advise the Meeting on procedure or to make an occasional suggestion, your main task is to discern the Meeting's united mind. This is harder to do if you also try to participate in the discussion. You may find that the discipline of detachment leads to a new and deeper relationship with your fellow members. If you are deeply involved in a decision to be reached, the Meeting should be invited to ask another Friend to act as clerk for the occasion.

Though decisions should not normally be made on the strength of numbers, there are mundane matters such as the date or time of a meeting on which the convenience of the greatest number should prevail.

The weightiest Friend is not necessarily weighty in all matters: seek to assess the value of individual contributions. Do not forget that the silence of some is often of greater significance than the speech of others.

¹³ Adapted from Church Government of London Yearly Meeting.

When strong division of opinion seems to threaten the worshipful basis of the business meeting, a period of silent and prayerful waiting on the will of God may have a calming and unifying effect.

In matters where the wording of the minute is especially important, do not be afraid to ask the Meeting to wait while the minute is prepared. In some cases you may need to have time for reflection or consultation and to bring in a minute after an interval in the meeting. Make sure that each minute covers all required points in a decision with a view to the possible need to consult it in future. All minutes, except on the most routine matters, should be written out in full and presented before the close of the meeting for business during which the matters were considered. (In the case of Quarterly or Yearly Meeting sessions which are adjourned from time to time over a day or a few days, minutes covering all but the most important issues may be read at the start of the next session, but all should be approved before final adjournment of the sessions.)

When a Friend from outside comes to your Meeting to speak by invitation or under concern, try to ensure that the agenda is arranged to allow adequate time for the matter when the Meeting is not fatigued or overburdened with other business.

Your office gives you some authority to act or speak for the Meeting. Beware of exceeding your authority. Use discretion and consult Friends of experience in deciding which matters may conveniently be handled by yourself and which need reference to the Meeting.

In the meeting for business deal courteously but firmly with those who speak too long or stray from the point. It is well to permit no side discussion but to insist that all who wish to speak address the clerk. The proper exercise of the clerk's authority is of great service to the Meeting's smooth handling of its business.

Try to keep a sense of proportion and a sense of humor. Do not be overly brisk or allow the meeting to drag. Be alert to those who need encouragement to speak.

Think affectionately between meetings of the needs of the community which has appointed you and how they can best be met. Ask God's guidance continually in the performance of your task.

B. Suggested Formats for Transfers

1. Transfer to Another Meeting

In transferring a membership to another Meeting, a Monthly Meeting may use a letter or a standard form with blanks, which may be called a Certificate of Transfer or Certificate of Removal. Wording may vary, but it is suggested that all of the information contained in the suggested format below be included. The letter or form should be on the letterhead of the Meeting, if available, and should contain a full mailing address for reply.

(Date)

(Name of receiving Meeting) (Address)

Dear Friends:

At our Monthly Meeting held on (date), we approved the request of the following full member(s) in good standing of our Meeting for transfer of membership to your Monthly Meeting:

(full name or names)

[This request for transfer also includes the following child(ren) of the full member(s) who is/are (a) junior (associate) member(s) of our Meeting: (full name or names)]

We commend him/her/them to your loving care. We enclose the appropriate Recorder's information for your records.

We would appreciate receiving your acknowledgment of this request and notice of your action upon it.

On behalf of (name of Meeting),

(Signature)

(Typed or printed name of signer)

Clerk (Recording Clerk/Corresponding Clerk/Recorder)

2. Acknowledgement of Transfer

When the transfer is approved by the receiving Meeting, the Meeting requesting the transfer should be promptly notified. The member(s) remain(s) on the rolls of the requesting Meeting until the transfer is completed. The following format may be used:

(Date)

(Name of receiving Meeting) (Address)

Dear Friends:

In accordance with your request, the following was/were accepted as (a) full member(s) of our Monthly Meeting by transfer from your Meeting on (date):

(full name or names)

[Also accepted at that time as (a) junior (associate) member(s) was/were the following child(ren) of the full member(s):

(full name or names)]

On behalf of (name of Meeting),

(Signature)

(Typed or printed name of signer)

Clerk (Recording Clerk/Corresponding Clerk/Recorder)

C. Suggested Formats for Letters of Introduction, Travel Minutes, and Endorsements

The Monthly Meeting should make appropriate alterations to fit individual

situations.

1. Sample Letter of Introduction

Meeting Letterhead and Date

Dear Friends,

Please welcome _____ as he/she travels among you. _____ is a member of our Meeting in good standing. We send you our loving greetings, and commend _____ to your loving care during his/her journey.
In peace, Clerk

2. Sample Travel Minute

Meeting Letterhead and Date

_____, a beloved member of this Meeting, has opened to us his/her/their leading to travel among [location's] Meetings [Insert brief indication of concern]. He/She / They anticipates that _____, a member of _____ Meeting, will join him/her/them and that they will travel in this ministry between _____ and _____, 20__.

This Meeting unites with _____'s leading. We trust that you will benefit as we have from sharing his/her/their insights and quiet faith. We commend him/her/them to your care and hospitality.
Approved and minuted at our meeting for business held _____, 20__.

_____, Clerk

3. Sample Endorsement

Dear Friends,

_____ was present with us during meeting for [worship, business] today. His/her ministry here was appreciated. We are holding him/her in the Light as he/she continues this journey.
Date _____

_____ Clerk, _____ Monthly Meeting

D. Advises on counseling¹⁴

In helping one another, Friends can be instruments of the all-encompassing love of God. All Friends should help one another as they are able, but particular responsibility for care and counseling lies with Overseers. This committee should choose counselors fitted for particular needs from among themselves and other qualified persons in the Meeting. Qualifications of a good counselor include approachability, warmth, sympathy, spiritual insight without doctrinaire assumptions, ability to listen without judgment, ability to keep confidences, and practical resourcefulness. The following suggestions are made as guidelines for those entrusted with counseling:

- Overseers should come to know the families and individuals in the Meeting. The Meeting should have a program of systematic visitation in which the Overseers and the Ministry and Counsel Committee cooperate. Information concerning particular needs should be passed to the Clerk of Overseers. The Meeting may arrange for a definite time and place in which persons may confer with an appointed counselor.
- One or at most two persons should be assigned to counsel in a given situation, and other members of Overseers should leave the matter to them in order to avoid members being played off one against another. One need not have faced the same problems to be helpful; having faced a problem does not make one an authority on it. Each situation is new and the counselor can learn with the member(s) seeking help. Everything said should be held in confidence.
- Listening is a key part of the process. To listen helpfully and creatively involves unswerving faith in the person, patience, a desire to understand, and avoidance of giving advice.
- Decisions: The counselor may suggest new ways of looking at the situation and possible solutions which may appeal to the person(s) needing help, but decision should be left to the principal(s). Catering to

¹⁴ What is the Nature of the Helping Process? (Suggestions for Counseling, adapted with permission from The Book of Discipline of Pacific Yearly Meeting, 1965.

wishes which do not answer the basic problem is no solution and should be avoided. Growth, independence, standing on one's own feet, are to be encouraged. Emotional support in a hard decision can be most helpful.

- A problem may be too serious for the Meeting to handle, in which case outside help should be sought. A professional opinion may give needed guidance. Members of Overseers need to have knowledge of resources in a wider community for counseling assistance, such as clinics, family and social services, physicians, and psychiatrists.
- The Meeting may be helpful at the same time that professional help is required. It may help in practical ways, such as child care, meals, transportation, temporary housing, companionship. Standing by, listening, helping to plan, can be of great assistance in a critical time.
- The meeting for worship is a basic resource. Through corporate worship the strength and power of God's Love may be opened up in a way that reaches to the hidden depth of our personal problems. In worship, all seek to grow in spiritual and emotional maturity and in understanding of our common human weaknesses and our common recourse to Divine Love. As members of the Ministry and Counsel Committee are concerned to nurture and strengthen the meeting for worship, they are expressing also their concern for the welfare of the members.
- Membership and personal problems: Persons are sometimes drawn to the Meeting because it promises help in personal problems, and such help is a proper function of the Meeting. A Meeting, however, should be aware that a person's difficulties may be deeper than the Meeting's resources for help. The Meeting should not seem to offer solutions or aid beyond its powers. Acceptance of membership by a Meeting should be considered on its own grounds, not as a presumed solution to a personal problem.
- The nature of the emotional life: We all have positive and negative feelings about ourselves, about life, about one another. We need to face and accept these feelings in others and in ourselves and to see them in the light of the Love which transcends our human limitations. Friends who undertake to give counseling should not be deterred from accepting this responsibility because of their own human weaknesses.

They will make mistakes; their insight and understanding will be defective. They must be willing and able to accept criticism and hurt with humility and without retaliation. This is part of their function. They will learn from their mistakes, from one another, and especially from the people they are called upon to help.

- Young Friends: Parents are often unable to communicate effectively with their own adolescent children at the time in which they are detaching themselves from home and parental ties. Thus questions concerning basic truths and values may go unanswered during a period when they are of great importance. Young Friends are likely to broach such questions most freely in their own meetings and discussions. Overseers may be able to find persons who relate readily to young people whether through participation in their meetings or through personal conversations. The time of decision about adult membership in the Meeting offers an opportunity for communicating on a meaningful level with a young person.

E. Guidelines for Considering Applications for Membership

To reach clearness together about the rightness of membership for the applicant, the committee and the applicant should discuss all the issues in a deliberate fashion. The committee should:

- Ask about the spiritual journey of the applicant and listen attentively and prayerfully to the applicant's response. Does the applicant seem to be genuinely led by the Holy Spirit in seeking membership and willing to respond to Divine guidance in making other decisions?
- Inquire as to the applicant's understanding of Quaker history and experience.
- Inquire whether applicants find harmony with Quaker testimonies and with the Meeting's expressions of these testimonies. The committee might also inquire how applicants see their lives, including vocational choices and other associations, being affected by these testimonies.
- Consider whether the applicant is involved in the life of the Meeting and whether the applicant is prepared to make a commitment to the Meeting community and to the Society of Friends as a whole. Is the applicant prepared to seek clearness for individual leadings through the

Meeting?

- Discuss the applicant's familiarity with Friends' decision making processes.
- Has the applicant had opportunity to observe the Meeting conducting its business in order to understand this aspect of the Meeting's life?
- Inquire as to other religious affiliations of the applicant and discuss whether they are to be terminated or continued.
- Inquire whether anything further is needed to help the applicant reach clarity about the decision.

F. A Suggested Procedure for Establishing a Preparative Meeting

NOTE: The procedures below apply to those Preparative Meetings that are established *under the care of* a separate Monthly Meeting, not those which are formed as equal parts constituting one Monthly Meeting. See page 59.

When Friends are ready to establish a Preparative Meeting under the care of a Monthly Meeting, an ad hoc committee may be established by the Monthly Meeting to consider details and to bring forward a proposed Minute to Establish the [Name] Preparative Meeting for the consideration of the Monthly Meeting. This committee should include Friends from both the proposed Preparative Meeting and the sponsoring Monthly Meeting. It is helpful to have Friends on the committee experienced with Friends' business procedures.

The committee should consider such matters as the place of meeting for worship of the new group, what officers and committees are necessary for the Preparative Meeting, and what the relationship will be to the Monthly Meeting regarding finances, membership, marriages, property, business, and similar concerns. Care in recording and documenting these deliberations is needful, and these records should be preserved with Monthly Meeting records.

When the committee has formulated a minute, has presented it to the Monthly Meeting, and the minute has been approved, the committee is laid down. Upon approval of the minute by the Monthly Meeting in session, the Monthly Meeting should name a temporary nominating committee to seek Friends to serve the

new Preparative Meeting as a Nominating Committee. This Nominating Committee then will seek to fill the positions required by the Preparative Meeting. Upon approval by the Preparative Meeting, these names will be recorded by the Monthly Meeting. The new Preparative Meeting is then in being.

Close liaison between committees of similar responsibilities from Preparative and Monthly Meetings will be helpful. A regular report (annual or semi-annual) should be made by the Preparative Meeting to the Monthly Meeting.

1. Sample Minute to Establish a Preparative Meeting

[Name] Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, held at [place (city/town, state)], hereby establishes as a Preparative Meeting under its care the [Name] Preparative Meeting to be held at [place (city/town, state)].

2. Membership

- Members of [Name] Monthly Meeting who worship with [Name] Preparative Meeting will retain their membership in the Monthly Meeting until the Preparative Meeting is established as an independent Monthly Meeting.
- Persons interested in the Preparative Meeting, who are now members of other Friends Meetings, should request transfer of their membership to the Monthly Meeting.
- Persons interested in the Preparative Meeting who desire membership in the Religious Society of Friends should apply for membership in the Monthly Meeting. Their applications for membership should initially be considered by the Preparative Meeting Committee on Ministry and Oversight and forwarded with its recommendations to the Committee of Overseers of the Monthly Meeting.
- As members of the Monthly Meeting, members of the Preparative Meeting are also members of the appropriate Quarterly Meeting and of Baltimore Yearly Meeting.

3. Finance and Property

- Any real and personal property acquired by the Preparative Meeting shall be legally held by the Trustees of the Monthly Meeting. When the Preparative Meeting becomes a Monthly Meeting, title to such property will be transferred to the Trustees of the new Monthly Meeting.
- The Monthly Meeting is responsible for the financial support of the activities of the Preparative Meeting. The Preparative Meeting will prepare an annual budget to be submitted to the Monthly Meeting for approval. Friends from the Preparative Meeting expect to contribute funds to meet these expenses. Preparative Meeting Friends also accept the responsibility to contribute to the Monthly Meeting budget, including its Baltimore Yearly Meeting apportionment.
- The Monthly Meeting may authorize separate bank accounts for the Preparative Meeting and may appoint, in consultation with the Preparative Meeting, an Assistant Treasurer authorized to handle such accounts. Funds and records should be handled according to procedures worked out by the Treasurer and the new Assistant Treasurer, with the approval of the Finance Committees of both the Preparative and Monthly Meetings.

4. Business, Officers, and Committees

- The Preparative Meeting should hold regularly scheduled business meetings. The business-handling procedures outlined in Faith and Practice of Baltimore Yearly Meeting apply.
- The Preparative Meeting may consider and act on business which concerns it alone. Copies of minutes of Preparative Meeting business meetings should be forwarded to the Clerk of the Monthly Meeting who may ask the Monthly Meeting to consider any of the items.
- The Preparative Meeting may consider other business and may forward recommendations to the Monthly Meeting.
- The Preparative Meeting should appoint a Clerk and Assistant (or Recording) Clerk and other officers as necessary. The Clerk and the Assistant Treasurer from the Preparative Meeting will be considered officers of the Monthly Meeting and will serve on the Monthly Meeting Executive Committee, if there is one.
- Preparative Meeting Friends may be considered for membership on the

standing committees of the Monthly Meeting. The Preparative Meeting may establish committees, and also may consider Friends from the Monthly Meeting for membership on its committees.

- Weddings are held under the care of the Monthly Meeting. Friends from both the Preparative and Monthly Meetings should be appointed to the clearness committee to meet with Preparative Meeting Friends seeking marriage under the care of the Meeting.
- Memorial Meetings or other special occasions involving Friends from the Preparative Meeting should be jointly planned by committees from the two meetings.
- Careful records of committee and business meetings of the Preparative Meeting should be maintained with copies of business meeting minutes forwarded to the Clerk and Recorder of the Monthly Meeting.

G. Queries to Consider in Granting Monthly Meeting Status to Preparative Meetings

- Is a sense of community present among members and attenders of the Preparative Meeting? Is spiritual nurturing experienced within it?
- Are meetings for worship and business held regularly and attended appropriately?
- Is there a core group with the commitment to give permanence to the Meeting?
- Is contact maintained with organizations in the wider community of the Religious Society of Friends?
- Is witness for traditional social testimonies of Friends fostered?
- Does the Preparative Meeting maintain a library of Friends materials? Does it encourage its members and attenders to grow in the knowledge of the Society?
- Has the Preparative Meeting established relationships with other religious groups in its community?

H. Policies and Advices Regarding Estates and Bequests¹⁵

¹⁵ From the Proceedings of Yearly Meeting 1972 and 1973.

The Yearly Meeting and Monthly Meetings and affiliated institutions, are grateful for the generosity of spirit which has led to the receipt, over the years, of many gifts and bequests. Heretofore there has been no systematic guidance to individual members contemplating bequests, and little in the way of policy regarding the acceptance and use of money and property by corporate bodies of Friends. In the light of our actual experience in the administration of trust funds, and with rapid social change having a major effect on our sense of priorities among various Quaker concerns, it is timely to adopt appropriate policies and advices, as clear and comprehensive as possible, as far as our present insights lead us.

1. Advice to Individual Friends

Individual Friends are advised and encouraged:

- To give careful thought to the making of wills, to arranging for insurance, and to reasonable provision against the needs of old age and the possibilities of serious illness, insofar as means will permit.
- To consider with great seriousness their role as stewards of a portion of the Lord's bounty, not endeavoring to accumulate large material estates.
- To consider wills and estate plans with children, it being expected that if they have been brought up to be self-reliant and resourceful, they will not be overly concerned about the amounts they may inherit.
- To consult a suitable person or persons in their Monthly Meeting, particularly with respect to intended charitable and religious donations but also with respect to general arrangements. Professional legal, investment, and accounting advice is often essential and is in fact usually sought when substantial amounts are involved. But if we are to be fully aware of our Christian responsibilities, counseling on more than a purely secular basis is also needed.
- To take into account, in planning donations and bequests, the spirit and intent of the Yearly Meeting policies noted below.

2. Advice to Monthly Meetings

Each Monthly Meeting is advised and encouraged:

- To make suitable arrangements for consultation as indicated above. Responsibility may be entrusted to a standing committee, or perhaps to

one or more well-qualified individuals selected by the Ministry and Counsel and the Stewardship and Finance Committees. In the case of a small meeting, or where there are several meetings in an area, the resources of a group of meetings may be called on.

- To seek to develop a healthy attitude within the Meeting, and to encourage periodic open discussion, with respect to the Meeting's property, investments, and financial position generally. Trustees and other financial officers should seek to be as responsive as possible, within the limits of legally imposed restrictions, to the considered judgment of the whole Meeting on matters of policy. Care must always be taken that the Meeting's paramount role as a mutually supportive religious fellowship is not weakened by over-much concern for the custody of property or investments.
- To consider the degree to which it should be and is able to help members in case of financial emergency, relating this to the primary role of each family to meet its own needs as far as possible.

3. Yearly Meeting Policy

- Baltimore Yearly Meeting is, and must always strive to be, primarily a religious fellowship whose work and program reflect the living concerns and the deepest insights of its active members, under Divine guidance seeking to make responsible decisions in the light of present conditions and of future needs. In this fellowship, past, present, and future generations are linked in a continuity of the spirit. The greatest heritage which any generation can leave to the next is the example of faithful lives. Causes to which such lives have been devoted should never be forgotten even though victories have been won or new conditions have created new priorities.
- Friends who have felt themselves a vital part of the Yearly Meeting fellowship, or who have supported worthwhile causes as an expression of Quaker concern, are often moved to donate or bequeath money or property to the Yearly Meeting. We express our gratitude for the generosity of spirit which motivates such action and invite active consideration of further gifts now and in the future. It is proper for [donors] to be able to feel that a beneficial influence is extended in a

direct and effective way beyond [their lifetimes]. But such gifts need to be made with the full realization that their function is to enable each current generation of Friends to extend, and to be more effective in, the Quaker faith and its practical expression.

- To this end the Yearly Meeting welcomes, and wishes to accept, gifts whose terms are liberating rather than restrictive. Care must be taken not to allow us, or any future generation, to be dependent on bequests or on endowment income so as to relieve the current membership of a vital sense of responsibility for operating expenses, services, and wider outreach. At the same time attention should not be diverted from those concerns which are felt to be most central and to have the highest priority, by the existence of funds irrevocably committed to specific purposes which are no longer as relevant as when the gift was made. The following provisions are intended to guide both the Trustees of the Yearly Meeting, and prospective donors. They should be especially noted in the making of a will, since in the case of a living donor the terms of a gift can be discussed and altered until it is clear that full agreement has been reached.
- The interests and intentions of a donor should be expressed in broad terms. A will should contain the fewest possible legally binding restrictions, with preferences being expressed in terms of guidance. Detailed preferences as to the administration and use of funds are likely to be more appropriate for a supplemental letter than for the will itself.
- Even though the donor's wishes are stated as a matter of preference rather than as a legally binding restriction, the Yearly Meeting, in accepting a bequest, feels a moral obligation to comply with those wishes as far as and as long as it is possible to do so, consistent with this statement of policy. Not later than 15 years after the receipt of a bequest the Yearly Meeting wishes to be free to review the uses to which it is being put, and other relevant conditions.
- Changes would be made if they appeared necessary and desirable in the light of this policy. However, even if a modification were made, this would be done while adhering as closely as possible to the original intent; for example, from a narrow preference no longer relevant to a second area of preference.

- Income from endowment funds is now, and for some time is likely to remain, an important and useful part of the resources available to the Yearly Meeting. If a preference is indicated in connection with a gift that the principal is to be invested and only the current income expended, it is reasonable to expect that this will be done for a number of years to come. Nevertheless the present members of the Yearly Meeting do not wish to tie the hands of their successors. It is therefore expected that in connection with the review mentioned above, a decision might be made after a period of 15 years that part of the principal of a gift might be used in addition to income. In like manner any physical property given to the Yearly Meeting would be subject to examination to determine whether its continued use as originally designated is compatible with current program and conditions.
- The Yearly Meeting recognizes that the ways in which capital funds are invested often have important implications in terms of Friends' testimonies and concerns. It reaffirms the right to give policy guidance to the Trustees from time to time in this respect. Taking such guidance into account, and considering social and moral factors, it is expected that the Trustees will on the one hand avoid certain types of investment regardless of the expected rate of monetary return, and will on the other hand have liberty to make some other investments involving a somewhat lower monetary return or a greater monetary risk than would be considered acceptable in a secular organization.
- In American society it has become common for educational buildings, philanthropic funds, and the like, to carry the name of a donor or of a person or family being memorialized. The Yearly Meeting hopes that bequests, while letting such an interest be known, will leave final decisions to the judgment of the Yearly Meeting.
- With respect to all endowment funds presently administered by the Yearly Meeting, stipulations which were binding at the time the gift or bequest was accepted will continue to be honored, unless and until some serious conflict arises and there needs to be some legal resolution of a restrictive situation.
- With respect to gifts which are offered to the Yearly Meeting in the future, during the lifetime and competence of the intended donor, the

Trustees are directed, through an appropriate representative, to discuss the terms, and to accept the gift when these are in harmony with this policy of the Yearly Meeting.

- With respect to bequests which are being considered by members making their wills, it is expected that the Yearly Meeting Trustees will cooperate with and assist those seeking to serve as consultants referred to in section 2a and 3c above.
- With respect to bequests which may hereafter be offered to the Yearly Meeting, the Trustees are authorized to accept those whose terms are substantially in harmony with this statement of policy. If a bequest is offered with terms plainly out of harmony with the spirit and intent of this policy and without special extenuating circumstances, the Trustees are directed to notify the executor that the bequest cannot be accepted.
- With respect to a bequest which is offered in terms which are not entirely consistent with this policy, but which the Trustees feel for good reason ought to be accepted or at least considered by the Yearly Meeting, they are instructed to draw up an appropriate statement of the circumstances together with their recommendation and to present the same for action at the next annual session of the Yearly Meeting.
- Every effort shall be made to see that this policy is familiar to members, and that all possible encouragement and assistance is given to those who may contemplate making a gift or including a bequest in a will.
- The adoption of policies similar to the above is strongly commended for the consideration of our constituent Meetings and affiliated institutions.

I. Planning a Memorial Meeting

1. The memorial meeting

- An introductory welcome and explanation of Quaker service is very helpful to those who have not been to a Quaker meeting previously. What is to be said? Who will say (or read) it? It is particularly helpful to include information about how to know when the service is over.
- Approximately how long should the service be, and who is to close the meeting?
- Is there a memorial minute? Who will read it? And when?
- Is there to be music? Who will arrange or perform it? (Is special

equipment needed?) Should it be at a pre-arranged time or as the Spirit moves? (Adequate lighting should be assured for anyone needing to read music.)

- Are there any particular people to be asked to speak? Who will make the request?

2. Practical considerations

- How many people might attend? Are facilities adequate? If not, what can be done or what other location may be used? (Possibilities should be considered in advance of need as much as possible, particularly for Meetings that do not have their own meeting houses.)
 - Parking for a large gathering may be a problem. It is helpful to designate someone (or two or three) to direct people where to park. Reserve a few spaces near the entrance for those who need this convenience.
 - Is child care needed? Who can provide it and where will it be?
 - Does the family wish to sit in a particular place? How are the places to be reserved?
 - Are there to be flowers? Who will supply them? Remove? Transport? Obituaries and death notices may appropriately request donations to a chosen organization in lieu of flowers.
 - Does the family want casket or ashes present? If so, where should they be placed? How and when will they be placed and removed?
 - Will there be a guest book? Who will obtain it? Where will it be placed? See that a pen is available too.
 - Are there to be refreshments afterwards? Who will provide them, where will they be served, and who is responsible for cleaning up?
 - Can members of meeting offer hospitality to friends and relatives from out of town?
 - Should someone remain at the home while the family is at the memorial service? Is there some Meeting member not close to the family who might do this?
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Index

Forthcoming

To volunteer to Index the 2025 Faith &
Practice, please email admin@bym-rsf.org.

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