

*One Explorer's  
Glossary of*  
**Quaker  
Terms**

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by Quaker Press of Friends General Conference

ISBN: 0-9620912-4-3

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Cover and text design by David Budmen

The first printing of this book was made possible through the generous contributions of Alice Walton and Marti Matthews.

For more information about this publication contact:  
Quaker Press of Friends General Conference  
1216 Arch Street, 2B  
Philadelphia, PA, 19107

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## Foreword

Those reared in Quaker households may have come by the peculiar terminology of Friends so naturally that they do not pause to wonder at it. But the more recent Friend finds himself or herself challenged at every turn by a new language, remarkable for its unadorned directness and its lively power of communication. Here are some of the words and phrases that keep cropping up in Quaker talk and Quaker writings, with some casual and completely unauthorized commentary.

*Warren S. Smith*

## Acknowledgments

The original acknowledgments, written by Warren S. Smith in November, 1983 follow:

This little glossary owes much to some helpful Friends: the late David Scull, then clerk of the Publications Committee of Friends General Conference, his successor, Helen Parker, and the members of the committee.

Gordon M. Browne, Jr., Carolyn Terrell, and Edwin Bronner, all of whom read the manuscript and offered invaluable suggestions for its improvement.

The acknowledgments for the 1992 edition were written as follow:

For this newly formatted and revised 1992 edition, we wish to thank Robert Sutton for his useful editorial suggestions and the staff of FGC for their work on design. Also Gordon M. Browne, Jr., who read and advised us on content and changes.

Mae Smith Bixby designed the new page format and prepared the photo-ready copy.

For the 2002 revision: We would like to thank Deborah Haines and Doug Whyte for their thoughtful suggestions and revisions. David Budmen designed the new cover and text.

## Foreword to the 2002 Edition

This is a delightful book. More than an introduction to Quaker terminology, it is an exploration of the world of Quaker spirituality, as revealed through Friends' unique use of words. Some are familiar words to which Quakers have given a peculiar twist. Others are new words, coined to fill gaps in the English language as Quakers struggled to describe what they had experienced. Each is a doorway into some aspect of religious life.

Warren Sylvester Smith (b. 1912, deceased) is our guide on this journey—observant, wise, charming, and filled with a sense of wonder. Coming to the Religious Society of Friends as an adult, he clearly never took the peculiar language of Quakerism for granted. He questioned and prodded and reflected on the words he encountered, and delighted in the discoveries he made. His keen intelligence, wry sense of humor and gentle spirit suffuse this book. It is a deeply personal account of the fruits of one remarkable life of exploration.

In republishing this book, we have made very few changes. The phrase “hold in the Light” has been added. The definition of “overseer” has been rewritten, in part using the text formerly consigned to a footnote, where the author expressed his doubts about the wisdom of relying on such a culturally loaded term. A few other minor editorial changes have been made.

But we rejected the idea of trying to expand this slim volume into a more comprehensive and up-to-date glossary of Quaker terms. There may well be a need for such a book, but there is also a need for this one as it stands. It is, in its own way, a classic.

The newcomer will find here a warm welcome to the world of Quakerism. The long-time Friend will rediscover the wonder of the experiences that have shaped Quaker language. Warren Sylvester Smith's unique voice beautifully conveys both the welcome, and the wonder. This is a book to be read and treasured.

*Deborah Haines*

## **Advancement (see also Outreach)**

Friends do not like negative-sounding terms. They even hesitate to call their occasional withdrawals into quiet conferences “retreats.” They prefer words like “advancement.”

Many Friends, especially in the unprogrammed meetings, are not comfortable with efforts that smack too much of proselytizing, evangelizing, or missionary zeal. However, all accept the fact that there are “out there” a considerable number of people who would respond to the Quaker message if they were made aware of it, who are “Friends without knowing it.” Advancement, or outreach, is the term given to committees or programs which at various organizational levels carry on or encourage this kind of approach through advertising, publishing, visitation between meetings, and other ways.

## **Advices (see also Queries)**

Friends have carefully kept clear of formal creeds or anything that might resemble them; for how can we be free to search for the God that is within us, if we cannot depart from the road signs devised by others? Yet one senses that it was not always easy to get along without an occasional definition of principle that would hold members together. In early days, too, persecution might fall on all Friends because of idiosyncratic behavior of an individual. So, when statements had to be made in a simple declarative vein, Friends were careful to *advise* one another rather than command or require. Friendly conferences or committees, at the conclusion of their deliberations, may publish a set of advices. Yearly meetings, too, issue thoughtfully worded advices on the same general subjects that are covered by the queries and ask that members of monthly meetings read and consider them periodically.

Both advices and queries grow out of the collective experience of Friends in trying to live their Light. Unlike dogma, they are subject to revision as new experience sheds new light.

## **Affirm (see also Oaths)**

A court system sorely tried by the refusal of Quakers to swear judicial oaths (it is a bother to have the prisons always full) moved in 1696 toward the solution of the problem by an act of Parliament which would permit a Friend “solemnly to affirm” that he or she was speaking truth. However, “solemnly,” a religious word, was also not acceptable to some Friends, and it was 1722 before a formula was agreed upon by all and its enactment into law secured. The privilege of “affirming” rather than “swearing” is now available in the British and American systems to all who wish to avail themselves of it.

## **After the Manner of Friends**

This phrase has happily come into more and more frequent use as non-Friends find Friendly processes worth copying. Committees grown tired of the formal procedures of *Robert's Rules of Order* decide to conduct their business "after the manner of Friends." Young couples who want neither the outworn pomp of the church ceremony nor the legal aridity of the justice of the peace decide (where law permits) to be married "after the manner of Friends." The phrase is sometimes used to characterize protest marches and nonviolent demonstrations. It is not always used accurately.

## **Allowed Meeting (see Indulged Meeting)**

## **American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)**

For many non-Friends, especially in certain areas overseas, the American Friends Service Committee (with its sister organization, Quaker Peace and Service in London) is Quakerism. However, Friends regard these service organizations as the activist arm of a religious commitment. Indeed not all Friends support all activities of the AFSC. Responding to the relief work of British Friends during World War I, the AFSC was established in 1917 to aid in humanitarian service and to provide an outlet for the energies of those opposed to war. In the aftermath of World War I the AFSC distributed food and supplies to six or seven million people across Europe. It has since widened its activities to include struggles for justice and equality as well. It was particularly active on behalf of conscientious objectors during World War II. In 1947, to honor the peace and reconciliation work of Friends, the Noble Peace Prize was awarded jointly to AFSC and the British Friends Service Council (now Peace and Social Witness). Yearly meetings appoint members to the American Friends Service Committee Corporation, but AFSC remains independent, not directly responsible to any yearly meeting, operating under its own board of directors, seeking to translate the Inner Light into social action.

## **Birthright Friend (see also Membership)**

This is a term for those born into the Religious Society of Friends (RSoF) by the circumstance of both parents being members. There are typical "Quaker names" that go back many generations, testifying to a long Quaker pedigree. But Quakerism is not always heritable—witness the sons of William Penn! On the other hand, sometimes a Quaker upbringing produces a Rufus Jones. In any case, the choice of what religious path to follow is an adult decision, and birthright or not, the mature Friend must be a "convinced Friend." Some meetings list children as "associate members" until they are old enough to make up their own minds. Paper Friends, whose only evidence of membership is their listing on the roster, are of little value to the RSoF.

## Book of Discipline, Discipline

Each of the larger yearly meetings publishes a Book of Discipline which is meant to guide monthly meetings and individual Friends in procedural matters and give some background of the history and testimonies of the RSoF. A yearly meeting which does not publish its own Discipline customarily selects one from another yearly meeting. A number of Disciplines are prefaced with the caution of the 1656 Yorkshire Friends (often referred to as the Elders of Balby):

Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule to walk by, but that all with the measure of light which is pure and holy may be guided, and so in the light walking and abiding these may be fulfilled in the Spirit—not from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth light.

Friends of our own time seem a pretty permissive group and the word “discipline” falls harshly on their ears—though why should it, since the word, like “disciple” comes from a stem that means “to learn?” Yearly meetings now have a way of calling their books of discipline *Faith and Practice*. But discipline, in the old-fashioned sense, continues to be essential for Quaker life and worship. The process of silent worship is itself a rigorous discipline. And beneath the apparently casual life styles of many younger Friends there lies a definite resistance to the self-indulgence of our times—a resistance to the lures of television, alcohol, drugs, tobacco, and the prodigalism of the sybarite.

## Break Meeting (*see* Close Meeting, Sit at the Head of Meeting)

### Center, Center Down

A meeting for worship cannot become a “gathered meeting” in an instant. It requires of each worshiper a period of “centering down,” a time of shutting out all outside interference and giving oneself over to the spirit that moves in the silence. How long should it take to center down? Five minutes? Ten or more? It depends in part on how skillful the worshiper has become, and in part on the state of mind brought into the meeting. I think we must all confess that there have been days when the whole hour was not sufficient.

### Cherish

This lovely old-fashioned word is rarely heard spoken in the larger world, but Friends have kept it as part of their standard vocabulary. We all need some cherishing, and the meeting’s pastoral caregivers should continue to remind us who of our members or attenders need especially to be cherished.

## **Christocentric (see also New Foundation Fellowship)**

This is a word in popular usage among modern Friends. Part of its appeal seems to lie in its imprecision of meaning. Universalist Friends (see p. 24) tend to use it to signify all Friends who designate themselves Christian. Liberal Friends tend to use it somewhat pejoratively to signify those Quakers who are theologically quite conservative or who are biblical literalists. Still other Friends use it as a proud label for their own faith. Regrettably, some Friends who have fled spiritual damage in other authoritarian religious experiences find in this term a summary of all they are fleeing, while at the other extreme, a few Friends use it as a label of exclusion, to separate themselves from those who are unable to assert a traditional Christian belief. Like many other labels for experiences in the spirit, it is handy and concise but fraught with potential for misunderstanding. Since George Fox's day, however, the metaphor of the Inward Christ or the In-dwelling Christ has been one of the most common expressions of Quaker religious experience.

## **Christ Within (see Inner Light)**

### **Clearness**

Any Friend facing a personal dilemma may ask to meet with a clearness committee, to explore the situation in worship, in hopes of seeing it more clearly and finding a spiritually grounded way to move forward. An applicant for membership into the Religious Society of Friends should also undergo a search for clearness; such a search would be done under the care of a committee appointed by Worship and Ministry.

Particularly applicants for marriage under the care of the meeting are visited by a Committee of Clearness, which, on behalf of the monthly meeting, tries to determine if there are any serious obstacles in the way—a recalcitrant former spouse, uncooperative parents, children of a former union, or a deep-seated emotional resistance to the marriage on the part of one of the applicants—and tries to help in resolving such difficulties.

## **Clerk (see also Meeting for Business)**

The person who "sits at the head of the meeting" as Friends say, is, and has always been, a clerk. The person who records the minutes is a recording clerk. It is a humble term that avoids not only sexism but also any sense of ostentation.

In reality, however, a good clerk is a very special person. Whether it be in a yearly meeting, a quarterly meeting, a monthly meeting or in some small committee, the clerk must see that business is conducted in an



orderly fashion, that time is allowed for everyone to express his or her views, but without wandering too far from the subject under discussion. A clerk must be sensitive to individual feelings and know when it is wise to introduce a period of silence into the meeting. Most important, the clerk must be able to grasp the "sense of the meeting" and formulate it into a minute for the recording clerk. And while any Friend should be able, on occasion, to "clerk a meeting," a really gifted clerk is a rarity to be cherished. (Note that Friends also use "to clerk" as a verb.)

Non-Friends do not always properly comprehend Friendly language. I have heard that a committee of Washington Friends seeking information under the Freedom of Information Act was told haughtily, "We don't give information to clerks."

## Close Meeting

Unprogrammed meetings for worship are brought to a close by a person, usually designated by the Committee on Worship and Ministry (sometimes called the Committee on Ministry and Counsel), who clasps the hand of the person sitting next to him or her. Other Friends then follow suit. In principle, a meeting is not terminated until the proper moment makes itself felt, but in modern practice that moment often seems determined by the clock. All Friends meetings, whatever their purpose, customarily begin and end with a period of silent worship.

## Concern

This is a good plain word that has almost become a technical term in Quakerism. It should be reserved for weighty matters that disturb the conscience and impel a person toward action. It is perfectly reasonable that a specialized term of this kind would develop among people who practice the fine art of living silence, and who thereby keep their consciences in a state of constant tenderness. Many of the remarks in meeting for worship or meeting for business are likely to begin, "I have a concern . . ."

I suppose whole movements have begun with that sentence. All the basic Quaker testimonies are concerns shared more or less generally by the whole RSoF. However, not all concerns are so shared. It is not often given to the concerned one to see clearly what action he or she would take. (Would it really be right to interfere with the upbringing of your neighbor's children? Is it right to complain to the president or secretary of state when you really don't have a better plan yourself?) So a real concern may lead to much worry and much seeking, and even come to rule one's life (as it did for John Woolman and Elizabeth Fry, to cite only two prominent examples). A Quaker concern may not be a good companion for easy, irresponsible living.

## **Conscience**

Is this the same as the “Inner Light?” Not according to most Quaker theologians. Conscience is informed and nourished by the Inner Light. Conscience is human and fallible. The Inner Light is divine Truth. Unfortunately we cannot always be certain that we are properly separating the two, so a measure of humility is recommended in giving voice to our inner promptings. But when a Friend asks us to lay his or her concern upon our consciences, it is assumed that our consciences will be “tender” and open to the light of the Truth.

## **Conscientious Objector (see also Pacifism, Peace Testimony)**

This is the official position a person of draft age may take to avoid military service or to be placed in a noncombatant role. Under the United States Selective Service Act such a position would have to be approved by a local draft board, and the applicant would be required to present evidence that he or she was opposed to war by reason of religious teaching or belief. If a competent draft counselor is not available in a monthly meeting, guidance can be sought from the yearly meeting, the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors, or the American Friends Service Committee. But the term is not a Friendly one—it is a legal designation. Though Friends are often “objectors” to the social and political patterns of the larger world, they do not like to be classed as nay-sayers. Quakerism is a positive force for peace and harmony, growing out of an inner conviction that potentially, as the Psalmist says, “You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless you shall die like men, and fall like any prince” (Psalm 82).

## **Conservative Friends (see also Wilburite Friends)**

Conservative Quakerism still has a distinct flavor which can be traced to its roots in the nineteenth century when John Wilbur’s blunt warnings about the outcome of Joseph John Gurney’s doctrines led to the disownments and separations of the Conservatives. The precipitating issues of the separations of the 1870s and after were the pastoral system and ultra-evangelism, both of which Conservatives rejected.

Today three yearly meetings—Iowa, North Carolina and Ohio—call themselves Conservative and are affiliated with no central organization. These Friends are fewer than 2000 in number but strong in their commitment to original Quakerism.

## **Convinced Friend, Convincement**

A Friend who had come into Quakerism through the Hicksite (see p. 12) channel was describing his convincement to a pastoral Friend, who responded, “Why, that’s exactly what we mean by conversion!”

It is interesting that George Fox, for all the emotional force that marked his ministry, did not claim to “convert” people. He kept saying that “many were convinced.” Most unprogrammed Friends meetings have adopted his terminology: if they are not birthright, they are convinced. The use of this intellectual word certainly did not imply, in Fox’s case, the absence of a deep-seated emotional and spiritual change. But the word does emphasize that becoming a Friend is an intellectual choice, too. Most people do not come to Friends as the result of a revival service that brings them to the altar to shed their sins. They are urged to think about membership and take their time. When I first began to attend meeting, an elderly Friend spoke to me in the lobby: “You don’t have to hang up your brains along with your hat when you come in here.” (That was in the days when all the men still wore hats.) I was convinced.

## **Disownment**

This seems to be the most loving term that Friends could devise for expelling a member from the RSoF. The process of “reading someone out of meeting” was meant to protect the RSoF’s integrity and prevent its embarrassment from a member who behaved in a blatantly un-Quakerly manner. Disownment was the last resort after extensive eldering (see below) and the disowned Friend was normally offered the possibility of renewed membership when he or she was ready to unite again under the discipline of the community.

During the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, many young men were disowned when they chose to take up arms. One of the reasons for the decline in membership during the nineteenth century was the practice of meetings to disown anyone who “married out of meeting”—who married a non-Friend—or even someone from another branch of Quakerism. Disownment for marrying out of meeting was abandoned late in the century when it became obvious that the RSoF could ill afford to expel its most promising youth for their choice of non-Quaker spouses.

Disownment is a rarity these days. The term does not even occur in most newer Books of Discipline. The possibility, of course, still remains. But as one of the older Books of Discipline cautions, “No judgment should be made hastily nor in the spirit of condemnation.”

## **Elders, Eldering**

In the early days it was more common than it is now to appoint certain Friends as elders or minister for a meeting. They sat on the facing benches and were expected to contribute to the vocal ministry. More important, perhaps, they served as role models for the younger Friends. Their functions have largely been absorbed by the pastoral caregivers and by Committees for Worship and Ministry (or Ministry and Counsel).

When one refers to elders these days, the likely reference is simply to the older members of the meeting. But it is still possible to be “elderred.” (My dictionary does not list *elder* as a verb, but it is commonly so used among Friends.) Should your message be over-long or inappropriate, should your behavior give cause for concern, you may still be quietly approached with a modern equivalent of “Friend, has thee given prayerful thought to thy words—or actions—and the effect they may have on others?”

## **Epistle**

Friendly language tends toward the simple, and generally eschews the fancier Greek and Latin derivations. Then why the Greek *epistle* instead of just plain *letter*?

Partly, no doubt, because of its New Testament connotations, but also because a Quaker epistle is something more than a mere letter. It is more likely a pronouncement to the larger world. Epistles, these days, are issued only on special occasions, such as at the close of yearly meetings, and are addressed “To Friends everywhere.” The tradition of the Quaker epistle goes all the way back to George Fox, whose 420 epistles form an impressive part of his collected works.

## **Evangelical Friends, Evangelical Friends International (EFI)**

We must remember that “evangelical” simply means “spreading the good news,” and is a relative, not an absolute designation. There are Friends committed to spreading the good news in all branches of Quakerism; many members of Friends United Meeting would call themselves evangelical. The strong evangelical movement that swept through all Protestantism in the nineteenth century did not leave the Religious Society of Friends unaffected. But today the term “Evangelical Friend” would probably refer to a Friend from the Evangelical Friends Alliance, an association of pastoral Friends which is especially concerned with church growth and the Christian mission. Evangelical Friends International includes four yearly meetings in the United States: Northwest, Rocky Mountain, Mid-America, and Evangelical Friends Church—Eastern Region.

## **Facing Benches**

In early days, in the meetinghouses, the elders, ministers, overseers, and invited guests sat on benches that were elevated and faced the larger body of attenders. These were called facing benches. This practice persists, by virtue of the architecture, where these meetinghouses are still in use. Newer meetinghouses are not likely to retain facing benches. It is more likely that the seating arrangement will be in the form of a circle or a square, where no positions are architecturally elevated.

## Faith and Practice (see Book of Discipline)

### First Day

From the beginning the early Friends refused to apply the old heathen terms to the days of the week or the months of the year. George Fox attached enormous significance to words as symbols. (See, for instance, "steeplehouse.") Naturally, then, he would not honor the sun god, the moon goddess, Woden, Thor, Frig, or Saturn nor the gods and Caesars commemorated in the names of the months. The early Friends were perfectly sincere in this, of course, though it would be easy to carry the whole idea to a *reductio ad absurdum* by attempting to eliminate all words of pagan origin from our speech.

The use of "First Day" is a pleasant survival for most of us. Officially Friends still use all the numbered days and months, though I am wondering how long one must be a Friend before a statement such as: "The meeting will be on fourth-day evening seventh month twenty-four at eight o'clock," becomes instantly comprehensible without mental translation back into pagan terms.

### Five Years Meeting of Friends (see Friends United Meeting)

### Free Quakers

Some of the Friends who had been disowned for their participation in the American Revolution felt that they were nonetheless Quakers and set up their own meetings in the Northeast after independence had been achieved. They called themselves "Free Quakers," but the movement did not last long. At least one of their meetinghouses survives as a historical landmark in Philadelphia.

### Friend, Friendly

"What an amazing title for a religious organization!" Bernard Shaw exclaimed to his Quaker neighbor, Stephen Winsten: "Friends! That in itself was a stroke of genius." Originally the Friends of Truth were but one of a dozen heterodox sects that arose from the religious turbulence of mid-seventeenth-century England. The spiritual power and organizational talents of such early leaders as George Fox and Margaret Fell assured the survival of the Religious Society of Friends, while most of the others lost their identities. See **Quaker** for the nickname that became the alternate title of the RSoF. And remember: it is the *Religious Society of Friends*. We are not a secular brotherhood.

The simplicity of nomenclature is typical of Fox, and one of its lasting benefits is our right to make reference to members of the RSoF with the adjective *Friendly* (capital "F").

## **Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)**

The Friends Committee on National Legislation, formed in 1943, is a political lobby in Washington, DC that works to influence national legislation in the direction of Friendly principles. Like the American Friends Service Committee, it does not represent any yearly meeting, but its board includes Friends appointed by 26 yearly meetings and eight other Friends organizations in the United States. It “seeks to follow the leading of the Spirit.” It is most active in its opposition to increased armaments and in its support of the United Nations and other efforts toward international cooperation. It publishes a widely read, influential newsletter, and keeps score on how our legislators vote on key issues.

## **Friends General Conference (FGC)**

In 1867 the yearly meetings that were Hicksite (see p. 12) began associations that in 1900 combined and became Friends General Conference. This organization—consisting of fourteen yearly meetings, including Canadian Yearly Meeting, and seven monthly meetings (figures as of 2002)—regards itself as an association of Friends who share similar concerns vital to their individual and corporate spiritual lives. FGC sponsors an annual Gathering of Friends, workshops, and other events; Quaker Press publishes pamphlets, books and other materials and QuakerBooks is a mail order bookstore that provides meetings with consignments for book tables and fairs. The Traveling Ministries Program, Advancement and Outreach and the Religious Education committees encourage interchange of persons and ideas among various Friends groups. The influence of FGC on the spiritual life of Friends has been pervasive.

As witness to the healing of the Orthodox-Hicksite split, a number of yearly meetings maintain an association with both Friends General Conference and Friends United Meeting.

## **Friends Service Council of Britain and Ireland (see Peace and Social Witness)**

## **Friends United Meeting (FUM)**

Shortly after the Hicksites formed Friends General Conference, eleven Orthodox (see p. 19) yearly meetings in 1902 established the Five Years Meeting, with headquarters in Richmond, Indiana. Two Orthodox yearly meetings, Philadelphia (Arch Street) and Ohio, abstained from this association. The differences between the constituents of the Five Years Meeting and Friends General Conference are less divisive than they were in 1902, but they are still apparent. Friends United Meeting—as the Five Years Meeting was re-named in 1963—has about eighty percent of its membership in pastoral meetings (Friends Churches) which maintain much of the evangelistic zeal and missionary concern of the early Quaker movement and are closer to

mainstream Protestantism than are the meetings of FGC. FUM now includes eighteen yearly meetings, comprising over half the world's Friends, and encompasses in its fellowship the large number of Friends in East Africa.

### **Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC)**

From earliest days, unity among scattered Friends was preserved by visitation, exchange of epistles, and occasional general meetings (from which arose yearly meetings and such modern organizations as Friends United Meeting and Friends General Conference). After the death of George Fox, London Yearly Meeting assumed an informal responsibility for oversight of all Friends and sought to hold them together. By the twentieth century this no longer seemed suitable, and a new procedure evolved. As a first step in the effort to bring some unity to the many disparate Friends groups scattered very unevenly around the globe, several "All-Friends Conferences" have been held, the first in London in 1920. The 1937 conference at Swarthmore, Pennsylvania produced a new umbrella organization, Friends World Committee for Consultation.

This committee continues to function through a world office in London, and through four Section offices: European and Near East; Africa; Asia-West Pacific; and Section of the Americas. As the name suggests, the organization is consultative, not legislative. It exercises no authority over yearly meetings, but, through representatives named by yearly meetings, it carries on programs of common concern to them: intervisitation, Wider Quaker Fellowship (see p. 32), International Quaker Aid, and occasional conferences. It represents Friends at the United Nations, at international ecumenical gatherings, and in other international contexts.

### **Gathered meeting, Covered Meeting**

This is a peculiarly Quaker term. A meeting is "gathered" when individual personalities vanish and we are conscious only of a mystical union of the worshiping group. In a gathered meeting, Thomas Kelly has pointed out, no one can take credit for a spoken message, since the message flows out of the silence and "many find healing through the one life."

### **Gay Friend**

This is a nineteenth-century appellation, not a twentieth-century one, and it has nothing to do with sexual orientation. It is a nickname for those Friends in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who had broken from the strictures of plain dress in particular and with simple living generally. But the word "gay" is certainly an overstatement! If you read the fascinating story of Elizabeth Fry, you will meet a pleasant cross-section of both the gay and plain varieties and find that Elizabeth herself reversed historical procedure by changing from gay to plain.

## Gurneyite

In the early nineteenth century Joseph John Gurney, a member of a well-known English Quaker family, led a reaction in Quaker theology that stressed the primacy of the scriptures and the doctrine of the atonement. He had a wide following on both sides of the Atlantic. His three-year ministry in America (1837–1840) was so influential that “Gurneyite” is sometimes used almost as a synonym for “Orthodox,” although by no means all Orthodox Friends adopted “Gurneyism.” In terms of the Hicksite-Orthodox split, Gurney’s leadership was followed only in Orthodox meetings, not in Hicksite meetings. Gurneyite confrontation with the more conservative Wilburites (see p. 32) eventuated in actual separations in the New England Yearly Meeting and the Ohio Yearly Meeting.

## Half-Yearly Meeting (*see Quarterly Meeting*)

## Hat Honor

In the seventeenth century it was proper etiquette for men to wear hats indoors but to remove them in the presence of persons of higher rank. In keeping with their testimony on equality, Friends stubbornly refused to “uncover” except when addressing God in prayer. As with their refusal to take oaths, Friends’ denial of hat honor caused them no end of trouble with the authorities. The hats of William Penn and his co-defendant were forcibly removed on one occasion when they presented themselves before a judge and jury.

Hat honor was no longer an issue two centuries later when John Bright, an early Quaker member of the English Parliament, had to receive special permission *not* to kneel on being presented to Queen Victoria.

## Hicksite (*see also Orthodox*)

Perhaps the greatest tragedy to befall Quakerism, at least in the United States, was the separation of 1827, when Orthodox and Hicksite Friends in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting established separate meetings and ceased to recognize each other as true Friends. The division soon spread to other yearly meetings, taking various forms. Elias Hicks (1748–1830) can hardly be blamed for all of this, but it was his powerful ministry in New York Yearly Meeting that polarized the “liberals” into one camp and the more Bible-oriented conservatives into another. The Race Street Meeting in Philadelphia became the Hicksite headquarters. The Arch Street Meetinghouse in Philadelphia remained home for the Orthodox. In Baltimore the present Baltimore Monthly Meeting, Stony Run, traces its history through the Hicksite side of the separation; Baltimore Monthly Meeting, Homewood, traces its history through the Orthodox side.



Both groups claimed, of course, to be in the true tradition of George Fox and the early Friends. It took a century and a quarter of arduous reconciliation, often led by younger Friends to bring the Hicksites and the Orthodox back into fellowship. It must be recognized that there are still differences within the RSoF that might be labeled "Hiscksite" or "Orthodox" or "Gurneyite" or "Wilburite," but contemporary Quakerism is resolved to reconcile these differences creatively.

## **Hold in the Light**

When Friends hold something or someone in the Light, they are doing a Quaker version of prayer. It is a way of offering a situation to God, without really letting go of it. Holding a problem in the Light may lead to a sense of reassurance that it is being taken care of, or may give insight into what to do or say.

## **Holy Experiment**

Specifically this was William Penn's master plan for a government based on the teachings of Jesus and the principles of Friends. The influence was permanent in the constitutions of Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey, and the constitution of the United States. Though Penn governed largely from abroad, and was present in Pennsylvania only for two two-year periods, his colony was the only one which lived in complete harmony with the Indians, at least for its first half-century.

From its beginnings in 1682 Pennsylvania was governed largely by the Society of Friends. Friends remained the dominant force in legislature until 1756. The poor were cared for, industry was encouraged, religious toleration enforced, and peace maintained in the face of strong political pressures from without. Finally, when the non-Quaker governor declared war on the Delaware Indians (who were in league with France), Quakers quit the Assembly, and the Holy Experiment came to an end. But the basic democratic form of government that Penn had established remained in force until the new nation was launched.

## **Indulged Meeting**

A worship group under the care of a monthly meeting, less formally organized than a preparative meeting (see p. 22).

## **Inner Light, Inward Light, Christ Within**

This is the central concept of Quakerism. Friends may differ on almost any other issue, but they are united in their belief in the presence of an inward source of inspiration and strength. The Inner Light is more than conscience. The surrounding culture influences conscience. The Inner Light is that of God within. But is it to be received as a gift from God, or is

it a part of human nature? This fundamental question still separates the more spiritually minded Friends from their more humanistic counterparts. Some would say that this Inward Light resides in all living things. Some would say, with Teilhard de Chardin, that it is in every particle of matter or energy in the universe! By whatever name Friends refer to it, they know by experience that it is a potential force for good in every human being, and Fox has enjoined us to walk cheerfully through the world *answering* it. The constant presence of the Inner Light assures us of a continuing revelation and a contemporary religion that cannot become obsolete with changing times and the advance of secular knowledge.

### **International Membership Committee**

There are a few small meetings, worship groups, and individual friends so isolated geographically that they find themselves cut off from the normal channels of Quaker communication. They range (according to a FWCC handbook) "from Port Moresby to Bahrain, from Cairo to the Seychelles, from Ghana to Singapore." For these Friends the Friends World Committee on Consultation provides an International Membership Committee to promote whatever communication, intervisitation, and spiritual nurture the situation permits. This committee was created by Britain Yearly Meeting long ago, and later transferred to the FWCC.

### **Isolated Friend**

Isolated Friends live a great distance from a monthly meeting or worship group.

### **Lay Down a Meeting**

The laying down or discontinuance of a monthly or quarterly meeting is rarely a simple matter. If membership has dwindled to a few, and unity on laying down cannot be achieved, the process may drag on for years. There is usually property to be disposed of, which is normally deeded to the quarterly or yearly meeting; there may be burial grounds to leave in some responsible hands; and, of course, remaining memberships must be transferred to other meetings. Help in these matters can often be furnished by the appropriate quarterly or yearly meeting.

If a meeting is not actually being laid down, but is merging with another meeting, as, for instance, a preparative meeting merging with its parent monthly meeting, the process is likely to be less complex.

### **Leadings**

Listening to the Inner Voice can have unexpected consequences. The leadings of the Spirit took John Woolman from his tailor shop on long journeys to convince eighteenth-century Friends to free their slaves. In 1939 such

leadings took three Friends (Rufus Jones, Robert Yarnall, and George Walton) representing the American Friends Service Committee, to the chief of the Nazi Gestapo to seek permission to carry relief to war sufferers in Poland. (See also **Speak Truth to Power**.) The leadings of the Spirit have taken many lesser-known Friends on less newsworthy journeys that have nevertheless changed their own lives and those with whom they have come in contact.

## **Light, the Light Within (see Inner Light)**

### **Meeting for Business**

All meetings of Friends are, or at least ought to be, meetings for worship. When Friends gather to transact business (on the monthly, quarterly, or yearly level), they are guided by a clerk—not a chairperson, and certainly not a president! A recording clerk takes notes. Meetings for business always open and close with worshipful silence, and periods of worship may be called for in the midst of business matters, particularly if it becomes evident that more heat than Light is being generated by the discussion. Friends do not vote; they wait for a minute to be read which seems to represent a “sense of the meeting” (see p. 27). Pendle Hill issues an excellent pamphlet entitled *Guide to Quaker Practice* by Howard Brinton.

### **Meeting for Sufferings (see Representative Meeting)**

### **Meeting for Worship (see also Gathered Meeting)**

The meeting for worship is central to Friends way of life. Out of the gathered silence come inspiration, courage, and guidance. But one does not attend meeting only to receive. Everyone should be conscious of bringing something to meeting—a sense of worship, a sense of sharing. There are days, of course, when we come to meeting as a thirsty traveler comes to water, or as a drowning swimmer finds the land. We ask only to be there, to sit quietly and reorient our lives surrounded by the love and support of our Friends. And there are days of ebullience, when we feel so full of the joy and power of the Holy Spirit that it must overflow. But meeting has a deceptive power. It may be that when we are most in despair we may be called upon to minister to others, and that when we come rejoicing our joy will be absorbed into the silence. The meeting has a life of its own, and all our lives are part of it. It is only in a Friends meeting that we can begin to comprehend Paul's mystical observation, “There is one body, and one spirit.”

### **Meetinghouse**

George Fox could not accept the word “church” as referring to a building. The church, for him, was the body of Christian believers. The houses in which Friends met were usually private homes. When special structures were built, they obviously became meetinghouses. (See also **Steeplehouse**.)

## Membership

The recorded membership in the Religious Society of Friends worldwide is only about 340,000.<sup>1</sup> Friends influence, however, has always been more impressive than their numbers. They comprise a highly articulate and literate assemblage. Quakers are frequently found in positions of influence in science, in education, and in government. A few other thoughts should be borne in mind when considering the paucity of Quakers in the world:

- Becoming a Friend is usually a two- or three-month process involving a visit from pastoral caregivers and a report to a meeting for business. In many religious bodies an applicant can become a member by making a declaration on the spot.
- Many meetings do not admit children into adult membership until they are old enough to make an independent commitment.
- Though evangelical Friends have sent out missionaries, Friends as a general rule do not proselytize.
- Friends require a large commitment in exchange for few theological certainties.

But Friends often carry with them a body of fellow-travelers many times their own size. Friends schools, workshops, conferences, overseas aid, and social outreach groups enlist hosts of non-Friends in spreading the Quaker message.

Early Friends did not at first bother to record membership. And even now it is not uncommon for an attender to wait years before requesting membership. Even so—the Religious Society of Friends should be growing, and Friends are perhaps too reticent in their outreach (see p. 19). One young Friend recently suggested a classified advertisement: *Found: 300-year-old religion. Good as new.*

## Ministry, Minister

Friends have always liked to think that it was their vocation to minister to the needs of one another. Even where pastors are employed, individual Quakers have not felt free to lay all the pastoral responsibilities on a professional minister. But sometimes the term “ministry” is used to mean “vocal ministry” (though when it is, I think the distinction ought always to be made). In this case it refers to speaking in meeting or in some other public gathering—presumably in such a manner that the listeners have their needs ministered to. In this regard it is generally felt that some have more obvious gifts than others, and meetings have sometimes recognized and recorded their most gifted and inspired speakers as “ministers.” Howard Brinton has characterized the mystical motivation that gives rise

<sup>1</sup> Information from [www.quaker.org/fwcc](http://www.quaker.org/fwcc), 2002, reflecting data from 1998–2000.

to the most significant Quaker speech and action as "prophetic ministry." Sometimes the word is used to express a more limited range of inner compulsion, such as a "ministry of reconciliation."

## **Ministry and Counsel, Worship and Ministry** (see also Pastoral Care)

Almost every meeting has a committee whose specific responsibility is the conduct of the meeting for worship and whose more general responsibility is the care of the spiritual life of the meeting as a whole. Since these duties often overlap those of the pastoral caregivers, the two groups are sometimes combined into a single committee. More likely they are kept separate, but with some cross-over members, and occasional joint sessions.

Besides nourishing the vocal ministry, and, if necessary, eldering those whose messages are too long or too frequent or otherwise inappropriate, the Committee on Ministry and Counsel (or Worship and Ministry) should be concerned with the spiritual growth of individual members and attenders, and should show sensitivity to the expression of diverse views, always seeking to have them presented in a way that will avoid dissension or conflict. Quakerism is a religion in which diversity often has to be brought into unity. The process is largely in the hands of this committee.

## **Minute(s)**

Once organized, Friends tended to keep careful records, and the minutes of meetings and committees in the various Quaker collections provide source material for the industrious historian.

Friends frequently use this word in the singular: A minute is composed to express the sense of the meeting. A minute of appreciation is recorded. Or, as a verb: We want to be sure that this action is minuted.

## **Monthly Meeting**

This is the central unit in Friends organizations, so called because normally meetings for business are held at monthly intervals. Meetings for worship are usually held weekly, sometimes with a midweek service as well. But any local meeting is probably a *monthly* meeting (or an official part of a monthly meeting) in the organizational scheme of Quakerism. Some of the older monthly meetings antedate the settlements of which they later became a part, and take their picturesque names, not from the towns, but from nearby streams: Goose Creek, Gunpowder, Clear Creek, Fishing Creek, etc.

Usually membership in the RSoF implies membership in a monthly meeting, but there can be exceptions. Monthly meetings have a large measure of autonomy. They not only maintain their own records of births, marriages, and deaths, but arrange for their own pastoral activities and a local program of social outreach as well. In the regular organizational pattern the

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monthly meeting (along with its preparative meetings) would be joined several other monthly meetings to form a quarterly or half-year meeting. The quarterly meetings would comprise the yearly meeting. The monthly meeting is expected to be guided by the yearly meeting's Book of Discipline (the published principles of *Faith and Practice*). However, there are local meetings that are not part of this more or less standard pattern. Some are independent, and some are connected with more than one yearly meeting. As a matter of fact, to the casual eye, the sprawling organization of Quakerism may appear to be mildly restrained anarchy.

### Mysticism

It depends on one's personal theology whether this word means mere contact with powers above and beyond oneself, or actually living in the presence of God. It is a rather fancy word for Quakers, who prefer, normally, to speak of inner experiences in some such simple terms as the "Inner Light" (see p. 13), but the use of it connects those experiences with those of other sects and religions which have searched directly for God's presence without dependence upon priestly intercession or graven images. With such mystics, whether they exist within the discipline of the Roman Catholic Church, within Eastern religions, or others, Quakers have always felt a special kinship, although the special *group* mysticism of the meeting for worship seems to be unique with the Religious Society of Friends.

### New Foundation Fellowship

It should be the task of the heirs of the Quaker vision to witness for the church of the cross and to make this genuine alternative to institutional Christianity a live option in the present age.  
—Lewis Benson<sup>2</sup>

These words of Lewis Benson summarize his call for a new foundation within the RSoF. Benson and the New Foundation Fellowship find the inspiration for the future in the prophetic message of George Fox, but they are quick to point out that they seek a twentieth-century expression of the seventeenth-century vision. Like the early Friends, the New Foundation Fellowship is Bible-centered and Christ-centered. Modern Friends must rediscover the testimony of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures if they are to end their alienation and unite in a holy community.

### Oaths (see also Affirm)

The refusal to swear an oath might almost be called the original Friends testimony, for it was Friendly stubbornness in this regard that was most directly responsible for the mass jailings of Quakers under the restored Stuarts. Truth for Friends was truth, and there was no way to make

<sup>2</sup> Benson, Lewis, *Catholic Quakerism*, Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1968.

it more true by swearing an oath. The uneasy feeling about oaths has subtly changed, yet subtly remains the same. It used to seem preposterous to Fox for the magistrate to insist that he swear on the Book which plainly stated "Swear not at all." Yet an oath to Jesus hardly meant what it meant to Fox; and it meant to neither what it means to us. Nevertheless the uneasiness is still with us and is not exactly allayed by the fact that we may substitute the word "affirm" for "swear." What is it we resent? Is it the implication that we are of such low moral stature that we will not speak truthfully without a special device? Or is it the indelicate business to which an oath is usually the prefix—the glorification of the state, the presumption of guilt, the public prying into matters of personal privacy? For whatever reason, the oath is no more compatible with the still small voice of the Spirit that it ever was.

### **Orthodox (see also Hicksite)**

In the separation of 1827 those who objected to the teachings of Elias Hicks, with its mystical emphasis on the Inner Light, called themselves "Orthodox" and viewed the Hicksites as heretical. Yet the dictionary definition of "orthodox" specifies "adhering to traditional belief," and the followers of Hicks maintained it was they who were following the path laid down by Fox and the early Friends, and that it was the misnamed Orthodox who had been lured into evangelicalism in the Wesleyan revivalism of the late eighteenth century.

Whether or not one agreed with the accuracy of the word, "Orthodox" was the term accepted in Quakerism for the body of Friends who opposed Hicks and his followers and claimed to be the ongoing guardians of the Quaker tradition. Many of these meetings, especially in the Midwest, are now part of Friends United Meeting.

### **Outreach (see also Advancement)**

There was a time when Friends were frankly evangelical and proselytizing. The change from this to "quietism," and from that to social action is, in a sense, a condensed history of Friends. But as an individual can never escape his or her experiences, so also the RSoF retains something of all phases and counter-phases it has gone through. Friends *do* want to attract others to their ways of worship and living, yet they have a fear of presumptuousness and self-righteousness. In this age of potential annihilation and exponential propagation of knowledge, Friends feel they have a special witness. But they can claim no special revelation that is not available to the most obscure (or famed) seeker. For this reason, perhaps, many Friends prefer the simple Anglo-Saxon combined form, *outreach* to the ecclesiastical Greek derivation of *evangelism*.

In the Sermon on the Mount we are enjoined (1) not to hide our good deeds as though we are ashamed of them, and (2) not to parade our righteousness in pride before the world. Truly this is a narrow line to walk!

### **Overseer, Oversight (see also Pastoral Care)**

Friends have traditionally used, and continue to use, labels such as “overseer,” “oversight,” “oversight committee,” etc. to define pastoral care. I was first startled to find the historically anti-slavery Society using these terms, which conjure up images of a slave-driver with a whip in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*!

Recently, African American Friends have addressed this concern:

The term “pastoral care” appears in almost all yearly meetings’ books of *Faith and Practice*, but it is not a term commonly used in conversation by unprogrammed Friends. We tend to refer, instead, to the work of certain committees. However, those committees have different names in different yearly meetings: ministry and counsel, ministry and oversight, and overseers are most common. In recent years some African American Friends have raised concerns over the terms “overseer” and “oversight” which call up memories of how those terms were used by slaveholders. This has led some meetings to creatively adopt new names for their caregiving committees such as “care and counsel,” “membership care” and “listening ear.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Pacifism, Peace Testimony**

From the beginning Friends have opposed wars, citing Jesus’ advice from the Sermon on the Mount. Friends declaration of 1660 is absolute in its rejection of armed force as a means of settling disputes:

We utterly deny all outward wars and strife, and fightings with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretense whatsoever; This is our testimony to the whole world.

It is also the testimony for which Friends are best known, and which causes them often to be thought of simply as “those people who won’t fight.” In the midst of wartime patriotic fervor, Friends have had to endure rejection, ranging from incivility to imprisonment.

But for Friends the peace testimony is not merely a wartime thing. It is a way of life that governs attitudes and behavior in the home, the school, in business, in labor unions and committee meetings, in the care of the elderly, the mentally ill, and lawbreakers. In the midst of an age of violence, Friends keep urging, “Let us see what love can do.”

### **Pastoral, Pastoral Friends**

Whether or not a Friends meeting (or Friends church) has appointed a pastor, there are pastoral duties that must be attended to. Care of the sick

<sup>3</sup> McBee, Patricia, editor, *Grounded in God: Care and Nurture in Friends Meeting*, Philadelphia, PA: Quaker Press of Friends General Conference, 2002, p. ix.



and elderly, arrangements for marriages and memorial services, counseling in times of marital or family difficulties—all these are on-going pastoral concerns which, in unprogrammed meetings, are channeled through the pastoral caregivers.

The majority of the world's Friends are now pastoral Friends. That is, their meetings have employed a pastor to carry out at least some of these pastoral works. Usually this includes bringing a Sunday message in the name of the meeting. Outside the United States, most pastors are unpaid.

### **Pastoral Care (see also Pastoral, Pastoral Friends)**

A Friends meeting considers itself an extended family in which each member cares for the others. But as the family grows to include infants and nonagenarians and spreads out geographically, it becomes manifestly impossible for everyone to look after everyone. In non-pastoral meetings, therefore (and to some extent in pastoral meetings as well), the pastoral duties are laid especially on a Pastoral Care Committee or are placed under the care of Ministry and Counsel. Such duties include visiting the sick, greeting new attenders, processing applications for membership, arranging for marriages and memorial services, counseling those in trouble, and helping to resolve differences. But these are matters in which all Friends should participate in whatever way they feel competent. The system fails when (1) the pastoral caregivers are not responsive, or (2) the meeting comes to rely on the pastoral caregivers to the extent that other Friends no longer feel responsible to minister to each other. Pastoral caregiving is a delicate business; the pastoral caregiver must know when to call on others for help; but must also know when to leave well enough alone.

### **Peace and Social Witness (formerly Friends Service Council and Quaker Peace and Service)**

The Friends Service Council of Britain and Ireland, later renamed Quaker Peace and Service, and now known as Peace and Social Witness, was established in 1927, and grew out of the World War I Council for International Service, the Friends Relief Service, and the Friends Ambulance Unit, as well as the Friends Foreign Mission Association. British Friends responded to the humanitarian needs left in the wake of World War I before American Friends did. Once the American Friends Service Committee (see p. 2) was established, however, the two groups cooperated in their European relief activities, and the two organizations were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947.

### **Plain Friend (see Gay Friend)**

## Plain Talk, Plain Speech

The beginnings of Quakerism were only about thirty-five years after the death of William Shakespeare and about forty years after the official publication of the King James Bible. The language of early Friends, therefore, was of the era which maintained separate pronoun and verb forms for speaking to intimates—as many languages still do. *Thou, thy, thine, thee* would be used in the singular within the family circle and with close friends: *you, your, yours* for more formal address. Furthermore, these plural forms were customarily used to flatter the person addressed (like the royal “we”). Friends’ passion for equality of all people before God soon led them to address all people as intimates—a shocking departure from the decorum of their day. In addition they refused to use titles—even simple titles like Mr. and Mrs., and certainly not the more exalted titles like Your Lordship, or Your Highness. When George Bernard Shaw imagined in one of his plays a meeting between George Fox and King Charles II, he was quite right in having Fox address the King simply as Charles Stuart (although the meeting never really took place). All this is in line with Friends’ practice of avoiding exaggeration and of absolute truth-speaking (see **Oaths**).

Plain talk today, when used at all, is chiefly among family members and Friends who will reciprocate. And *thou* with the old-*est* verb ending went out of use in eighteenth century except in vocal prayer. Where a seventeenth-century Friend might have said, “Thou makest good pie, Nellie,” a later Friend would say, “Thee makes good pie, Nellie.”

There is no doubt that plain talk carries with it an aura of long tradition and a feeling of security among “a peculiar people.” But it must be admitted, I think, that a non-Friend coming upon such talk for the first time is struck, not by its plainness, but by its apparent pretentiousness and exclusiveness.

Plain talk can also mean speaking simply and directly, without diplomatic circumlocution and superfluous adjectives and adverbs.

## Preparative Meeting

This term has somewhat different usages in the United States and in Great Britain.

In the United States (with some exceptions) a preparative meeting is a body of Friends which, under the care of a parent monthly meeting, is preparing to become a full-fledged meeting on its own. It is more formally organized than a simple worship group or an indulged meeting (see p. 13). It may have its own officers, committees, and budget, but is not authorized to accept new members, conduct marriages, or own property except by approval of the monthly meeting of which it is a part. Preparative meetings vary greatly in the amount of responsibility they are willing to take and in the amount of dependence on the parent monthly meeting. Sometimes the

preparative meeting is at some distance from the parent meeting, and a good deal of intervisitation is called for. Preparative status may be due to small size or to its not yet having enough members with experience in Quaker process.

Under the British system a monthly meeting is likely to consist of a number of preparative meetings on a more or less permanent basis. Each preparative meeting *prepares* business which is forwarded for consideration by the monthly meeting, whose sessions may rotate among the meeting-houses of its constituent preparative meetings. Some meetings in the United States retain the British organization. In both arrangements all who are members of the preparative meeting are automatically members of the monthly meeting.

### **Primitive Christianity**

George Fox repeatedly endorses "primitive Christianity" without ever clearly defining the term. William Penn saw the Quaker movement as "Primitive Christianity Revived," in a tract by that title published in 1696. From context we assume that these early Friends, and the present-day Friends who occasionally use the term, are referring, perhaps somewhat nostalgically, to apostolic Christianity as they visualize it: the church of the first generations, where organization was still extremely simple, leadership was assumed by prophets rather than by priests, there were no learned theologians or creeds or rituals, and the Christians strove to conform their faith and practice to the words and actions of Jesus as set forth in the Gospels.

### **Public Friend**

In the earliest years of the Quaker movement, "Public Friend" was the designation of those who went about preaching in public places—market, tavern, on dale or moor, in a church after the sermon—to any who would listen. (When he or she had "convinced" hearers, the "Public Friend" sent them to a silent meeting in the neighborhood or brought them together to form such a meeting.) The term later came to mean a traveling minister likely to hold public meetings, or a recorded minister; still later, a person so active in Quaker affairs as to be known beyond an immediate circle.

Anyone in the public eye who clearly represents Quaker principles may be referred to as a Public Friend. John Bright, the nineteenth-century Quaker member of British Parliament, comes quickly to mind. In this century in the United States, Rufus Jones and Clarence Pickett stood for Quakerism for many non-Friends, as did Herbert Hoover, particularly as food administrator after World War I and coordinator of relief work after World War II. In Canada physician Jerilynn Prior has been very public in her witness against paying military taxes.

## Quaker

From *The Journal of George Fox*:

This was Justice Bennet of Derby that first called us Quakers because we bid them tremble at the word of God, and this was in the year 1650.<sup>4</sup>

Later the term “Quaker” became more widely recognized than the term “Friend,” and has been highly respected. But that it was originally a term of derision is borne out by another, later quotation from the *Journal*:

I went forth with Friends into the yard and there I spake to the priest and people. . . . And the priest scoffed at us and called us Quakers. . . . And the Lord’s power was so over them all, and the word of life was declared in so much power and dread to them, that the priest fell a-trembling himself, so that one said unto him, “Look how the priest trembles and shakes, he is turned a Quaker also.”<sup>5</sup>

*Quakers* are not to be confused with the *Shakers*. The Quakers are formally called the Religious Society of Friends. The Shakers are an American celibate and communistic sect which originated in a Quaker revival in England in 1747, formally called “The United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing.”

## Quaker Midnight

10:00 PM (or 9:00 PM in rural areas).

## Quaker Peace and Service (see Peace and Social Witness)

## Quaker Universalist Fellowship

There have always been Friends who believed that the spirit of Quakerism embraced areas beyond formal Christianity. In 1978 a British Friend, John Linton, formally organized the Quaker Universalist Group, consisting mainly, but not exclusively, of Friends. The aim of the group is to extend the Quaker message and the Quaker method to all sincere seekers, including non-Christians and agnostics. Christianity, they remind us, has no exclusive claim on Truth, and those who have been brought up in other traditions—or who have departed from their Christian upbringing—should be made welcome in our meetings and not be embarrassed or rejected by over-zealous Friends of a more evangelical persuasion.

## Quarterly Meeting, Half-Yearly Meeting

The organization of the RSoF into monthly, quarterly and yearly meetings was accomplished during the lifetime of its founders and is largely the

<sup>4</sup> Fox, George, John L. Nickalls, editor, *The Journal of George Fox*, Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, 1997, p. 58.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

reason for the RSoF's survival in the face of early persecutions under Cromwell and the Restored Stuarts. In North America, where monthly meetings were sometimes at such distances from one another that uniting every three months posed a real hardship, some groups met only once between yearly meetings and were thus "half-yearly meetings." Many meetings were rural, and "Quarterly Meeting Days" were the occasion for renewing acquaintances for both adults and children with Friends who lived too far away for more frequent contact. Attendance at *yearly* meeting, before the age of modern transportation, often required a journey of two or three days each way, and so was restricted to those who could afford the time and money for an extended absence from work. *Quarterly* meetings, therefore, were more important occasions than they have recently become. It is a pity that with the ease of modern transportation and communication, the importance of quarterly meeting in many areas seems to have declined.

### Queries (*see also* Advices)

As is the case with advices, Friends sometimes address queries to each other at specific times for specific purposes. But when the queries are spoken of as such, the reference is to the set of questions issued by a yearly meeting to challenge and guide our faith and practice. A set of queries is usually read at meeting for worship once each month. They have to do with such matters as the conduct of meeting for worship, members' care for one another, faithfulness to Friends testimonies and the extent to which our personal lives agree with what we profess.

In reading the queries (found in *Faith and Practice*) I always sense that they have been so often examined and revised that they are like stones worn smooth with handling. And it takes some time to realize how remarkably potent they are! You can mentally argue about the advices or quietly make reservations about them. But you can't escape a query. For instance: In all your relations with others, do you treat them as equals? Well—do you? You see, there's no way of getting around the challenge no matter how you answer.

### Quietism, Quietistic

After the Toleration Act of 1689 in England, the stormy period of early Quakerism came to an end, and by the middle of the eighteenth century Quakers had become respectable. The period from about 1700 to the mid-nineteenth century, in both Britain, Canada and the United States, is generally referred to as the era of Quietism. It was a period when Friends looked inward for their spiritual nurture and largely turned their backs on the larger world. But this should be regarded as a matter of degree, not as an absolute state of things. During these years, for instance, some Friends

were active in the abolition of slavery and the reform of prisons. Recorded ministers (see below) traveled widely among meetings, and Quaker schools evolved. The evangelical movements of the nineteenth century shook Friends out of their Quietism. The Civil War and the Boer War set the stage for Friends involvement in the peace movement, and social action that grew out of the turbulence of World War I and has continued throughout this century.

### **Ranter (see also Seeker)**

The outbreak of religious emotion that gave birth to the RSoF spawned many other groups that did not survive their own generation. The Ranters were in some ways like the early Friends, and indeed it must be assumed that a good many of them became Friends. They believed in the immanence of God, but their enthusiasm was untempered—as their name implies—and they never achieved an organization that could be called a sect. It is impossible to hold a group together when each individual is certain that his or her own voice is unquestionably the voice of God. Friends, too, listen for the Inner Voice, but are committed to testing it against the openings of the larger meeting. Still, it is a delicate matter to know when God is really using you, and the problem of the Ranters has never been fully resolved.

### **Read out of Meeting (see Disownment)**

### **Recorded Minister (see also Ministry, Public Friend)**

There was a time when recorded ministers were among the most widely traveled of Friends, sharing their inspiration with meetings far and wide. The recording of Friends who are recognized as having been specially called to the ministry is no longer as widely practiced but the queries (see above) and advices continue to urge Friends, whether they are recorded ministers or not, to be sensitive the the call to minister.

### **Regional Meetings (see Quarterly and Half-Yearly Meetings)**

### **Representative Meeting**

In the early days of Friends, so many members were undergoing persecution or imprisonment in England that special “meetings for sufferings” had to be called to deal with problems that arose between yearly meetings. After the period of persecution ended, the name was retained to designate those meetings that were called to carry on yearly meeting business between the regular annual sessions. Most yearly meetings in North America now call them “representative meetings.” They are attended by delegates from the monthly and quarterly meetings and form what non-Friends might call an executive committee.

## **Sacrament, Sacramental**

The fact that Friends did not “observe the sacraments” made them for some synonymous with atheists. This is an area where Friends are still often misunderstood. Early Quakers were so insistent on making religion a part of daily living that anything special—a building, an ornament, a symbol, a rite—was avoided as a snare and a delusion. Most Friends would have no objection to the idea of being baptized with the Spirit, or of being infused with the mystical body of Christ, or of being joined by God in wedlock. They object to the rites themselves and the kind of priestly intercession that goes with them. As Reginald Sorenson, a prominent British Friend, has remarked, a sacrament is an outward act that has inner significance, and we should consequently try to make all of living into a sacrament. Every meal may be a time of communion. Friends therefore strive toward sacramental living rather than periodic “observance” of the sacraments.

On similar grounds Friends refused (in theory at least, if not strictly in practice) to observe special holidays. You may find early Friends referring to “the day called Christmas.”

## **Seasoned Friend (see Weighty Friend)**

## **Seekers (see also Ranters)**

Among the groups from which George Fox drew early support were those who called themselves, simply, Seekers. They had despaired of finding spiritual nourishment in any of the existing churches, and so were responsive to Fox’s message. More than any other group they were the predecessors of the RSoF. They sometimes said that Fox made them “Finders.” But since Fox preached a religion of continuing revelation, they did not cease to be seekers after they had become Friends. Some Friends have discovered the source of all spiritual being, but they continue to seek the revelation and the wisdom to know the truth of the Inner Light, and the courage and strength to do what is required.

## **Sense of the Meeting (see also Meeting for Business)**

Since, in a Friends business meeting there is no voting, agreement, when it comes, must be sensed—usually by the clerk, although often he or she needs vocal help from others. Almost always the clerk must phrase a difficult answer in this way, then that way, to test the reactions of the entire group. Finally, a satisfactory minute is framed and written down as the sense of the meeting. It is a long process, but shorter than the bitterness that lives on after many of the most neatly conducted parliamentary wrangles. Now and then someone uses the astounding figure of speech: the

Quaker velvet steamroller! Silence, as we know, does not always mean consent, and the clerk should not roll over the opposition simply because it is momentarily quiet. Friends may be quiet simply because they are hesitant to hurt someone's feelings—as for instance, if a nomination is made that does not meet with general approval. As close to an ultimate put-down as Friends are likely to express would be a comment such as, "That name would not have occurred to me."

Sensitive actors on the stage are conscious of a mysterious transfer of emotions among themselves, or between themselves and the audience. This transfer is a kind of *empathy*. Early Friends would be shocked by my reference to show-folks in such a connection, but it has seemed to me that empathy is nowhere stronger than in a meeting for business where gathered Friends are seeking divine guidance.

## Silence

It might be argued that Quakers have no right to appropriate this word as a special term since silence is, so to speak, in the public domain. But in a certain sense Quakers did invent silence—or at least they rediscovered a special kind of silence. We must remember that silence is relative in any case. The silence generated in a Friends meeting has no meaning in the objective world: there may be sounds of nature, of children, of traffic, of a boiler factory next door. We are silent, but we do not imitate the silence of death. We have the special quiet of listeners, the special perception of seekers, the special alertness of those who wait. It is not merely absence of noise, but expectant, living silence.

## Simplicity

This is surely the most difficult of all the traditional Quaker testimonies (see p. 30). The word itself is hopelessly relative. Is simplicity making do with a Volkswagen instead of a Cadillac? Or is walking instead of riding? May one own a television set? Or wear a red dress? Or a bright tie? Shall we all join communes or live close to the soil as the Amish do? Is it possible to give no thought for the morrow?

Whatever standards of simplicity we adopt, we shall probably find ourselves at odds with a society devoted to materialism and the desire of luxurious living. Both capitalism and communism rest on materialistic—not spiritual—premises. Still Friends, in listening to the Inner Voice, know that moderation is better than excess, that our lives should be centered, not dissipated, and that if we cannot live in voluntary poverty, we should not live in voluntary prodigality. As the old Shaker hymn has it, "Tis a *gift* to be simple."

## Sit at the Head of Meeting (see also Clerk, Minister, Elder)

To sit at the head of the meeting does not necessarily mean to clerk it. A visiting or weighty Friend may be asked to join elders or members of



Ministry and Counsel on the facing benches. The invitation probably implies an expectation the the person so invited will have a message.

To sit at the head of meeting may also refer to a person who may be seated anywhere in the room, who has been given the responsibility at a particular time for "breaking" or closing meeting for worship. It is assumed that the person or persons at the head of meeting will, if needed, restore peace and quiet if a disturbance distracts, and may even ask a wholly unacceptable speaker to bring his or her remarks to a conclusion.

### **Sit Loose**

When Howard Brinton asked an ancient mountain woman how she accounted for her longevity, she told him, "When I sits, I sits loose." Friends have something of a tradition of "sitting loose" to issues. That is, they are not only able to relax physically, but they are also able to remain open to fresh ideas. They do not attend meetings prepared to defend a fixed position. When you "sit loose," in other words, you are not "up tight."

### **Sojourning Member (see also Membership)**

As a Friend you should be enrolled in only one monthly meeting, so that you are counted only once. If you move to another area, you would, ordinarily, transfer your membership to a nearby meeting—if there is one. But if you feel that your stay at the new location is likely to be temporary, you may retain your membership in your old meeting and ask for *sojourning* membership in the new. This will make you a member there in every sense except for being counted.

### **Speaking to One's Condition**

There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition.

This is probably the most oft-quoted sentence from George Fox, because these are the words that came to him after four years of seeking. Besides being the climax of the first recorded Quaker mystical experience (or experiment) the words answer a semantic need. "To speak to one's condition" may have been a common idiom in the seventeenth century; if so, I am not scholar enough to be aware of it. In any case, it is the George Fox quotation that has kept the expression alive, and that is good fortune for the art of communication. For you may now say that the book you have just read is the very one that could speak to your condition; or that a neighbor's off-hand remark—or the bright summer morning—speaks to your condition. The expression is not restricted to Friends (nothing of Friendly origin is), but I never heard it before I first stepped into a Quaker meeting. Now I can think of no other way by which these things could be said.

## Speak Truth to Power

This expression does not have a long history in Quakerism. It was used as the title to an American Friends Service Committee publication in 1955. But it has caught part of the essential spirit of Friends that goes back to the beginning.

George Fox, former shepherd and shoemaker's apprentice, spoke, at the age of thirty, with the Lord Protector of the British Commonwealth, Oliver Cromwell. He "spake much to him of Truth, and a great deal of discourse . . . with him about religion."<sup>6</sup> This was but the first of a series of visits Fox paid to Cromwell. He thus set a precedent for later Friends to "speak truth to power."

William Penn, less surprisingly, interceded with both Charles II and James II. A long list of Quakers since then have ignored traditional chains of authority and carried their concerns directly to the top. They include Elizabeth Fry (who visited not only the British monarch, but also the royal family of Russia); Mary Fisher (visited the Sultan of Turkey); and representatives of the American Friends Service Committee (called on the head of the Nazi Gestapo—see entry under **Leadings**). Not all these visits brought immediate tangible results, but they served, within the ramparts of militarism and political expediency, as witness to the Spirit.

## Steeplehouse

This was Fox's somewhat caustic name for a conventional church building. See also **Meetinghouse**.

## Tender

This is an adjective that early Friends used in the sense for which we would more likely use "sensitive." Generally this referred to a person's conscience though it was not always so stated, so that when Fox says he came upon certain people and found them "tender" we must assume that it was their consciences that were in this condition. They were, in other words, ready for his message. In modern Quaker usage I like to think of tenderness as the careful maintenance of inner feelings, the opposite of inward callousness.

## Testimonies

Lacking any formal statement of beliefs, the Society of Friends had always achieved whatever unity it possessed at any given time by a common agreement on behavior rather than a common acceptance of words. These common actions by which Friends came to be characterized are generally called their *testimonies*—in effect, statements of approval of their

<sup>6</sup> Fox, George, John L. Nickalls, editor, *The Journal of George Fox*, Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, 1997, p. 199.

actions or beliefs. In a literal sense they are the validating evidence of the Inner Light. Howard Brinton interprets the major testimonies of Friends as positive qualities: harmony, simplicity, community, and equality.<sup>7</sup> But many have known Friends simply as the people who (negatively) refused to bear arms or refused to take oaths, rather than the people who (positively) educated both girls and boys, worked for prison reform, and established the one-price system in selling goods. Quaker witness is not, or should not be, restricted to the traditional testimonies. A more specific testimony, for instance, may be needed concerning the sharing of the world's resources, or the preservation of ecological balance on our planet, or on Quaker attitudes toward the mass media.

## **That of God (see Inner Light)**

### **Travel in the Ministry**

It is not necessary to be a recorded minister (see p. 26) to travel in the ministry. Friends who wish to spend a limited period of time visiting other meetings frequently ask their monthly meeting to provide them with a minute which will furnish a proper introduction. Traveling in the ministry, however, implies more than simple visitation. A Friend so designated should be prepared to meet with members of the host meeting's Ministry and Counsel Committee, if requested, to counsel with them on the spiritual health of the meeting, and to offer whatever service or ministry lies within his or her competence.

### **Unity (see also Clerk)**

Friends speak of arriving at unity in much the same spirit as they speak of attaining a sense of the meeting. Neither of these expressions equates exactly with what non-Friends normally regard as "consensus."

## **Universalism, Universalist (see Quaker Universalist Fellowship)**

### **Way Will Open**

Friends method of doing business, which requires the clerk to find "a sense of the meeting," frequently results in action not taken. Even when the meeting agrees on what should be done, it may not be able to implement the agreement immediately. For those whose pet projects are thus delayed the frustration may be mitigated by the assurance that the meeting

<sup>7</sup> Brinton, Howard H., *Friends For Three Hundred Years: The history and beliefs of the Society of Friends since George Fox started the Quaker movement*, Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1965, p. 120.

will proceed "as way opens," or "way will open." But will it? Patience is certainly a required virtue of the RSoF—patience and a measure of faith. There is wisdom in the saying because circumstances do change. The pet project may not have been well thought out. Those opposing it may grow to see its worth. The social and political climate may alter. One generation will replace another. Way *will* open, but not, perhaps, by the next meeting for business.

### **Way is Clogged**

A new term used by some of the younger members of the RSoF to indicate some kind of restriction on action, or the unhurried way in which Friends made decisions.

### **Weighty Friend**

In seeking a sense of the meeting, the presiding clerk tries to respect all points of view. Yet it is obvious that the opinions of some Friends "weigh" more than others. This is, of course, not a matter of Friends' *avoirdupuis*. Nor is it a measure of how frequently or forcefully a Friend offers an opinion. It is a measure, rather, of how frequently a Friend's judgment is sought and whether it has come to be relied on.

### **Wider Quaker Fellowship (see also Membership)**

One of the many legacies left by Rufus Jones is the Wider Quaker Fellowship (WQF), begun in 1936. This organization is intended for those who feel close to Friends ways and works but do not wish to make a commitment of membership in the RSoF. Many members of WQF are communicants in other denominations. Friends who are isolated geographically from any monthly meeting may be correspondents of WQF and receive the mailings. Rufus Jones wrote:

There would be no condition of membership except readiness to dedicate oneself to the way of love, and a faith that man is a candle of the Lord and can become a center of radiance, an organ of the spirit, just where he lives.

WQF members receive regular mailings to keep them in touch with the Society and have a variety of Quaker resources available to them. WQF is now a program of Friends World Committee for Consultation (see p. 11), Section of Americas.

### **Wilburite Friends (see also Conservative Friends)**

These Friends were followers in the nineteenth century of John Wilbur of Rhode Island. They were Friends who took the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so seriously that they rejected formal Bible teaching and devoted

themselves to the inner life. They were quietist Friends who clung to the old plain clothes and plain speech longer than most others. They were part of the Orthodox division (as opposed to the Hicksite), but they were in opposition to the Gurneyite wing which was Bible-oriented and vigorously evangelical.

### **Witness (*see also* Testimony, Leadings, Hat Honor)**

There are many ways of bearing witness to one's beliefs. Early Friends were imprisoned by the thousands for their refusal to take oaths or for their insistence on holding their meetings which had been declared illegal. Later Friends have spent time in prison for refusal to register for the draft or for other acts of civil disobedience prompted by their Inner Light. Not all Friends are called to make such sacrificial witness. A far greater number have borne witness in Quaker ways by being models for others. The Foxian scholar, Lewis Benson, cannot find a record that Fox ever said, exactly, "Let your lives speak"—words that have been attributed to him, but it is certainly not a statement to which he would have objected. It is as good a definition of Quaker witness as we are likely to come by; Let our lives speak.

### **Worship (*see also* Meeting for Worship)**

What needs to be said here is that meeting for worship, central as it is to the RSoF, is not the only means of worship. Most sets of queries ask if we set aside time for daily worship and study of the Bible and other religious writings. Indeed, the meeting for worship does not really function at its deepest level if Friends do not worship elsewhere at other times. The "group mysticism" (Howard Brinton's phrase) is irreplaceable, but it is nurtured from moments of solitude that we make way for in our daily lives. How much time do we need? Someone has said we should learn to worship between pulse-beats!

### **Worship and Ministry (*see* Ministry and Counsel)**

#### **Yearly Meeting**

The yearly meeting is composed of quarterly or half-yearly meetings, which are in turn made up of monthly meetings. In the rather loose organization of the RSoF, the yearly meeting is the largest integral unit. There are about ninety-six<sup>8</sup> yearly meetings in the world, none of them with any official connection with any other. The grouping of yearly meetings into Friends General Conference, or Friends United Meeting or the Evangelical

<sup>8</sup> Information from [www.quaker.org/fwcc](http://www.quaker.org/fwcc), 2002, reflecting data from 1998–2000.

Friends International do furnish a kind of superstructure, but there is no authoritative “archbishopric” or “ministerium” or “Holy See” to bring errant yearly meetings into line or to expel heretical groups from the RSoF. There is probably no other sect where such a range of theological pluralism is accepted! All the more reason why such informal umbrella groups as the Friends World Committee for Consultation are important in holding the RSoF together. The annual gathering of a yearly meeting may last from several days to a week. It is not restricted to “representatives”—any Friend may attend and participate. Though the meetings for business have sometimes been stormy, yearly meetings are not strictly business. They are also times of Friendly reunions and spiritual renewal.

### **Yearly Meeting Friend**

The devoted group members who find time and energy, beyond obligations to their own monthly and quarterly meetings, to serve as officers and members of yearly meeting committees.

## Quaker Organizations

American Friends Service Committee  
1501 Cherry Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19102  
Web Address: [www.afsc.org](http://www.afsc.org)

Evangelical Friends International  
5350 Broadmoor Cir., NW  
Canton, OH 44709  
Web Address:  
[www.evangelical-friends.org/](http://www.evangelical-friends.org/)

Friends Committee on  
National Legislation  
245 2nd Street NE  
Washington, DC 20002  
Web Address: [www.fcnl.org](http://www.fcnl.org)

Friends Council on Education  
1507 Cherry Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19102  
Web Address: [www.friendscouncil.org/](http://www.friendscouncil.org/)

Friends General Conference  
1216 Arch Street, 2B  
Philadelphia, PA 19107  
Web Address: [www.fgcquaker.org](http://www.fgcquaker.org)  
Bookstore: [www.quakerbooks.org](http://www.quakerbooks.org)

Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns  
Box 222  
Sumneytown, PA 18084  
Web Address: [www.quaker.org/flgc/](http://www.quaker.org/flgc/)

Friends United Meeting  
101 Quaker Hill Drive  
Richmond, IN 47374  
Web Address: [www.fum.org](http://www.fum.org)

Friends World Committee  
for Consultation  
1506 Race Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19102  
Web Address: [www.quaker.org/fwcc](http://www.quaker.org/fwcc)

Peace and Social Witness  
(Britain Yearly Meeting)  
Friends House  
173 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BJ  
Web Address:  
[www.quaker.org.uk/peace/index.html](http://www.quaker.org.uk/peace/index.html)

Quaker Information Center  
1501 Cherry Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19102  
Web Address: [www.quakerinfo.org](http://www.quakerinfo.org)

Quaker United Nations Office  
777 United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY 10017  
Web Address: [www.afsc.org/quno.htm](http://www.afsc.org/quno.htm)

Wider Quaker Fellowship  
c/o Friends World Committee  
for Consultation  
1506 Race Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19102  
Web Address:  
[www.quaker.org/fwcc/Americas/wqf.html](http://www.quaker.org/fwcc/Americas/wqf.html)

# Minute of Purpose & Major Goals of Friends General Conference

*Approved by FGC Central Committee 10/21/95*

## MINUTE OF PURPOSE

Friends General Conference is a Quaker organization in the unprogrammed tradition of the Religious Society of Friends which primarily serves affiliated yearly and monthly meetings. It is our experience that:

- Faith is based on direct experience of God.
- Our lives witness this experience individually and corporately.
- By answering that of God in everyone, we build and sustain inclusive community.

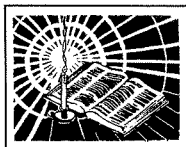
Friends General Conference provides resources and opportunities that educate and invite members and attenders to experience, individually and corporately, God's living presence, and to discern and follow God's leadings. Friends General Conference reaches out to seekers and to other religious bodies inside and outside the wider Religious Society of Friends.

## MAJOR GOALS

God willing, in the next five years, Friends General Conference will:

1. Provide, and help its affiliated yearly and monthly meetings to offer, opportunities for worship and spiritual nurture to people ranging from the most seasoned Friends to the newest seekers.
2. Nurture the small and isolated monthly meetings and worship groups, particularly in areas where little support is available.
3. Build and sustain an extended, loving community of Friends, a community which embraces and respects great diversity but which is nevertheless based on the experience of unity in God's spirit.
4. Articulate, communicate and model core experiences, values and principles of Friends, such as the direct experience of God, the miracle of the gathered meeting, the meeting for worship for business, the balancing of individual leadings with corporate discernment, and the call to live and witness to our faith.





**Quaker Press**  
of Friends General Conference  
1216 Arch Street, 2B  
Philadelphia, PA 19107

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ISBN 0-9620912-4-3



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ISBN 0-9620912-4-3

1983, 1992

reprint 2002

\$10.00

