Bridge City Friends Meeting held an Adult Education Session one Sunday after worship, on the Faith and Practice draft versions related to Creativity and Right Relationship to Wealth. This session was lightly attended and I took sketchy notes which I am attempting to decipher some months after the fact. I will relate what I can here, with apologies. Following my notes on the Creativity draft is a message from a Friend who was not able to be present.

Nancy McLauchlan

**Section on Creativity**

Page 1, 4th paragraph. Friends felt that there is “something of God in our mind and hands.”

Page 2 Last line of “Advices:” It says “…..Friends are advised to mind the Light and to take care not to outrun their Guide.” Friends found this statement to be belittling Spiritual gifts; patronizing; using Quakerese; showing restrictions on creativity.

Page 3, second paragraph, sentence that begins with “Friends are advised to “keep low.””

…. Friends found this patronizing and not a good place to stop this section on creativity.

Negative. They felt this statement was Puritan, that it spoke of an inherent danger of pride, that the artist was being asked to tone himself or herself down, to be appropriate.

General comments:
It is hard to believe early Quakers would be that Puritan. Friends mentioned the book and movie *Friendly Persuasion* and expressed relief that our attitudes toward creativity have changed.

Friends asked if there are boundaries to creativity? What’s acceptable in creativity? They expressed a desire for the section to include a sense of where we hope to go with creativity, as well as the history and where we are now.

Creativity is expressed through the filter of what’s acceptable in community.

What is creativity balanced by? Creativity and the status quo.

I was absolutely shocked by the Advices and Queries on Creativity and very
frustrated that I am not able to be at Meeting and Adult Education this morning, where this proposed addition to Faith and Practice will be discussed.

To cut to the chase, I would object strenuously to including this section in Faith and Practice. The Queries themselves are not too far off, but perhaps could be rephrased slightly. The History and Advices, however, are very problematic.

The two fundamental problems with this proposed section are:

1) History

There is a misrepresentation/misunderstanding of Quaker history around this issue, but even in the most sanctimonious of times (i.e., the Quietist period noted by Elizabeth Fry and William Charles Braithwaite) there were artists amongst the Friends who were able to lead both spiritual and artistic lives (e.g., John Greenleaf Whittier; and c.f., "The Quaker Poets of Great Britain and Ireland", by Evelyln Noble Armitage, 1896).

We should acknowledge that those who tried to suppress the arts were almost always the same as those who tried to disown members who married outside the Society and who objected to any form of pleasure as sinful self-indulgence.

Yes, there was a period of abuse and intolerance amongst Friends and this was an aberration and perversion of the original message and intent of the Society. It is a shameful part of our history and needs to be acknowledged, but we should not in any way imply that this was part of the *ideals* of Friends at any point in our history.

2) Advices

In the Advices, I disagree with a number of the statements, starting with the first sentence: The exercise of creative gifts is ALWAYS a spiritual discipline, but we do not always recognize it as such. There is no more profound an act of Worship than the creative process that comes out of the inspiration of the Inward Light.

Self-indulgent art is produced when we are not true to that Inward Light that gives us the spark or when we are just performing an empty exercise without True Intent. This is *exactly* the same as when we perfunctorily practice rituals that have become meaningless, just because we are "supposed to".

In the second paragraph, I object to the implication that only some Friends are endowed with creative gifts. I believe that an essential part of Friends principles, from the very beginning, was that EVERYONE has the creative spark that is the gift of the Holy Spirit and that our best and most noble experiences of the Spirit rise out of that creative spark. The last sentence of that paragraph is one of the few in this proposed addition that I can wholeheartedly agree with.

In the third paragraph, I would much rather advise Friends to above all seek that True Intent of their art. I would be very cautious about the wording around advising Friends to "keep low" about their arts. Yes, self-indulgence and false pride should be avoided, but there is a fundamental difference between False Pride and the feeling of accomplishment that one gets from completing the
result of following the inspiration of the Inward Light.

Finally, I am most outraged by the statement that "creative gifts should be a benefit to the community, not just to the artist." True art comes from following one's own vision and interpretation of the inspiration they have received from the Inward Light of the Holy Spirit. Although we can anticipate and even relish the impact of our art on the community, path to self-indulgence is to create any work of art that does not speak out of our own personal experience. Just like in any other spiritual discipline.

In closing, I am grateful that we are addressing the issue of Creativity in our Faith and Practice, but I want it to represent the faith and practice of Friends in our Yearly Meeting in this place and this time and to accurately represent the history of Friend's faith and practice that includes more than those in our Society who promoted intolerance and meanness of spirit for their own self-promotion.

Peace,

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Section on Right Relationship to Wealth

Page 1. Third Paragraph. Friends questioned this statement: “Friends are mindful that the gap between the rich and poor is a seedbed of war.” Friends talked about economic inequality and that war is usually related to resources.

General Comments:

Friends thought this section more naturally fit in “Community.”

This Section reads capitalistic.

Do Friends believe in having money and not working for it?

The Section doesn’t mention property.