Eugene ad hoc Discipline Review Committee

Our Process:
In the fall of 2007, four Eugene Friends formed an ad hoc committee to review the discipline. We wanted to create a forum for our monthly meeting and worship groups to worship and discuss the proposed revisions in community, and also a format for sending seasoned feedback to the NPYM committee. We decided to name the process “Coming to Terms with Our Faith & Practice in the 21st Century”

We scheduled three worship-discussion sessions per month--two in Eugene, and one in Umpqua, and we repeated that schedule for 3 months in the fall of 2007, 3 months in the winter and spring of 2008, and 1 month in the fall of 2008- to cover all 7 of the current draft sections of the Faith and Practice.

Each month we published a study guide with queries, with a brief introductory “inquiry” written by one of our committee members, and with the complete text of one of the draft sections. The study guide was made available 2 weeks before the worship discussion, with the hope and expectation that folks would come prepared.

Each month the sessions were well attended (at Eugene, 20-30 people; at Umpqua, nearly the entire group), and folks were well prepared, having read the study guide and thought about the topic. These sessions were rich and community building; those who attended felt their understanding expanded.

We took copious notes of what was spoken at the sessions, and our committee met the following week for an evening potluck to gather the “threads” of what we heard. We extracted and distilled the points that were most repeated, and wrote a report. The report was read at that month’s Eugene meeting for business, for acceptance rather than approval, and then sent, along with all the notes, to the NPYM Committee to Review the Discipline. We must say that the work was deep, rewarding, and FUN! If you have questions for our committee, please contact the clerk of the NPYM committee, who will forward your questions to us.

Attached: Sample study guide with queries (these were used each month) and the topical “Inquiry” (not all sections had an Inquiry).
Coming to Terms with Our Faith & Practice in the 21st Century

Eugene Friends Meeting has an exciting topic of study this year! We will be working together to season the revisions of the North Pacific Yearly Meeting’s “Faith and Practice”.

As it states in its introduction, “Faith and Practice is an evolving document, reflecting the growing experience of Friends in North Pacific Yearly Meeting as we seek to know and follow the inner light.” The NPYM Committee on the Discipline is charged with updating and revising this document, which was last revised in 1993. They have been working for a year already, and their emerging Advices and Queries are a wonderful succession to, and synergy of, the adult study Eugene Friends did last year in Principles and Practices, Jim Thomas’ Inquiry class, and in the Friendly Gatherings.

The Advices and Queries are our Yearly Meeting's efforts to establish roots in the growing edge of our faith and practices. Beginning this fall, Eugene Meeting members and attenders, and our affiliated worship groups, will undertake a seasoning process to seek clearness on what the updated Faith and Practice means to us- as individuals, families, and as a wider community. This process is a limitless opportunity for each of us for convincement and re-convincement, with the promise of rich worship and discussion in each section that we study.

The Seasoning Process
We will have several opportunities to discuss and worship together on the selected section: At Eugene Meeting House on the 2nd Sunday, 12:30-2 p.m., the following Tuesday, 7:30-9:00 p.m., and on the 1st Sunday at Umpqua Worship Group.

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<td>Religious Education:</td>
<td>Oct. 14, 12:30-2 p.m.</td>
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<td>Participation in the Life of the Meeting:</td>
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After our meetings, we (the ad hoc Discipline Review Committee) will prepare a report for Eugene’s meeting for worship for business. It’s exciting to realize that these same efforts are taking place in other meetings in our yearly meeting simultaneously, and that the NPYM Committee on the Discipline will take our suggestions in for integration and further seasoning.
Queries
Each month, one section of the draft Faith and Practice will be printed in this study guide. You are encouraged to read it through more than once, absorb it, and grapple with what you feel and think about it, for your use as an individual as well as for our community’s use. Some suggestions:

• Rewrite the section to express your personal light on the subject. What do you like in this draft? What would you change?
• Frame the queries in first-person I-statements. How are they useful for you as an individual? Do they call for you to stretch your thinking and elaborate to develop satisfactory answers?
• Consider the section as a resource for our Meeting community. Is it inclusive of our community in all its diversity? Is there something not reflective of our community? How are the Queries useful to the community? What would you add to make this resource more complete and comprehensive?
• Consider the section as “the cutting edge” of Quakerism in the 21st century. Is it the truth of who we are becoming?
• Consider the section in the context of the tradition of the Religious Society of Friends. Is it the truth of what we have always been?
• Read some of the sources for the text to get further inspiration.

On Coming to Terms, as Quakers, With Our Faith and Practice in the 21st Century

It is the work of historians to unpack what Quakers were. As Quakers it is up to us to come to terms with what we are becoming.

It seems to me that “coming to terms” is what early Friends called veracity. Veracity, as truthfulness, is a passionate seeking of truth without ‘owning truth’ and making it dogma. Truth, like Light, belongs to each of us in our own measure. We cannot claim truth, but only speak in the Light of truth as we see it. Humble, but not shy, we seek to mean what we do and say what we mean. This is “coming to terms”--not in the abstract/ideal/hypothetical or theological sense, but in short it is ‘getting real’ in understandable terms.

To come to terms with who we are becoming requires the utmost veracity. Do we have the courage of our convictions to see and say who we are becoming? Can we, by our own terms, stay in the Light?

These two questions are really challenges to a difficult task. This task is an ongoing work of our yearly meeting as they reconstruct our convincements in the form of a new Faith and Practice.

It is being proposed that the Meeting for Inquiry [introduced in our Meeting last year] may be a means for our monthly Meeting to have input into the seasoning process for the substance of the new Faith and Practice. The Meetings for Inquiry were experimental, but they seemed to generate interest and passion into Quaker self-examination.
We will work with the standard themes of our old Faith and Practice, with an eye to clearness in these changing times. I would hope that we could open ourselves to issues not heretofore examined if we remain faithful to the leadings of the Spirit.

Can we find terms that describe who we are becoming? Recognizing that our traditions of peacemaking and practice of silent unprogrammed worship attracts a very wide range of seekers. . . .

and that it is often difficult to tell the difference between active participants and seasoned members . . . .

and that the language of early Friends anchored in the Bible is seldom used [or even known]. . . .

We are changing! We cannot be all things to all people. At the same time, we maintain a Meeting House here in Eugene that lives under Jesus' admonition "...my house shall be called a house of prayer."

This implicit invitation is not exclusive. Neither is it a suggestion that anything goes. We have a long and deep tradition that is being led by the Presence in our midst. That Presence does not require a rote form of belief and prayer. But it does require our conscious attention and veracity. We seek to understand ourselves, and what we are becoming. In this quest, we need to disarm ourselves of notions and, in the spirit of prayer, inquire into our own experience and say what we mean by it. . . . in the now.

This form of seeking asks us to be at home with questing, questioning and inquiring. It asks us to candidly report [witness] our own experience in the Light; it asks us to come to terms with what we each believe. Then, for the hard part: Can we say what we believe? How wide-minded and deep-souled can we be/become?
Inquiry on Religious Education:
What do Quakers teach?
- We have no catechism---on purpose.
- We have seen how the broadcaster of the Word can obscure, even block out, the Light in words written in indelible ink.

In what anchored Truth do we take our stand? “You mean creed?” [We have been the victims of recited pledges of allegiance.]
Still we have ten year olds who need to have measures to Grow by.

We live by example: yes, but what do we say? As George Fox asks, “What canst thou say?”
- We do have a very clear history in biblical Christianity.
- We do have strong roots in spiritual and political traditions.
- We do seek to be inclusive in our seeking the Light.
- We do believe that revelation is an ongoing process--in each of us as witnesses.

Witnessing has two aspects:
1] to see clearly in the Light
2] to affirm the truth in the Light

Can we put firm flesh on these strong bones and feet on this body?
*Come to our Meeting for Inquiry ready to address how we let our light so shine as to help younger [or newer] friends find their way.

Inquiry on Participation in the Life of the Meeting:
Is it possible to live in the presence of and enjoy wild birds? We can put them in cages, but then they would not be wild. We can place feeding stations where safety and survival are insured, but near enough to enjoy their company.

Is it possible to prepare a place where the Holy Spirit, the Presence, the Comforter, the Witness [all that is free and whole and Holy] can visit and come into our lives? We Quakers call such a place a Meetinghouse---a feeding station, an opportunity and invitation to local and passers-by to share in the Spirit.
- As host of such a place, what do I contribute?
- As guest at such a place, what needs to I hope to have met?
- As guest and host [at once] how do I expect to grow in the kinship of Grace?

Inquiry on Friends Beliefs:
"You're Quakers? How quaint." In this introduction to our Faith and Practice we are asked to introduce ourselves. In the main, Quakers are considered a peculiar people. We don't deny it. But just because we insist that we are a work in progress does not mean that we should not say just what that work is. What metaphors do we use to describe ourselves? What are our origins, framework, foundations, structures, reasons for being, direction or goals?
- Are we rooted in the "Rock of Ages" in the Judeo-Christian sense?
• Are we protestants, protesting the pretensions of the church?
• Are we a prophetic people, responding to revealed truth?
• Are we a large tent that honors any and all recognizers of the Divine [Light, Presence, Spirit, et al.]?
• Do we act as the world’s immune system by responding to injustice and violence with peace and love?
• If, organizationally, we are not a hierarchy, what are we?
• If there is nothing solid in our system like a creed, how do we remain faithful?
• If our altar [point of devotion] is 'inner,' how do we share that outwardly with the rest of the world?
• Do we see ourselves as midwives to the birthing of Spirit?
• If the Bible and revelation is pointing in a direction, are we also on that path?
• Are we forever reinventing the wheel---that is, rediscovering ourselves? In this seemingly endless seeking, are we ever found?

Inquiry on Right Relationship to Wealth:
What is the measure of my worth?
• As I live in a commercial world, am I a capitalist?
• Do I buy, sell, trade, in good conscience?
• As a Quaker and to the extent that I live in the Spirit [that can neither be bought or sold], can I find harmony between money and the sacred?
• How do I express my faith by material means?

Inquiry on Creativity:
Let's take this inquiry personally.

Leading questions:
• If I have been created in the image of the Creator. . . . am I a creator? or a procreator?
• Do I feel I am a finished product or is there yet in me more to be realized, born, created?
• Do I at times feel [like in Meeting for Worship] that there is still more to be born? Is there an inner urge in me to express something----known or yet unknown?
• The Holy Spirit, Presence, et al. is sometimes described as Comforter or Light. What else is that Spirit revealing? Is it ever felt as a creative urge to be expressed as a 'work'? Does that "work" then reveal the Divine in me or something of the beauty of creation?
• Too much to ask? Why? Are humility and modesty virtues? Is hiding my Light under a basket a virtue?
• How can I discern the difference between vainglory and witnessing in the Light?