Living in the Spirit: Friends Spiritual Disciplines

[[Note to Friends: the 2 quotations and the introductory paragraphs are new to Faith and Practice.]]

Now, Friends, deal plainly with yourselves, and let the eternal Light search you, and try you, for the good of your souls. For this will deal plainly with you. It will rip you up, and lay you open, and make all manifest which lodges in you; the secret subtlety of the enemy of our souls, this eternal searcher and trier will make manifest. Therefore all to this come, and by this be searched, and judged, and led and guided.

Margaret Fell, 1656

To me it has felt like He’s taken my life down to its bare foundation, to the cement above the dirt and rocks so He could get at everything that needed His touch. He acknowledges this is true and then one day, when He senses I am ready, God asks me, “So what do you want to build?” … We rebuild my life from the ground up and we plant a garden outside…. One of God’s greatest joys is opening up His hands to show me how the pain I gave to Him months before, the weights I let go of, have now been transformed into building blocks of great strength and integrity, adding beauty and love to my life.

Sarah Kateleen Hoggatt, 2010

Through years of experience, Friends have discovered certain practices and disciplines that are helpful in developing and living our spirituality, both as individuals and as a spiritual community.

Not all Friends practice all of the spiritual disciplines described here. Each may hold a different place in our lives. Nevertheless these are some of the ways that Friends have found to connect more deeply to that grounding center from which we draw our strength and inspiration, and which opens us to transformation.

Friends may call this center God, Spirit, some other name, or no name at all. Some Friends believe that this center is a part of the constitution of every individual and develops there on its own, while others understand that it exists outside of us and works to develop something it owns within each of us.

These practices are the means by which Friends have found we are able to come into “right relationship,” where we make ourselves available and vulnerable to that center and where the foundations of our spirituality are laid and built upon.

Advices and queries. The advices and queries are intended for use in monthly meetings as well as for personal reflection. Queries are used for personal or corporate examination; advices gather the wisdom and experience of Friends. Meetings may read and consider one or several queries, along with
appropriate advices or other material, once a month. Some meetings record the responses of the meeting to the queries. Meeting committees may find certain queries helpful in evaluating their activities. Meetings often publish the queries regularly in their newsletters. They offer a basis for a monthly meeting’s annual report on the state of the Society. The reader will find advices and queries on specific topics through the next two chapters.

[[Notes to Friends: How else does your group use advices and queries?]]

[[Would you prefer to keep the traditional names “advices” and “queries” or use some other words (and if so, what)?]]

**Prayer**

[[Note to Friends: This section is mostly new to Faith and Practice. Some quotations from pp. 22-23 of the 1993 edition. Some queries brought in from Britain YM.]]

Prayer is spending intentional time in the presence of the Divine. Regular times of corporate and personal prayer build our relationship with the Living Christ. This enables deeper communion for us as individuals through each day and for the meeting when we gather in worship.

Prayer includes more than petitioning for what we need or want. It can take such forms as thanksgiving, praise, self-reflection, and asking God’s support for others, which many contemporary Friends call “holding in the Light.” If we ask for a specific outcome, such as healing or rescue from difficulties, the Divine Power may disappoint our expectations. An alternative is to take the issue or the person(s) in our minds and hearts to the Light and leave them there.

There are many effective practices for personal prayer. Some of them are:

- Listening to the inner Guide and opening ourselves to the motion of Love;
- reading and deep reflection upon diverse sources of spiritual wisdom;
- harmonious meditation in response to the wonders of the natural world;
- offering praise, thanksgiving, and confession; petitioning; and seeking guidance;
- recounting one day’s events along with the feelings, inklings, and openings contained within them.

Friends have found ways to focus their attention on the holy by devoting particular times of the day to prayer or through making reminders for themselves within a day. Perhaps prayer happens most naturally for one person on arising in the morning, while another finds conversation with the Inward Teacher richest at the end of the day. Many Quaker families pause for a quiet time of reminder and remembrance before each meal together. Others reflect and connect with Spirit whenever they encounter particular situations, such as passing through a doorway, stopping at a traffic signal, or waiting for a computer to start. Prayer in the setting of meeting for worship may lead to a “gathered” meeting, where Friends unite in a deep contemplative connection with each other and the Divine.

[[Note to Friends: Prayer can include self-examination. We've used “self-reflection” and “confession” to describe this. Do these words speak to you? Are there others you would use?]]

**Quotations**

One of these deep constructive energies of life is prayer. It is a way of life that is as old as the human race is, and it is as difficult to “explain” as is our joy over love and beauty. It came into power in man’s early life and it has persisted through all the stages of it because it has proved to be essential to spiritual health and growth and life-advance. Like all other great springs of life, it has sometimes been turned to cheap ends and brought down to low levels, but on the whole it has been a pretty steady uplifting power in the long story of human progress. The only way we could
completely understand it would be to understand the eternal nature of God and man. Then we should no doubt comprehend why he and we seek one another and why we are unsatisfied until we mutually find one another.

Rufus M. Jones, 1931

As taught and practiced by Jesus, prayer is communion with God, in which mind and heart become open to his sustaining power and gladly and humbly submissive to his directing will.

The Lord’s Prayer is an example of the simple directness of the prayers of Jesus. One can meet God without an elaborate chain of words, even in the rush and tension of everyday life.

Prayer may be response to the beauty or grandeur of nature; to the courage and goodness sometimes revealed by the human spirit; to a desperate sense of need. Prayer may be inspired by joy and sorrow, illness and health, birth and death. Prayer may be without words or in the simplest phrases. Through prayer, daily or special, he who prays can find serenity, humility, strength, courage and direction amid the stresses as well as the joys of life.

Prayer is an exercise of the mind and spirit. Its efficacy is increased by conscious practice. Prayer can work miracles by making individuals sensitive to the will of God and, through obedience, strong to accept or surmount the natural conditions of life.

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1972

But to establish the practice of the presence of God so that it becomes as natural as breathing—that requires a rigorous apprenticeship. When I think about it now it sounds silly, but I resorted to some trivial and seemingly ridiculous ways of keeping myself reminded. For instance, I fastened a large safety pin to the front of my dress and I carried a button in my pocket that I felt every time I reached in to find a pencil or a handkerchief. These objects were preferable to Moslem prayer beads which, although they serve the same purpose, called for questioning, whereas no one suspected a safety pin or a button.

Josephine Duveneck, 1978

I read that I was supposed to make ‘a place for inward retirement and waiting upon God’ in my daily life, as the Queries in those days expressed it…. At last I began to realise, first that I needed some kind of inner peace or inward retirement, or whatever name it might be called by; and then that these apparently stuffy old Friends were really talking sense. If I studied what they were trying to tell me, I might possibly find that the ‘place of inward retirement’ was not a place I had to go to, it was there all the time. I could know the ‘place of inward retirement’ wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, and find the spiritual refreshment for which, knowingly or unknowingly, I was longing, and hear the voice of God in my heart. Thus I began to realise that prayer was not a formality, or an obligation, it was a place which was there all the time and always available.

Elfrida Vipont Foulds, 1983

Has your heart ever come so close to bursting from joy—at the birth of the child or the beauty of a sunset, perhaps—that your whole being expanded with thankfulness? If so, your body was speaking a prayer of adoration, even if you uttered not a word. Have you ever been so passionately concerned for the welfare of one or more others—a deeply depressed loved one or refugees rejected by our government, perhaps—that you could hardly eat or sleep? If so, you were praying without ceasing.

Carol Conti-Entin, 1989
There is a healing that comes through prayer in its various forms, through the laying on of hands, through music and dance, painting and colour, through communication with and understanding of the world of nature and through friendship.

Jim Pym, 1990

How do we practice Simple Prayer? What do we do? Where do we begin?
Very simply, we begin right where we are: in our families, on our jobs, with our neighbors and friends. Now, I wish this didn’t sound so trivial, because, on the practical level of knowing God, it is the most profound truth we will ever hear. To believe that God can reach us and bless us in the ordinary junctures of daily life is the stuff of prayer. But we want to throw this away, so hard is it for us to believe that God would enter our space. “God can’t bless me here,” we moan. “When I graduate....” “When I’m the chairman of the board....” “When I’m the president of the company....” “When I’m the senior pastor...then God can bless me.” But you see, the only place God can bless us is right where we are, because that is the only place we are!

Richard Foster, 1992

Contrary to a lot of opinion, there is no “best” way to pray. The best way to pray is as the Spirit is prompting or leading you at the time. Or, as Dom John Chapman is rumored to have said, “Pray as you can, not as you can’t.” It’s probably best to make time in your daily time of retirement to enter intentionally into whichever form of prayer is yours at the present—as well as to be sensitive and open to the moments of prayer that come upon you unexpectedly in the course of your days.

Patricia Loring, 1997

Count the stars in the sky; that is how many ways there are to pray.

Mary Jo Williams, 2007

**Advices**

In prayer, Friends find humility and courage, guidance and strength for our daily lives.

Mindful prayer requires attention.

Prayer technique matters far less than opening our hearts to God. Frequent and regular prayer can lead us to become more faithful in our lives.

**Queries**

- Do we set aside times of quiet for openness to the Spirit? How do we come to know an inward stillness amid the activities of daily life?
- Do we encourage in ourselves and in others a habit of returning to the Source throughout each day?
- Are we open to new Light, from whatever source it may come?
- How do we give corporate attention to prayer, giving voice to joys and needs that Friends feel?
- How does our personal prayer life enrich meeting for worship?

**Silence**

[[Note to Friends: This section is new to NPYM’s Faith and Practice.]]

The silence we value is a deep stillness of heart and mind. Friends dwell in silence on many occasions. We provide for silence at weddings and memorials and at meetings for the transaction of
business. Committee meetings open with silence, and silent grace quiets the heart before meals. These shared silences foster unity and charity among us.

Daily retirement for a period of quiet can give an individual a sense of peace and self-control. Another form of silence, described by Friends as an “opportunity,” bears a resemblance to a brief meeting for worship. It arises either by prearrangement or spontaneously, and may occur during visits to the homes of Friends or in unusual circumstances, such as on a park bench or in a hospital waiting room. Opportunities are an expression of spiritual friendship that may include a mentoring relationship.

Similarly, a pause may occur during general conversation, when we are drawn into stillness until words emerge again from a place of deeper refreshment. Active silence gathers us to walk in nature, or to perform quiet tasks together such as needlework, devotional reading, leaf-raking, or washing dishes. We are enriched by those among us whose lives embody and dwell in silence.

Silent retreats are times set aside for the refreshment of the spirit. Some Friends set aside an occasional weekend for an individual retreat in silence and solitude, for example when carrying weighty responsibilities. They may spend the time in prayer and reflection, visiting a garden or nature preserve, or yielding to the call to rest in quiet. Regular times for silence and retreat seem essential for spiritual growth.

Organized silent retreats call Friends together for a period of time. The retreat provides an occasion for silence, worship, and prayer away from the atmosphere in which committees and business are usually conducted. The Friends come with the expectation that in waiting together we may be gathered in worship in a way different from private meditation or a quiet weekend in the country. This more sustained period of retirement shared with other Friends can deepen our individual spiritual lives and the life we share together.

**Quotations**

*Be still in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts, and then thou wilt feel the principle of God to turn thy mind to the Lord God, whereby thou wilt receive his strength and power from whence life comes, to allay all tempests, against blusterings and storms. That is it which molds into patience, into innocency, into soberness, into stillness, into stayedness, into quietness, up to God, with his power.*

George Fox, 1658

*True silence is to the spirit what sleep is to the body, nourishment and refreshment.*

William Penn, 1699

*We were taught by renewed experience to labor for an inward stillness, at no time to seek for words, but to live in the spirit of Truth, and utter that to the people which Truth opened in us.*

John Woolman, 1747

*Silence has little intrinsic value unless it is put in the setting of the Quaker way of life.*

John Punshon, 1987

*Might part of the vocation of the Society of Friends be to keep silence alive as a service for the world?*

Kathryn Damiano, 2000

*We need a vocabulary to describe the different textures of our corporate silence so we can better appreciate the experience. When we focus on the vocal ministry to*
evaluate the quality of our corporate worship we have looked to the fruits and missed the source. Attending to the quality of the corporate silence can disentangle the personal issues that arise in reacting to the vocal ministry of another. Sometimes our experience in the silence might be fragmented, distracted, or scattered, with our thoughts and focus jumping from one thing to another. Other times it might be a deep stillness where many of those present feel held to attention, perhaps like what happens in a yoga asana where the breath moves through us while the mind is quiet. Practice can help us come to that place of deep, focused attentiveness more readily.

Debbie Humphries, 2009

Advices

All of us need to find a way into silence which allows us to deepen our awareness of the Divine and to find the inward source of our strength.

Amid the busyness of daily living, we seek to dwell in the living silence which grounds all existence.

We value silence, not as an end but as a means toward the end, which is communication with the Divine and fellowship with one another.

Seek to be formed by a living silence, as a foundation for a contemplative life.

Queries

- Do we set aside times of quiet for openness to the Spirit?
- How do we bring stillness into our daily lives?
- Do we seek to be formed by a living silence? How do we manifest that living silence?
- Do our hearts dwell in the silence beneath everyday busyness?

[[Question for NPYM Friends: does this new section speak to your group’s understanding of silence as a spiritual discipline? What else could be added?]]

Expectant Worship, Vocal Ministry

[[Note to Friends: This section is a revision of “worship” on pp. 40-41 in the 1993 Faith and Practice. Quotations from pp. 70-72 with a few additions.]]

Meeting for worship is the heart of the Religious Society of Friends. In meeting for worship individuals gather in prayer and silence in waiting expectantly on the Spirit. In worship we seek a union of the hearts of all present as we search for Truth. As individuals we may enter into worship with concerns about family and friends, members of our meeting community, and our local and world communities. We may also reflect on the ways we are in harmony with others and with Quaker testimonies.

When we are open to the Spirit in ourselves and in others, we may become united in our concern for each other and for our community. As this sense of unity in the Spirit grows, the meeting is gathered—there is a sense of strength and power in the presence of the Light that transcends us as individuals. Worshipping together we strengthen one another, and our bodies and minds are refreshed in the life of the Spirit.

Prior to meeting for worship Friends prepare in many ways. Individually or in groups, we can study and discuss scripture, Quaker writings, and the religious wisdom of other faiths. We may pray, sing, meditate, or find other ways to enhance our experience of meeting for worship.

Vocal ministry arises out of the silence in meeting for worship. It is a spontaneous outpouring of the Spirit through the individual who stands to speak. In vocal ministry Friends strive to be clear and
direct, and to speak as briefly as is needed to convey the message. Out of our own experience with the Spirit, Friends share insights with fellow worshippers with insights or to offer praise or prayer or song. After a message has been given, Friends take time to ponder its meaning before another rises to speak. We listen to ministry with respect and an open heart, seeking to appreciate both the meaning of the message and the spirit in which it is given.

Quotations

...And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, ... but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

1 Kings 19:11-12 (King James Version)

God is spirit, and those who worship [God] must worship in spirit and truth.

John 4:24

...[A]s many candles lighted and put in one place do greatly augment the light and make it more to shine forth, so when many are gathered together into the same life, there more of the glory of God and his powers appears, to the refreshment of each individual.

Robert Barclay, 1671

When you come to your meetings ... what do you do? Do you then gather together bodily only, and kindle a fire, compassing yourselves about with the sparks of your own kindling, and so please yourselves, and walk in the “Light of your own fire, and in the sparks which you have kindled?” ... Or rather, do you sit down in the True Silence, resting from your own Will and Workings, and waiting upon the Lord, with your minds fixed in that Light wherewith Christ has enlightened you, until the Lord breathes life into you, refreshing you, and prepares you, and your spirits and souls, to make you fit for his service, that you may offer unto him a pure and spiritual sacrifice?

William Penn, 1678

One day, being under a strong exercise of spirit, I stood up and said some words in a meeting; but not keeping close to the Divine opening, I said more than was required of me. Being soon sensible of my error, I was afflicted in mind some weeks without any light or comfort, even to that degree that I could not take satisfaction in anything. I remembered God, and was troubled, and in the depths of my distress he had pity on me, and sent the Comforter. I then felt forgiveness for my offense; my mind became calm and quiet, and I was truly thankful to my gracious Redeemer for his mercies. About six weeks after this, feeling the spring of Divine love opened, and a concern to speak, I said a few words in a meeting, in which I found peace. Being thus humbled and disciplined under the cross, my understanding became more strengthened to distinguish the pure spirit which inwardly moves upon the heart, and which taught me to wait in silence sometimes many weeks together, until I felt that rise which prepares the creature to stand like a trumpet, through which the Lord speaks to his flock.

John Woolman, 1740

It is indeed true, as Friends have been accustomed to say, that we cannot expect “to eat the bread of idleness” in our silent meetings. Every individual spirit must work out its salvation in a living exercise of heart and mind, an exercise in which “fear and trembling” must often be our portion, and which cannot possibly be fully carried out
under disturbing influences from without. Silence is often a stern discipline, a laying bare of the soul before God, a listening to the “reproof of life.” But the discipline has to be gone through, the reproof has to be listened to, before we can find our right place in the temple. Words may help and silence may help, but the one thing needful is that the heart should turn to its Maker as the needle turns to the pole. For this we must be still.

Caroline E. Stephen, 1908

Each Friend who feels called upon to rise and deliver a lengthy discourse might question himself—and herself—most searchingly, as to whether the message could not be more lastingly given in the fewest possible words, or even through his or her personality alone, in entire and trustful silence. ‘Cream must always rise to the surface.’ True. But other substances rise to the surface besides cream; substances that may have to be skimmed off and thrown away before bodies and souls can be duly nourished. ‘Is my message cream or scum?’ may be an unusual and is certainly a very homely query. Still it is one that every speaker, in a crowded gathering especially, should honestly face. Some of the dangers of silent worship can best be guarded against by its courtesies.

Violet Holdsworth, 1919

The first thing that I do is to close my eyes and then to still my body in order to get it as far out of the way as I can. Then I still my mind and let it open to God in silent prayer, for the meeting, as we understand it, is the meeting place of the worshiper with God. I thank God inwardly for this occasion, for the week’s happenings, for what I have learned at his hand, for my family, for the work there is to do, for himself. And I often pause to enjoy him. Under his gaze I search the week, and feel the piercing twinge of remorse that comes at this, and this, and this, and at the absence of this, and this, and this. Under his eyes I see again—for I have often been aware of it at the time—the right way. I ask his forgiveness of my faithlessness and ask for strength to meet this matter when it arises again. There have been times when I had to reweave a part of my life under this auspice.

I hold up persons before God in intercession, loving them under his eyes—seeing them with him, longing for his healing and redeeming power to course through their lives. I hold up certain social situations, certain projects. At such a time I often see things that I may do in company with or that are related to this person or this situation. I hold up the persons in the meeting and their needs, as I know them, to God.

Douglas Steere, 1937

In a gathered meeting there may be few spoken words, but there is a rich ministry. An hour passes quickly. Other meetings are lifeless. They may be full of words, but there is little ministry, little that is of service. Time drags and people feel the need to fill the silence.

A gathered meeting has the strength to absorb the differences and support the needs of those who attend it; this is easier when the meeting is a community of people who know and trust each other, who are not afraid to share their experience of worship and to learn from one another.

Conference: Exploring the Fundamental Elements of Quakerism, 1986

One morning, as we waited on God in silence, it struck me in a fresh way how Friends’ practice of open worship can, in a sense, be an amazing balance of utter discipline and total freedom. In open worship, we deliberately choose to trust the Holy Spirit in practice as well as theory; we deliberately confront any temptation we might
feel to intervene and shape the worship time correctly, or fill the awkward emptiness by reaching into our storehouse of Christian clichés, or gratify our own egos. We enter into a taste of the freedom we’re promised as the daughters and sons of God.

Johan Maurer, 2013

Advises

We prepare ourselves through study, meditation, and prayer to bring to meeting for worship an open and expectant spirit.

During the meeting for worship, when led to speak, speak audibly, clearly, and simply. When another speaks, listen with an open spirit, seek the thought behind the words, and hold the speaker in love.

After a message is given, Friends take time to ponder its meaning and to search within ourselves before rising to speak.

Queries

- How do we prepare our hearts and minds for meeting for worship?
- Do we worship together in a way that honors and respects other Friends’ beliefs? How do we listen to ministry that seems wrong or misguided?
- Do we meet for worship in expectant waiting for the promptings of the Divine Spirit? Is there a living silence drawing us together? How do we carry this inspiration into our daily living?
- Do we offer vocal ministry under the leading of the Spirit, in the simplicity and sincerity of truth?
- As we listen, or as we speak, are we guided by the inward Light and sensitive to one another’s needs? Are we careful not to speak at undue length or beyond our call?

[Notes to Friends: How does your Quaker group give guidance about vocal ministry – how to prepare yourself, how to know when to speak, etc. ?]

[How do people in your Quaker group prepare themselves for meeting for worship?]

[Currently Faith and Practice doesn’t say anything about children taking part in worship. Should it? What role do children have in your meeting for worship? How does your group prepare children for Quaker worship?]

Discernment

[Note to Friends: this section is a revision of pp. 41-41 of the 1993 Faith and Practice, where it was titled “Business Meeting,” with some quotations from pp. 15-21 and additional material on the spiritual aspect of meeting for business from pp. 73-76. The intro paragraphs for definitions, benefits, and variety of processes are new. The advices have been rephrased to address discernment other than in meeting for business, but their content is essentially the same as in on pp. 41-42 of the 1993 F&P. Several new quotations. New queries added from Britain Yearly Meeting.]

A community that emphasizes the present availability of divine guidance must take discernment seriously. Discernment is sorting, careful listening and recognizing.

Discernment offers tools to distinguish between an interior leading from God and an impulse whose origin is less worthy....

Michael Birkel, 2004

Friends make decisions in the faith that there is one divine Spirit which is accessible to everyone and that when we follow the Light of Truth within, we find unity and right action. When we are faithful in discernment we become more patient, listen more carefully, feel stronger bonds of community, and are more sensitive to divine nudges. We find ourselves transformed and aligned with
Quaker discernment is a spiritual discipline that we practice in meeting for business, in committee work, in specially-constituted clearness and support committees, and in personal choices made every day.

**Meeting for Business and Other Corporate Decision Making.** Conducting business on the basis of discernment is central to the existence of a Friends meeting. The Quaker way of living and working together can create and preserve a sense of fellowship in the meeting. It is the way the community comes together to do its right work under the guidance of the Light.

Whether in smaller groups or in the full meeting for business, discernment works best when Friends are fully attending to the Presence. The commitment to searching for unity depends upon mutual trust, implies a willingness to labor and to submit to the leadings of the Spirit, and increases as members grow in Love.

Quakers with a decision to make will not take a vote but will enter into worshipful discussion. All voices are heard and valued as the group seeks to recognize and follow God’s direction. Observers may describe Quaker decision making as working by “consensus” instead of majority rule. Consensus, a concept from the secular world, is a good way to find a decision that is generally acceptable to most people involved, but it is not what Quaker meetings for business are really reaching for. The question is not “what do we (or at least, most of us) want to do?” but rather “what does Truth require of us?” A meeting for discernment strives to understand the divine will for this group of Friends at this time, as manifested by “the sense of the meeting.” Friends know the sense of the meeting by the collective internal harmony it brings, and acknowledge it in grateful worship. Teaching the discipline of discernment to children and newcomers in the meeting can be particularly challenging and rewarding.

**Other Occasions for Corporate Discernment.** Regular committee work and other service to the meeting offer many opportunities to practice discernment and decision making, as do support groups and study groups. As a meeting for business does, all such occasions begin and end in silent worship.

**Clearness Committees.** From early times, Friends have appointed small groups to work with potential new members or with couples requesting marriage under the care of the meeting to test whether the way is “clear”—meaning that there are no impediments or unresolved issues—before the matter comes before the meeting for business. Gradually these clearness committees came to operate as pastoral counseling before approval of marriage or membership. (See Chapters 9 and 10, “Membership” and “Marriage and Committed Relationships.”) This existing structure has expanded and Friends now use clearness committees for other purposes, for example in making a life-changing decision or in testing a leading. Seeking clearness in this way is a spiritual discipline both for the Friend making the decision or testing the leading and for those serving on the committee. Committee members listen deeply and ask open-ended questions to help the seeker focus and turn to the Inner Guide for direction, without offering their own advice or solutions.

**Support Committees.** A Friend who is following a leading or engaged in ministry may request a support committee to offer spiritual direction and comfort. Working with a support committee increases the likelihood that the Friend will stay faithful to the leading. The committee’s role is to help the Friend (and the meeting) understand the ministry, encourage it, help the Friend stay accountable to the meeting community, and, eventually, help discern when the ministry is fulfilled or the leading is withdrawn, and the work is to be laid down.

**Other Individual Discernment.** Spirit-led discernment is an ongoing discipline which Friends practice individually in many aspects of our lives, whether in service to the meeting or in our homes, workplaces, and communities. Quiet, centered discernment helps us to distinguish the right course among the many distractions, temptations, mixed messages, and conflicting choices of daily life.
See also “Friends Method of Reaching Decisions” and “Clearness, Support, and Care Committees” in Chapter 5, “The Monthly Meeting.”

**Quotations**

…If you indeed cry out for insight, and raise your voice for understanding; If you seek it like silver, and search for it as for hidden treasures—Then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

…Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; For wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; Prudence will watch over you, and understanding will guard you.

Proverbs 2:3-6; 9-11

Being orderly come together, not to spend time with needless, unnecessary and fruitless discourses; but to proceed in the wisdom of God not in the way of the world, as a worldly assembly of men, by hot contests, by seeking to outspoke and overreach one another in discourse as if it were controversy between party and party of men, or two sides violently striving for dominion, not fellowship of God, in gravity, patience, meekness, in unity and concord, submitting one to another in lowliness of heart, and in the holy Spirit of truth and righteousness....

Edward Burrough, 1662

The spirit of worship is essential to that type of business meeting in which the group endeavors to act as a unit.... To discover what we really want as compared with what at first we think we want, we must go below the surface of self-centered desires.... To will what God wills is ... to will what we ourselves really want.

Howard Brinton, 1952

Our task is not to find a decision of which we all approve, but the decision which is in unity with the Holy Spirit. We have arrived at the correct decision not when there is consensus or effective unanimity, but when the Spirit within us witnesses that the decision is correct.

Lloyd Lee Wilson, 1993

...In seeking sense of the meeting, we open ourselves to being guided to a perfect resolution in Light, to a place where we sit in unity in the collective inward Presence. Through consensus we decide it; through sense of the meeting we turn it over, allowing it to be decided. “Reaching consensus is a secular process,” says a Friend. “In sense of the meeting God gets a voice.”

Barry Morley, 1993

In a “listening spirituality”... our individual and corporate ability to discern, distinguish, or sift Divine Guidance from other promptings is critical. Rather than drawing a dualistic, yes/no distinction between good and evil, Quaker spirituality demands of us a commitment to a much more subtle and strenuous effort to
discriminate movements of the Spirit among the complex motivations, forces and dimensions of experience within and around us.

Patricia Loring, 1999

Perhaps the most outstanding aspect of Meeting for Business is its atmosphere, which one word describes, respect. Quakers respect one another. They are also open to each other and are unusually humble. Being non-violent they do not shout each other down or indulge in sarcastic remarks. In part, their respect for each other arises because of their common belief that everyone has the Light within. In part it comes because Quakers are wary of claiming truth for themselves, although they are willing to acknowledge their small piece of it. Moreover, they enter Meeting for Business with the belief that all are seeking the best solution to whatever problems confront them and that the group can arrive at a best solution through worshipping and working together.

Patricia Williams, 2008

**Advices**

Seeking and waiting for Truth’s leadings is a discipline through which all can grow in patience, unity, and love. Decisions under the guidance of the Spirit knit the loving community together.

We remain patient and wait upon God as long as needed for a decision to emerge which clearly recommends itself as the right one.

We guard against contentiousness, obstinacy, and love of control and power. We remember that our views, however fondly cherished, may be wrong.

We season our decisions and test our leadings with patience and integrity. We take care to stay within our leadings, lest we “outrun our Guide.”

Friends approach meeting for business, committee meetings, and other occasions for corporate discernment with trust that the Holy Spirit will lead us to unity and right action. Unity is always possible because the same Light of Truth shines in some measure in every human heart. Corporate discernment takes place in a context of worship as those present seek divine guidance.

Friends expect unity as the outcome, not as the starting point, of corporate discernment. We proceed in the peaceable spirit of the light of Truth, with forbearance and warm affection for one other. Light will be shed on matters from many angles. We trust that as Truth is spoken, its power cannot be resisted.

We express our views but refrain from pressing them unduly. It is less important for any individual to be heard than it is for the Truth to be given voice.

Corporate discernment and the search for unity may require Friends to accept with good grace a decision he or she had not originally supported.

Friends are encouraged to attend meetings for business, to be faithful in the service of the meeting’s affairs, and to contribute our Light to group discernment and decision making.

**Queries**

- Do we patiently seek divine guidance to discern the right course of action?
- Do we test our leadings patiently and prayerfully? Do we seek cleanness in the Light? Do we offer spiritual aid for others who are seeking cleanness?
- When our own way is unclear, do we seek the counsel of others in our meeting?
- What can we do to help others recognize and strengthen their leadings?
Do we hold our meetings for business in the spirit of worship, love, and understanding? How are we seeking God’s Truth together in community?

Do we take regularly take part in meetings for business? Do we uphold the meeting in prayer when we cannot be present?

Do we let our own insights and personal wishes take their places alongside those of others, or even be set aside, as the meeting seeks a way forward?

As difficult problems arise, are we careful to meet them in a spirit of love and humility, with minds open for creative solutions? Do we avoid taking sides and forming factions?

Do we avoid the pressure of time, neither unnecessarily prolonging nor unduly curtailing full consideration?

Are we aware that we speak through inaction as well as action?

Ministry

[[Note to Friends: This section is new to NPYM’s Faith & Practice, based on comments on ministry received in response to the Monthly Meeting chapter; some material is borrowed, and modified, from Pacific, Philadelphia, Southeast, North Carolina, and Freedom Friends]]

Ministry is a response to both internal and external needs and a motion of Love. We are all called to ministry, and there are many occasions when we can minister to one another in the Life and Light.

Ministry takes many forms. One of the most visible is vocal ministry in our meetings for worship. (See “Expectant Worship, Vocal Ministry” above.) There are also ministries of caring, support, and counseling that quietly and persistently work among us. They seek to meet the physical, social, and spiritual needs we all have and lead to deepening our mutual life in the Spirit.

Ministry arises through recognizing gifts in others. This may occur informally in our daily conversation with each other. The gifts may also be recognized through the discernment of our meeting, perhaps through the work of a nominating committee. Our ministry entails keeping low, being open enough to embrace those opportunities for service that come to us.

Sometimes less formal ministry answers a practical need. Inviting someone to lunch after meeting, making a friendly phone call, regularly visiting the Friend descending into dementia, opening our home to someone recovering from surgery: all are occasions of ministry. Another example of ministry is the person who arrives early to open and heat the meetinghouse for worship, care for its upkeep, bring flowers on First Day, and welcome people as they arrive for meeting. We may be called by love to any number of duties; when a duty is performed through love, it is a ministry.

There is also ministry through the books, pamphlets, and periodicals that Friends publish; these publications can travel to places few might be able to visit. More than one person has come into our Society through the printed word. Likewise the websites and blogs we create, however singular they appear, are forms of ministry to the world and to each other.

Lastly, there is a continuing ministry in our deportment in daily life, how we live out our testimonies in the world. Each one of us is a witness to truth, found in love, which is the fundamental ministry.

See also “Friends in Ministry” in Chapter 5, “The Monthly Meeting.”

Quotations

True ministry is not goal-oriented. True ministry is a state of servanthood, for that is the root meaning of the word to minister: “to serve”. Success or failure in ministry is judged by God, not by human beings, and the basis of God’s judgment is whether we have been faithful in the process of serving God and our fellow human beings, not
on what the outcomes of that service have been.

Lloyd Lee Wilson, 1996

A concern for the ministry is a calling to be intentionally available to put our experience of the divine light and life at the disposal of others, for their refreshment and encouragement. If we accept the calling, then it is a commitment to redouble our inward watchfulness, so that we grow in faithfulness, and grow in our ability to serve. As we gain more of this inward experience, we find an increase in the clarity with which we are able to desire, pray for, serve, and rejoice at, the growth of the love to God and neighbor as it appears in anyone. This in turn feeds the life of the group, and invites others to come and see.

Brian Drayton, 2006

We hold dear the expression of faith through ministry. All God’s children are given gifts for the use of the meeting, and the world, therefore all can be ministers. The meeting should encourage the use of these gifts in and out of meeting. At times, Spirit may call an individual to specific service that requires their entire attention, but this person’s service is not better than anyone else’s. Obedience to the call—whatever it is—is the important thing.

Freedom Friends Church, 2009

For Quakers, “ministry” is almost synonymous with “service,” but with the added sense that ministry is service that is done under God’s guidance.

Mathilda Navias, 2012

**Advices**

Friends seek to discover the gifts and discern the service to which we are called. In making life choices, we consider ways that offer the fullest opportunity to develop our individual abilities and contribute to the wider community while providing for ourselves and our families.

In daily work, we seek to manifest a spirit of justice and understanding, thus giving a living witness to the Truth.

Friends recognize that we are given gifts for the use of the meeting and the world. The meeting seeks to recognize and nurture the use of those gifts.

**Queries**

- Are we careful to wait for and move under the leading of the Spirit in the exercise of our gifts?
- How do we minister to each other, offering and receiving advice and support in a spirit of love and humility?
- Do we hold with tenderness each of the varieties of ministry exercised among us?
- How does our meeting nurture and support calls to service?

[[Question for NPYM Friends: does this new section speak to your group’s understanding of engaging in Quaker ministry as a spiritual discipline? What else could be added?]]

**Creativity**

[[Note to Friends: this section is new to NPYM’s Faith & Practice.]]

The creative impulse is part of being human, a gift from God, and a way of finding a deep connection with our Creator. Friends have long appreciated the strong creative element in all aspects of practical life, such as cooking, gardening, and woodworking and have from early days embraced invention and innovation in engineering, science, and business.
After an era of suspicion, the door has opened during the past century to the fine and performing arts as well. Nowadays we have among us cellists and watercolorists and novelists, to name a few of the arts practiced by Friends. We acknowledge that the searching heart can find expression in many forms. Creative activity is a path into the Light, not a distraction or an obstruction. Creativity can be a form of worship and witness, a ministry and a calling, a way of speaking out of the silence. Like all other spiritual disciplines, creative expression carries the potential for spiritual transformation.

**Quotations**

*Praise the Lord!
Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the faithful.*

...  
*Let them praise his name with dancing,
Making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.*

Psalm 149:1, 3

Art has survived all cataclysms; it is imperishable because it is of the Spirit and it renews itself in constant creative giving… Man creating order, form and meaning out of the raw material of thought, color and sound—the poet, the artist, the composer—wages his endless battle for perfection, for immortality, for truth and beauty. These fragile creations, wrought by mind, heart and hand, have left their mark on this earth. They will still be there long after the empires of kings and conquerors have gone to ruin and oblivion.

Fritz Eichenberg, 1952

*I feel that the creation of poetry is not unlike the upsurging of words in a Quaker meeting. First, heart and mind must be prepared—and the emotional and mental preparation for art is something which few non-artists realize. Then there is the waiting, perhaps for months, because poetry cannot be forced: it is an act of imagination, not of will … and then at last comes the moment of certainty, accompanied usually by some physical action, and the words begin to flow.*  

Clive Sansom, 1965

*Quakers have not been handicapped in their relation to art because they don’t have “religious” art in their Meeting Houses. Their custom may have been an enormous advantage: it has kept the general run of bad “religious” art out of the worship experience. I strongly favor the traditional simplicity of the Meeting House. By temperament each person needs to find his own spiritual relatives in the world of visual arts, and his needs change as he grows. Meetings can help their members come to recognize this need.*

Dorothea Blom, 1974

*The Holy Spirit can indeed restore us to health (or stimulate us to work well) through the medium of music as well as prayer or antibiotics! And why, indeed, should I be surprised that this is so? Creativity is the gift that we were given on the eighth day of creation. In naming and re-making the world we are co-workers with God, and whether we are making a garden or a meal, a painting or a piece of furniture or a computer program, we are sharing in an ongoing act of creation through which the world is constantly re-made.*

Jo Farrow, 1994

*In the way I view the world and my work, creation is a gift and a blessing. It comes from the Life-Giver, so our response as creators is to create something that is life-giving.*
Advices

Friends exercise our creative gifts as spiritual disciplines that require time, focus, patience, trust, love, and openness to the Spirit. We are encouraged to develop and exercise them with awe and gratitude under the leading of that Spirit.

Friends are encouraged to acknowledge and cherish the creativity found in our meetings.

Friends remain aware of the spiritual danger of either idolizing or belittling artistic gifts or accomplishments. In a culture that glorifies individual achievements, we are well advised to hold lightly our own creations.

Queries

- Do we exercise our creativity in humility and gratitude to the Creator who makes our work possible? Do we recognize creation as a sacred act and creative ability as a gift from God?
- Do we use our creative gifts to bring beauty, healing, and joy into others’ lives and to reflect the glory of creation?
- Within our meeting communities, do we recognize and encourage each other in the exercise of creative gifts?

[[Question for NPYM Friends: does this new section speak to your group’s understanding of creativity as a spiritual discipline? What else could be added?]]

Religious Education and Study

[[Note to Friends: This section is a revision of “Religious Education” on p. 45 of the 1993 Faith and Practice, with quotations from “Scriptures” pp. 21-22; other quotations and additional advices added.]]

The primary way of imparting our Quaker testimonies—the fruits of the Spirit—is by living and acting faithfully in our homes, meetings, and communities. Friends have long recognized that education, particularly education that promotes spiritual growth, enhances the inward transforming experience. This brings us into closer harmony with the Spirit and enables us to live faithfully as Quakers. Friends hold that everyone has access to the Inner Light, and that all can benefit from education. At the same time we recognize that education itself does not necessarily lead to a deeper spiritual sensitivity.

Monthly meetings have a responsibility to bring the children and adults under their care into full participation in the life of the Meeting and into an understanding of the beliefs and practices of the Religious Society of Friends.

Children’s Religious Education. As individuals and families we show our children and each other that our search for Truth involves every aspect of life, and that the Truth may be found in many religions and spiritual traditions. Ideally, all members of meeting joyfully participate, as they are led, in the spiritual education and formation of the meeting’s young people. The spiritual lives of many adolescent and young adult Friends have centered on the communities developed regionally. These allow a chance to grow in love and learn Quaker practice.

Adult Religious Education. Quakers provide a broad array of opportunities to learn and grow spiritually throughout our lives. These include”

- courses in the basics of Quaker belief and practice, such as “Quakerism 101”;
- study groups devoted to reading the Bible, other religious literature, and Quaker writings;
- engaging in service projects;
- spiritual sharing groups;
worship sharing;
programs offered by regional meetings and by other Friends organizations.

[Question for NPYM Friends: would a sidebar listing opportunities such as Pendle Hill, Ben Lomond Quaker Center, Way of the Spirit, etc., be useful in Faith and Practice?]}

**Quotations**

... [T]he Bible is a training school in discrimination among alternatives. One of the most sobering facts is that it is not on the whole a peaceful book—I mean a book of peace of mind. The Bible is the deposit of a long series of controversies between rival views of religion. The sobering thing is that in nearly every case the people shown by the Bible to be wrong had every reason to think they were in the right, and like us they did so. Complacent orthodoxy is the recurrent villain in the story from first to last and the hero is the challenger, like Job, the prophets, Jesus, and Paul.

Henry Joel Cadbury, 1953

Friends’ peace testimony challenges us all to be peace educators. We may not all be teachers, but we are all communicators, and we all need to be learners. Peace education should be seen as an integral part of our peace testimony. But it is essentially something one does, and not something one talks about...Learning, to be educated, means changing one’s behavior, and peace education therefore aims at changing our own individual behavior. We communicate our values by the manner of our lives, but how many of us negate the peaceful attitudes we fervently profess by our own aggressive behavior?

Eva I. Pinthus, 1982

I feel peace education is about teaching children to discover that they have the power to change things they see are wrong and developing the imagination to find alternative responses to conflict. This is not an objective for a course called ‘Peace’ on the timetable. It must permeate all our teaching. For we cannot teach one thing and act another. If we teach children to feel their own power we must be ready for them to criticize the [educators themselves]. In order to survive we must begin to teach them to challenge authority, our own included.

Janet Gilbraith, 1986

To find guidance from the Bible, I first had to learn how to wrestle and argue with it. To take it seriously enough to wrestle with it, I also had to learn to honor it, listening attentively to what its ancient voices actually say in their own way. The faithful must argue for justice, as Abraham and Job did, even against God Himself. It’s certainly no breach of the prophetic faith to argue with the Bible wherever it promotes what we see as injustice. Rather, anyone who fails to argue with the Bible on behalf of the covenant isn’t taking the Bible seriously.

Jim Corbett, 1991

Each path is unique. Though Zen practice has blessed me greatly, I do not urge others to follow my footsteps.... [M]y Zen journey has helped me to appreciate, from ‘the outside,’ features of Quaker spiritual practice that I had formerly overlooked. Radically understood and faithfully followed, the Society of Friends needs no bolstering by alien traditions; rather, Quakerism is itself a fully sufficient path of transforming spiritual power and grace.

Steve Smith, 2004

For guidance in word and deed, we look first to the Spirit as revealed in ourselves and in others. We recognize as did George Fox that education in itself does not
necessarily lead to a deeper spiritual sensitivity and that there are many who lack extensive formal education yet who bring pure water from the spiritual springs of life. But we also know from experience that the perspective provided by sound education, which includes the development of skills in listening and communicating, helps us to identify what is faithful to the Light in our own leadings, to interpret and communicate those leadings, and to weigh the leadings of others.

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice, 2007

**Advices**

Friends study and learn throughout our lives in order to understand and deepen our experience of Truth and our Inner Teacher.

As individuals and families we make manifest our search for Truth in every aspect of life, and recognize that Truth may be found in many religions and spiritual practices. Friends participate, as they are led, in the spiritual education and formation of the meetings young people.

As we learn together, we spiritually nurture each other according to our gifts and leadings, participate more fully in our meetings, and deepen our understanding of the beliefs and practices of the Religious Society of Friends.

**Queries**

- Do we help to develop the spiritual lives of all of our members, attenders, and children?
- Do we all take part in educating ourselves about the history and heritage of Friends?
- Do we prepare members and children for worship and for a way of life consistent with the Friends principles? How do we teach Quaker worship and discernment and their importance to the good order of our meeting community?
- Do we share our faith and spiritual journeys, as well as listen to and learn from others? Do we encourage such sharing within our families and meeting communities?

**Participation in the Life of the Meeting**

[[Note to Friends: This section is a revision of material on pp. 42-43 of the 1993 Faith and Practice.]]

The Religious Society of Friends is enriched when all members and attenders take part to the fullest extent we can. The working of the Spirit in our life as a Friends community can be seen in many ways: through prophetic ministry, witness in the world, loving care for each other, conscientious attention to committee work, and the examples provided by lives lived in the Light. Quaker organizations and service groups offer opportunities for participation in the Religious Society of Friends as a whole.

The life of the meeting depends upon the varied gifts and leadings of all members and attenders. Awareness of the Presence in our lives connects us to each other, and over time we are known by the people with whom we gather. As we worship, work, and socialize together, we form friendships that strengthen our communities locally and in the wider Quaker world. We offer informal advice and counsel to one another, thus gaining skills and experience that enrich our lives outside the Religious Society of Friends.

In addition, the health of the meeting depends upon practical contributions from everyone. Friends discern the level of financial support we are to offer as well as the leadings we are to follow. Financial support is a vital component in the life of the monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings.

**Quotations**

*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*
Matthew 6:21

For as in one body we have many members, and not all members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Romans 12:4-8

Not by strength of arguments or by a particular disquisition of each doctrine and convincement of my understanding thereby, came I to receive and bear witness of the Truth, but by being secretly reached by the Life. For when I came into the silent assemblies of God’s people, I felt a secret power among them which touched my heart; and as I gave way unto it I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up and so I became thus knit and united unto them, hungering more and more after the increase of this power and life, whereby I might feel. myself perfectly redeemed.

Robert Barclay, 1676

The way to call anyone into fellowship with us is not to offer them service, which is likely to arouse the resistance of their pride, but to ask service of them.

Simeon Shitemi, address to NPYM Annual Session, 1991

Advises

When meeting for worship holds a central place in our life, regular and punctual attendance follows. Friends hold in the Light those who are unable to participate fully in the life of the meeting.

There are many ways to contribute to the life of the meeting: attending meeting for worship for business, committee service, financial support, offering and accepting spiritual support, and praying for the spiritual strength and health of the meeting. Contributions of time and resources are our love made visible, gifts we make in conscience and discernment.

Friends are encouraged to consider what gifts of service we are led to provide and how we may grow through this service. We also uphold others in their service.

We encourage attenders to become acquainted with Friends ways and to participate in the meeting community. We encourage attenders to apply for membership when it is evident that the meeting has become their spiritual home.

Queries

- Do we each take an active part in the life of our meeting?
- How has our group grown together through its activities?
- In what ways do we grow by participating in the life of the meeting?
- Do we express our skills and gifts in service to the meeting and to the Spirit? Do we recognize and support others in doing so?
- Do we provide youth with responsible opportunities and encouragement to participate in meeting life and structure?
- Do we bring together groups across generations in a loving community?
- Do we visit one another in our homes, and keep in touch with distant members?
- How do we welcome and involve newcomers?
- Do we encourage attenders to share in the life of the meeting and to consider membership
when they are ready?

- How does God speak to each of us through relationship to the meeting?

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**Some questions for discussion around “Living in the Spirit: Friends Spiritual Disciplines” in NPYM’s *Faith and Practice***

From NPYM Friends and the Committee on the Discipline

1. The Committee on the Discipline has tried to describe a wide range of spiritual practices followed by NPYM Friends. Are there other ways of living in the Spirit that you think should be included in our *Faith and Practice*?

2. Is there anything described here that you think absolutely does **not** belong in our *Faith and Practice*?

3. How does your Quaker group use advices and queries?

4. Would you prefer to keep the traditional names “advices” and “queries” or use some other words? If so, what?

5. Would you like to see more advices and queries? Fewer? What would you add or delete?

6. Prayer can include self-examination. We’ve used “self-reflection” and “confession” to describe this. Do these words speak to you? Are there others you would use?

7. How does your Quaker group give guidance about vocal ministry – how to prepare yourself, how to know when to speak, etc.?

8. How do people in your Quaker group prepare themselves for meeting for worship?

9. Currently *Faith and Practice* doesn’t say anything about children taking part in worship. Should it? What role do children have in your meeting for worship? How does your group prepare children for Quaker worship?

10. Would a sidebar listing opportunities such as Pendle Hill, Ben Lomond Quaker Center, Way of the Spirit, *Western Friend* discussions, etc., be useful in the section on Religious Education? What else should it include?

11. This proposed chapter includes material on several topics that don’t appear in the 1993 *Faith and Practice*:
   - Silence
   - Ministry
   - Creativity

Do these new sections speak to your understanding of these as Quaker spiritual disciplines? What would you add or change in these sections?