Eugene Monthly Meeting
Jan. Study Guide Notes from Inquiries
1-15-2008

Tuesday, January 15- Friends Beliefs
We met on Tuesday evening with 6 in attendance.

Overall views-
-I have a problem with the word corporate (in the heading “corporate discernment”). Can we find another word that would better explain what we are? Something up to date, that doesn’t have such a negative association? It could be that this is a historically accurate word, but NOW it has an unpleasant connotation... anyway, it’s repeated way too often.
-Suggestions: Community discernment, group discernment, collective discernment...
-Corporate is in the glossary, which is nice to know, but we still don’t need to use it so often.
-Because this is an introduction to the rest of the book, it’s hard to critique this section all alone...

-I’m still trying to decide if I like the bold headings or not- I like that it’s easy to pick out topics, but I don’t particularly like the headings that were chosen... Don’t like Corporate, Scripture is too exclusive as it usually refers to the Bible- (how about “Sacred Writings”?)And Names doesn’t help as a heading... (What about “Our Names”?) We don’t have Sacraments and Creeds, so how about heading the section “Statements of Belief”? Also not totally happy with Friends’ Place in Christianity-- what about “Our Christian Roots”?
- I’m not happy, either, with some of the content under the headings-- maybe if we resolved that, the headings would become clearer.
-Our current statement is like a song; and the new version is like footnotes to the song. Both styles have value, but the tone is different. One is a story, one is a study guide, full of information- when I read it I feel educated, but not nurtured.
-The voice is too impersonal, and shifts back and forth randomly. It uses the impersonal “Friends” too often...We can’t use Friends throughout when we are referring to how we in NPYM think- it’s better sometimes to say “We”. When you say, “We do not rely on formal statements of belief” it becomes more personal, and also truer, since some Friends MIGHT have creeds. Also, why would it ever be appropriate to refer to Friends as “them”? Aren’t we talking about us? -- “We consider how the advices and queries affect us personally, individually and in meetings, and where they are called to service.”... there is no them about it.

First section:
-I don’t much like the first paragraph; I like the current version better; it’s more welcoming.
-The first section gives me a negative feeling, like we are apologizing for what we went through- hero worship, internal division, public scandal, etc... This isn’t a good way to introduce our beliefs!
-It’s not necessary to drag out all we have struggled with- just say “the inward experience of the Divine is seasoned by the community’s experience of the Divine.” This is covered in the section on Discernment.
-The bulleted list of ways we test leadings are not particularly helpful- and they are not “benchmarks” because we aren’t being measured! How about, “we use several processes for testing our leadings”.
-Wilmer Cooper’s book (Jim has Michael’s copy) has an alternate listing of processes for testing leadings: Group discernment is fine, then: Authority (including scripture and community); Reason (consistency with testimonies and Faith & Practice); Feelings or conscience...
-Fruits of the Spirit is a useless suggestion, unless you list them right there-- most people will not know what they are, nor how exactly you can use them to test a leading.
Testimonies:
- Is harmony a new testimony? Is it part of the greater Peace Testimony? I don’t see how it fits-- most people know it as the Peace testimony, so that is what they will look for.
- One of the difficulties I have is keeping in mind the Quaker meaning of these words-- community, simplicity, and so on-- rather than the secular; they are not necessarily the same.
- Maybe we do need to change the words, but how will we be faithful to the spirit of these ideas (historically) if we do? For example, we don’t like the word corporate anymore- it sticks in our craw- we’d like to move on to something that keeps the same spirit. But some words we can hang on to.
- But we need to update to the cutting edge of Quakerism or we are just stuck in the past.
- I like the sentence near the end of that section: “Thus the advices and queries represent a continuing exploration of a common faith and practice.”
- What does it mean- “independent Friends”? (we explained that it means unaffiliated, which NPYM is.) Well, I didn’t know that, so maybe it would be better to say “independent (unaffiliated) Friends, like NPYM.”
- A wonderful quote that explains a Testimony: “Testimony is not a philosophical generalization to be affirmed by intellectual judgment … but rather a confession of spiritual surrender and the fruit of that surrender.” (from Pendall Hill pamphlet #......)

Scripture:
- We need to refer directly to other scripture besides Christian and Jewish, maybe by listing some possibilities, such as the Koran- and what about Quaker Journals? These are at least as important as the Bible... I like the Penn quote.
- We could start that section: “HISTORICALLY, Friends found the Jewish and Christian writing… to be a rich and sustaining source of inspiration...” and then continue it: “In these modern days we find writings from many different faith traditions useful and nurturing”.

Names:
- I really don’t like Names as a heading- it’s not clear what it refers to. For the first paragraph, when we talk about our name- why not head it “Our name”? 
- The last sentence of that paragraph- “The inseparability of faith and practice is a truth which pervades both past and present of the Quaker movement” - doesn’t make sense... is there a sentence missing? (How about: “Faith and practice have always been inseparable to Friends, past and present”?)
- If you add John 15:17- “These things I command you, that you love one another.” - that maybe explains why faith and practice are inseparable.
- But I still don’t see how it connects to the topic of our name...
- I like the second paragraph very much- the list of ways to describe the Divine. That should go right at the top of the whole section! I’d feel much more comfortable with the use of God throughout if I’d read that first. (We all agreed that it’s a great paragraph, but I don’t like it lumped together with why we call ourselves the Society of Friends. It’s not the same kind of thing.)
- I think we should add Goddess to the list if we really want to be inclusive.