

Peace and love,

- Beth Burbank

OTHER DOCUMENTS FROM BUSINESS SESSIONS

NORTHSIDE EPISTLE (See Minute 27)

Greetings of Peace.

Northside Friends Meeting has entered into a Sabbath Year. We have decided to lay aside much of our normal business, suspending our normal committees, in order to liberate more time for our community to grow together as a community of faith.

The poet W.B. Yeats wrote in his poem *The Second Coming*: “Turning and turning ... things fall apart, the center cannot hold.” To a great degree this was the experience of Northside Friends.

Our State of Society Report shows an active, growing Meeting: individually and corporately we were striving to do good things in the world, to nurture one another, and to keep true to the Light. What the State of Society does not show is that we were finding much of our activity fruitless, our attempts to nurture empty, our faithfulness to the Way frustrated. We suspected that our apparent unity – our ability to do things and do projects – was hiding a deeper disunity.

And so we were inspired to take a year’s Sabbath rest. During this time, we hope to listen more closely to the Spirit in worship and in dialogue with one another. We desire to clarify our understanding of what it means to be Quakers – members of a peculiar religious community.

We want to take on those really big issues: membership, marriage, faithfulness to the Testimonies, the meaning of ministry. We so often assume these important concepts have common meanings but we have found in theory and practice that we often lack a common understanding about how they operate in and among us. We wish to find a way to clearly articulate the unity we find in worship and thereby find a direction for our future.

If all this sounds more like Sabbath *work* than Sabbath *rest*, we can assure Friends that we are committed to *work*. We also joyfully share with Friends that, as we have labored through the difficult process to initiate this special time we have found that, indeed, the burden has been light and sweet. We take comfort in the fact that other Friends meetings have taken this path and found renewed vitality.

Because we are part of you, we ask that you share this dedicated time with us. Come worship with us. Invite us into your Meetings for worship and fellowship.

Above all, lift us to the Divine Light: as the work we undertake is a spiritual work, the support we seek is spiritual as well.

We are Your Loving Friends.

ADOPTED FAITH AND PRACTICE SECTIONS

Concerning this Book of Faith and Practice (Introduction, See Minute 39)

Early Quakers had a vivid sense of the Holy Spirit as an active presence, transforming themselves, their dealings with each other, and the entire world. They honored each person’s direct access to the Light, yet were aware of the frailty of human judgment. Their response was to develop practices of communal listening, seeking, and discerning. Meeting for worship, meeting for business, and some more specialized practices were all developed to allow the group to clarify and support individual guidance and revelation. Today, Quakers continue to revise, refine, and hand on their characteristic practices of corporate listening and waiting, because these practices

work.

The practical details of this corporate listening and waiting are of immediate concern to all Quakers. We have insisted on an open and freely shared ministry; as a result, the on-going life of our meetings is shaped to an extraordinary degree by each meeting's members. Caring for ourselves and one another well—calling forth the Holy Seed effectively—requires (and elicits) very careful attention. Each situation is a fresh opportunity, yet our experimental approach has led to a body of experiential learning.

Quakers have naturally supported each other by sharing approaches that have worked well in the past: methods of listening, discerning, and acting that have reliably embodied our core leadings, especially in situations that recur again and again. A book of Faith and Practice records such shared learnings, brought together for the guidance of meetings and their members, and endorsed (in this case) by the Yearly Meeting. Books of Faith and Practice exist to coach Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups, individual members and attenders, in how to care for themselves and each other in basic ways. Books of Faith and Practice have proved to be effective means to convey our faith, inspiring and guiding expression of the Spirit's leadings.

This *Faith and Practice* is intended as a guide to Friends' characteristic practices, embodying the wisdom and experience of Illinois Yearly Meeting Friends. Not every detail of every practice described here will fit the real life situation of every Meeting or Friend. It would be unfaithful to insist that they be followed in preference to the Spirit's present guidance! Nevertheless, we have tried to assemble here descriptions of tested ways of doing things, practices it would be good to follow whenever practical, apart from unusual circumstances or special leadings. This *Faith and Practice* also includes perspectives on the spiritual meaning and underlying coherence of our current practices, often in the form of excerpts from Friends' writings. Glimpses of this deeper pattern can illumine our usual practices, and can guide improvisation in exceptional cases or new circumstances. These practices and perspectives have empowered our meetings to find unity and move forward in that unity – both unity with each other, and a deeper unity in and with the Holy Spirit.

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 from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.

Meeting of Elders, Balby, Yorkshire, England, 1656

MEMBERSHIP (Faith & Practice section, as approved in Minute 50)

Attending Meeting

Visitors to meeting should be welcomed, and care taken to help them understand and relate to Friends' ways. Study groups in which newer attenders mix with experienced members can help, as can easy access to Quaker books, periodicals, and pamphlets. Regular attenders should be invited to participate in the life of the Meeting – to observe and take appropriate part in our distinctive ways of worship, business, and committee work, and in our potlucks, work projects, and ministries. Membership in the Society of Friends is membership in the monthly meeting community. The best orientation to a meeting may be the opportunity to be with its members while they do

what they care about.

Attendees may wish to discuss their spiritual goals and concerns with Friends before making an application for membership, or before feeling any clear interest in applying. Experienced Friends should be alert to this possibility, and make themselves available for such discussion. Attendees who find themselves nourished by their involvement with Meeting, comfortable with Friends' approach and testimonies, and interested in taking up the responsibilities of membership, should be encouraged to consider membership.

Sometimes long-time attendees act with the responsibility and commitment hoped for in members, and feel that they are members in all but name. A Meeting might gently encourage such attendees to join, as a matter of truth-telling and integrity. But occasionally committed attendance is the right choice for someone, and should be respected.

Applying for Membership

An attendee who wishes to join begins by making a formal request to the monthly Meeting. Usually this takes the form of a letter, which often will describe the nature or history of the applicant's interest in Friends. The clerk of the meeting shares this request with the Meeting during a meeting for business.

A clearness committee to visit with the applicant is either appointed directly by the meeting for business, or (especially in larger meetings) by the Meeting's ministry and oversight committee. An effort should be made to choose discerning Friends; the applicant's closest associates will not always be the ones best suited for this service. In a very small meeting, it will often be best for the Meeting to act as a committee of the whole.

The clearness committee visits with the applicant in a spirit of expectant waiting and tender searching. Beginning and ending the visit in silent worship is appropriate, as is taking time, during the conversation, to center down and to seek guidance.

The clearness that is sought is two-fold: Is this the right step for the applicant? and, Is this the right step for the Meeting? Topics that may help shed light on this include the applicant's knowledge and expectations of the Meeting and of Friends generally, his or her religious background and journey, consonance with our testimonies, and degree of comfort with the variety found among Friends.

In some circumstances, a single visit with the applicant will be sufficient; in others, multiple visits may seem appropriate. Sometimes the committee will find it helpful to meet together before or after the visit. The clearness committee and the applicant should keep in mind that they seek a solid clarity and easiness about the decision, not any pre-determined result. At times, a solid clearness is reached quickly and easily; other times, clearness comes only after labor, but may be just as strong. Sometimes, the clearness that is reached will be that the time is not right for membership – that the applicant or the Meeting is being led to wait. Occasionally the clearness may be that membership in the Society of Friends is not the Spirit's leading for an applicant. If applicant and committee remember that the goal is the clearness that allows faithful action, then these outcomes can be seen as positive ones.

If the visitors were appointed by a ministry and oversight committee, that committee generally hears their report and makes a recommendation to Meeting. If the clearness committee was appointed by meeting for business, it makes its report directly to meeting for business, optionally including a recommendation.

In either case, the decision to accept a person into membership is made and min-

uted by the Monthly Meeting in its meeting for business. Although the meeting for business needs enough information to make a faithful decision, personal information not directly pertinent to the decision should not be included.

Membership of Children

Children in our midst, regardless of their membership status, should be treated as full participants in the life of the Meeting. Meetings do well to nurture all children and young adults in making informed decisions with regard to their membership, when the time is right.

Parents who are members may request membership for their children. Some monthly meetings consider children to be full members. Others consider them to be associate members. Still others offer parents the choice of either full or associate membership for their children. Associate membership differs from full membership in that it does not extend indefinitely, but must be re-affirmed by the individual at some point. Illinois Yearly Meeting has not felt clear about setting any particular age at which associate membership is dropped, and leaves this difficult matter to the discretion of monthly meetings. Meetings are responsible for continuing a caring relationship with associate members as they mature, and for encouraging them to apply for membership when they are ready, whether before or after the end of associate membership.

A request that a child or children be recorded in either category of membership may be made at the time of the child's birth or adoption, or at the time of the parent(s) acceptance into membership, or later. A child may be recorded at the request of one parent and with the permission of the other. Parents requesting full or associate membership for their children should intend to raise them as Friends within a meeting community. Parents may also choose to request no enrollment for the child, leaving the matter to the young person's own leadings, as he or she matures. Monthly meetings should adopt clear policies about the membership status of members' children for whom no request is made. The Meeting has a responsibility to see that children recorded in membership, along with other children among us, have opportunity to reflect on their commitment as they grow toward adulthood.

Monthly meetings are encouraged to respect and support parents' decisions regarding their children's welfare in these matters. Sometimes (especially when a family of Friends transfers from another meeting) this respect and support will involve wrestling with a category of membership, or a conscientious choice, not previously used in the meeting.

There is no minimum age for applying for membership for one's self. Some young people are ready for membership at an early age; others take longer to mature into a sense of clearness about their spiritual path. Associate members, and young people not recorded in membership, may request full membership for themselves using the procedure described above, at any age at which they feel a leading to do so.

Sojourning Members, Transfer of Membership, Isolated Friends

Friends living temporarily at a distance from their home meeting, and near enough to attend another meeting, should usually request sojourning membership in the meeting they are attending. Members who have moved permanently to another area should transfer their membership to their new meeting. These arrangements go beyond record-keeping, allowing the individual to be forthright and honest about his or her real commitments, and helping meetings care for members in a practical way.

Either change is initiated by requesting a letter from one's previous or home

meeting, to the new meeting. Unless there is compelling reason, a letter recommending the Friend to the new meeting is prepared (by overseers, clerk, or in another appropriate way), signed by the clerk, and forwarded to the new meeting. Meetings generally treat Friends sojourning among them as members, but notify their home meeting when they leave the area. A home meeting drops a transferring member from its rolls when it receives confirmation that the new meeting has received him or her into membership.

Both members and persons interested in Friends sometimes live too far away from a meeting to attend regularly. The mere fact of living at a distance from one's meeting does not alter membership. Options for such persons include establishing a relationship with a meeting near enough to visit periodically, participation in Quarterly and Yearly Meetings and conferences of various kinds, and forming a small worship group with others of like mind in the area. Many of the monthly meetings of Illinois Yearly Meeting began in just this way.

Termination of Membership

A person may resign from the Society of Friends, and should do so if he or she feels strongly out of accord with the faith and practice of Friends, or remains unwilling to participate in meeting for a very long period of time; a meeting may terminate membership if it becomes clear that this is the case with a person. Real life circumstances are usually ambiguous and difficult to interpret. Friends may drift away until their lives show no evidence of interest in continued membership, yet feel reluctant to break with the past—perhaps for sentimental reasons, but perhaps from a deep, if dormant, sense of calling. Some distance themselves after a conflict in Meeting and never fully return; others find that they are led to put their energy exclusively into another spiritual path, yet retain membership. Often Friends need years to come to clarity about such issues. The underlying truth is often at least a little different from the explanations offered quickly and casually. Sometimes old hurts need to be healed before any real clearness is possible. There is much potential for hurt in inquiring into an inactive member's intentions—but there is also much potential for hurt in ignoring such situations. Meetings should explore such situations with real tenderness, taking however much time is necessary.

When it becomes clear that someone no longer intends involvement with the Society of Friends, the integrity both of the meeting and of the former Friend will generally be best supported by releasing that person from membership. Friends recognize that faithful pursuit of God's leadings may engage us in outwardly different paths; ideally, a termination of membership can help the former member focus more clearly on the path to which he or she is actually led. The possibility of affectionate relationship with the meeting community, and with friends within it, is by no means terminated by such action.

LETTER TO FWCC TRIENNIAL IN NEW ZEALAND (See Minute 65)

Illinois Yearly Meeting has been asked if there are concerns to forward to the upcoming Triennial of the Friends World Committee for Consultation, for consideration and mutual endeavor by this wider body of Friends. During our annual sessions in 2003 we took an extended time of open worship to reflect on what central issues, arising from the life of our Meeting, we would wish to emphasize. The following remarks are distilled from spoken ministry, were united with by the body, and urged to

be conveyed by our representatives:

I. Because we are a part of FWCC, we were able to have participants in the Section of Americas' recent "Conference on Quakers' Responses to the Growing Danger of Global War and Terrorism" (the "Guilford Peace Conference" last January). Reflecting how one of our Young Friends—a delegate from this Yearly Meeting—responded to the Witness of God in that gathering, we see three important strands coming together that are dear to the life of Illinois Yearly Meeting, and which we commend to Friends everywhere. At that conference, this young man who grew up among us heard of the massive suffering from genocidal strife in the Great Lakes region of Africa, and he also learned of Quakers' cooperative efforts involving Burundi Friends and the Alternatives to Violence project. God led this young man to seek the clearness and support of his Monthly Meeting to participate in a workcamp project for rebuilding and reconciliation. We are inspired by the convergence of (1) a concern to learn more about and to express our historic Peace Testimony, (2) the availability of creative Spirit-led Quaker projects for hands-on volunteer service to alleviate suffering, and (3) the valuable resource of energetic young people being nurtured in our midst and growing into leadership for our Religious Society.

II. Illinois Yearly Meeting speaks from the land of prairies, where fires set by Native Americans and lightning burned back the forests, and permitted the deep roots of the prairie vegetation, which formed the rich soil which is now a breadbasket of the world. The corn and soybeans which surround our historic meetinghouse and stretch to the horizon remind us of our wealth in a world of resource inequity. For 13 years our yearly meeting has had a growing concern for a right relationship with all of God's creation. We have established an Environmental Concerns Committee and instituted a recycling program. On our grounds we are planting native plant species. In our planning of a new building and renovation of the old, we are trying to be environmentally sensitive, utilizing recycled materials and energy-efficient construction. We have approved a minute on population and the environment. We have expressed our concern in the North American "Friends Committee on Unity with Nature" through 5 members serving on the FCUN steering committee. One of our members is treasurer of Right Sharing of World Resources.

We provide this background to underscore our belief that many of the world's problems—war and poverty especially—find roots in the overconsumption of the world's resources by our growing population, and the tremendous disparity in access to these resources among the world's people. As we fight for still greater shares of the world's fossil fuels, our larger society seems unmindful of the impact of environmental stresses, such as global warming, on all people—indeed all life on the planet. This growing concern has fed our long-standing Quaker concern for peace, a central focus for our yearly meeting.

We have shared these concerns with the hope that the FWCC Triennial will address these issues:

- the unsustainable growth in use of our natural resources by an unsustainable growth in the world's population.
- the degradation of God's creation brought about by this resource consumption.
- the growing inequity in distribution of the world's wealth.
- the need for increased devotion to the peace testimony of the religious society of Friends.

III. During the past year as the United States has pursued a course of war, many

Friends in this country have also felt attacked, angered, fearful, and isolated; we want Friends and other people of the Earth to know of this. Friends have also shown a continuing concern about racism. These two issues seem to unite in a desire of Friends to take responsibility for the behavior of our larger society. How can we find our way into increasing international community in such a way as to help our country transform its arrogance and violence? Can Friends help us know that we are not alone in this, and that our dissident voices in this country are heard and embraced by the world's peoples?

IV. Our incoming Clerk spoke of a clear vision that came to her as she sojourned and worshipped where Margaret Fell and George Fox had stood. She became even more aware of the Christian roots of Quakerism. And even without an insistence that all become Christians, she deeply felt that when we are ignorant of our roots, it harms us: it impedes our relationship with other (non-Quaker) Christians, and it prevents us from hearing genuine ministry from some in our own Meetings. We were urged to meet the fear that some of us have from the abuses in some versions of Christianity, and let God overcome this in us.

V. We ask the prayers of Friends as we resist and try to change policies of our government. And we are aware that for our efforts to be well-grounded and rightly-ordered, our social witness must grow out of the witness of God in our hearts, and that Presence in our gathered Meetings.

- Bill Howenstine, David Finke, Ann Eckert