

*A Self Study Pamphlet on
Canadian Quaker Faith and Practice*



(Victoria Friends Meetinghouse)

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Preamble to 2021 Edition

The purpose of this self-study is to explore the experiential understanding of Quaker faith and practice, as presented in the foundational book ***Faith and Practice of the Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends***, first published in 2011.

This pamphlet is a condensed version of the materials prepared in the spring of 2016 by Marjory Reitsma-Street, Gale Wills, and Catherine Novak for educational sessions hosted by the Committees of Outreach and Education and the Ministry and Council of the Victoria Friends, Vancouver Island Monthly Meeting. These materials are identical in substance, minus handouts and exercises, to those given to the Canadian Yearly Meeting Education and Outreach Committee. Under their auspices, teachers are providing online courses using the materials.

There are six sections to the self-study. Each contains comments illustrated with excerpts of the ***Canadian Faith and Practice***.

One	Pages	3-13	Quaker expressions of faith and practices
Two	Pages	14-18	Quaker worship
Three	Pages	19-22	Quaker worship with attention to business by Gale Wills
Four	Pages	23-33	Testimonies
Five	Pages	34-35	Advices and Queries
Six	Pages	36-39	Questions for Self-Study, References, Note on Authors

One: Quaker Expressions of Faith and Practice

'Where two or three are gathered in my Name, there will I be also'. This phrase captures the source, the mystery, the centre of Quakers, and the heart of many spiritual groups. What then defines Quakers? What ties us together and inspires us? 370 years ago ex-Baptists, ex-Anglicans, ex-Diggers, ex-Levellers, ex-Seekers, ex-Roman Catholics and others came together and created the Religious Society of Friends. So too today, seekers, many of us from other or no faiths, as well as birthright Quakers or those also practising other spiritual traditions, continue to come together, and call ourselves Quakers. What does that mean to us?

The following expressions of the Religious Society of Friends, illustrated with excerpts of the first chapter of *Canadian Faith and Practice*, may serve as a frame for self-study and discussions with other. Each reader, especially seasoned Friends, may have a unique frame of understanding Quaker faith and practice. I expect my frame, and that of the reader, will shift over time, as we grow and change in understanding.

There is that of God in everyone.

This expression is used often by Quakers. Packed into this simple "that of God in everyone" are several elements. There is an acknowledgement that **God exists**: a Force, beyond comprehension, and present in everyone, in the entire world, throughout the ages.

In fact, the British Faith and Practice book states in Chapter 27.35

" The priesthood of all believers is a foundation of our understanding of the church. Our own experience leads us to affirm that the church can be so ordered that the guidance of the Holy Spirit can be known and followed without the need for a separated clergy..."

In Biblical words of John, we hear: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" Or, in another verse from that Gospel, Margaret Fell Fox writing in 1694, see excerpt 1.11 we read: "*Christ was the Light of the world and lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*" Robert Barclay, one of the first Quaker theologians, spoke of "a secret power." In a much-loved excerpt, 1.69, written in 1678, Barclay wrote,

*“For when I came into the silent assemblies of God’s people,
I felt a secret power among them which touched my heart;
and as I gave way unto it,
I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up.”*

Many words are used by Quakers to name the nameless: God, the Seed, Light, Love, Fountain of Life. Inward Teacher. We recognize names for “that of God” from other tradition as well: Allah, Gaia, Jaweh, Sophia, Lilith. In a poem from a Friend from our Vancouver Island Monthly Meeting, Connie Mungall, quoted in excerpt 1.57, speaks of her joy in the simple fact that she can find in the quiet, a place *“full of Light”*... She writes of trusting that what she says or does can be true, *“enlightened by a universal energy. Divine.”*

In the expression ‘that of God in everyone’ we affirm the Light exists. It is. We also make another affirmation. The Light exists **in us**. Not a piece or speck, but the Light. The Light, the Truth, the Presence is indivisible and flows ineffably everywhere.

For some people, they feel Light shines strongly; for others, the sense of Presence is very dim, and sporadic. But, Quakers affirm that no matter what we feel or sense, the Light, the Seed still is in us. See Excerpt 1.1 of George Fox, the founding preacher and writer of the Religious Society of Friends. When he was a young man, a tradesman, Fox read the Bible constantly and sought out the many different protestant preachers and groups who had broken with the state approved church. But, after years of searching, he despaired, with no hope left in preachers and men. Then, as he wrote in 1647, *“I heard a voice, which said: ‘There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition,’ and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy”*.

There are contemporary Friends, sometimes called “Universalist” as opposed to “Christocentric” Quakers, who do not use the words of God or Christ Jesus as freely as people did in the days of George Fox and Margaret Fell. Some Quakers do not believe in any sense of a personal God. But they do affirm a working of the Spirit in the world. For example, Martin Cobin, in a 1964 poem quoted in Excerpt 1.22 writes:

*“My God’s the pattern of the universe,
the harmony transcending all that men can give expression to*”

Or we read in Excerpt 1.66, written by Victoria Friend Lynne Phillips: *“I don’t think of God as something with personal attributes, so I don’t feel forgiven by God when I make mistakes, but I can feel the spirit of God working in others when they forgive me for making mistakes.”*

In the common Quaker expression “there is that of God in everyone”, Quakers imply God exists. That God exists in us. And that God exists **in everyone**, young and old, black and pink, women and men, brilliant and plain folk. Never is a person without ‘that of God’, no matter how tiny, smart, violent, muddled, or depressed. This fundamental expression of our Quaker faith is shared with many spiritual and humanist ones. It implies we cannot kill, wage war, speak hurtful thoughts, or lock people away without hope, as each person is holy, as they are human, and as that of God is in them. Our testimonies of peace and equality flow directly from this affirmation.

This affirmation of God in everyone was revolutionary in the 1650s, and still is now; for instance, to see, feel, and treat women as equal to men, as the Quakers did—well, tried to do-- from its early days. It meant that prophecy, ministry, preaching, even decision-making, could not be denied if it came from women, as the divine was in women as it was in men. Margaret Fell, mother of eight children, wife of a judge, and mistress of Swarthmore Hall, was convinced by George Fox’s teachings when she was in her 30s. She became the organizational heart of Quakers in its founding decades, with the support of her first husband until his death, and with the very active help of all but one of her children and many people who worked and visited Swarthmore. Fell wrote and received hundreds of comforting, instructive letters and several books to Friends across England and beyond. She petitioned authorities, including the King, when Friends were imprisoned, travelling the long road to London eight times to plead their cause. When her husband died, Margaret suffered imprisonments for holding meetings at Swarthmore. At age 58, Margaret married George Fox, ten years her junior, and outlived him, editing his journals. In 1666, she wrote in *Excerpt 4.48*:

“Those that speak against the power of the Lord, and the Spirit of the Lord speaking in a woman, simply by reason of her sex or because she is a woman, not regarding the Seed and the Spirit and Power that speaks in her, such speak against Christ and his Church.”

There is no end to divine revelation.

Quakers affirm that there is no end to divine revelation. It can come to all. The endless, spacious mystery of what God is, what the Light reveals is just that: endless and mysterious. True in the time of Sarah and Abraham. True in the violent, civil war times of the England that Fox and Fell lived in. True in the fearful times of our Friends in Burundi, and in the Tent City of downtown Victoria. Despite all these worrisome times, there is no end to divine revelation. The Divine Nudges, as one elder Friend called them, or the promptings of love and truth as stated in the first of our Advices and Queries, come to all. The voice of Love, the challenges of the Spirit continue to be revealed, sometimes as a huge clarion call or in a whirlwind. More often it sneaks upon us as a whisper or even just a sense, a nudge that cannot be ignored.

Unlike the expression, 'there is that of God in everyone', the expression 'there is no end to divine revelation' is *not common* to all spiritual traditions. It was unique in the times of Fox and Fell, and still is today. Some spiritual organizations lock the truth of God into scriptural or oral traditions of the past, whether it is in the Bible, the Torah, or the Koran. Or there is the belief that divine revelation comes only to a distinct, small group of priests or the devout, or the well-educated.

Patricia Loring, inspirational author of several volumes on Quaker Spirituality speaks to this affirmation that 'there is no end to divine revelation. In Excerpt: 1.58, written in 1992, she says:

“Spiritual discernment lies at the heart of Quaker spirituality and practice. It's grounded in the central Quaker conviction of the availability to every person of the experience and guidance of God, immediate as well as mediated.”

Over half of the Quakers in our contemporary world continue to be strongly inspired by the revelations of God in the Bible, for comfort, guidance, and inspiration. But to all members of the Religious Society of Friends—in the programmed Meetings with pastors and in the Canadian unprogrammed ones without clergy—we affirm that a revelation, a Nudge, a way can open to each of us. It does not have to be justified by the Bible or blessed by a priest or pastor. Yet, as Elizabeth Watson, in 1990 states in Excerpt 1.98:

“I commend to you the Bible as a living document....It is also possible that God may choose some more contemporary medium for the message. Believe in continuing revelation, whether it comes through the Bible or through other sources. It is part of our Quaker heritage.”

There is heaven on earth

The next expression is not as familiar as the previous ones. It is one way that I have of framing an understanding in Quaker faith. I say: Heaven is now. Heaven is for everyone. Quakers do not believe that if we are good, or live the right way, there will be a heavenly life for us, later. Or that only the select few will be saved and live happily ever after. Nor do we say that if we change the world, then there will be heaven on earth.

No. This affirmation “there is heaven on earth” is more radical and liberating, and joyful. It means that when we feel we can do nothing, when we have bad days, or when we live in impossible times, still the Light lives. Whether we are sick or well, there is heaven on earth—for us, in us, despite us, and after us. That is the good news. It is as I wrote in the 2013 article “I am not cancer” in the Canadian Friend:

“At the close of writing this essay, I was stunned and amazed by how deeply I felt that the inner Light—The Light—is not diminished by what happens to my body. The ineffable Mystery is just that: ineffable and boundless. It does not need me to do, or even be anything except be alive, for now. No matter what happens to my body or mind, this mysterious Light continues burning brightly.” p.13, 2013.

In the days of Fox and Fell, civil war raged around them, and Quakers were being put into jail for their practices, losing their health and livelihood. There was a strong sense of the end of times, and a desperate need for a new political and spiritual order. But, this new order, they affirmed, would begin with their own hearts and lives, their own organizations and meetings. The Quakers believed Christ had already risen and come again, that Christ lived in them, that the Church was new again, in them, in their individual lives and small groups. Now. Not later, but now. Heaven today—despite hellish times.

Certainly, Quakers in the 1650s felt they had work to do on earth: they felt responsible for changing themselves and the world around them. They felt inspired and transformed to do this work. Many felt strongly a missionary fervor to bring the message of hope and deliverance, peace and simplicity to all. Pairs of Quakers, and what is known in Quaker history as “The Valiant Sixty” preaching Friends, went forth across England, to other countries, and to the American colonies to speak their messages of truth and love, to let their lives speak about God in everyone and that heaven is now.

American Quakers in the evangelical years of the 19th century felt strong calls to reform their spiritual and political worlds, in the fight against slavery and for prison reform. At the turn of the 20th century, liberal Quakers throughout the world took up anew the search for a better world for humanity, creating new organizations such as the Canadian Friends Service Committee—open to Quakers and non-Quakers—to feed those who are hungry, to work for peace in warring places, and to create new international and national policies that might help the survival of the earth itself.

But it is the Spirit in them and us, and around us, which speaks to our condition, and tells us that there is heaven on earth always. Quakers 370 years ago, and today, can walk ‘cheerfully upon the world’, doing **what we feel we are led to do in our particular condition**, and not worry if it is enough. All will be well, as there is heaven on earth, now, despite the horrors, the wars. Our life, as Quakers, is to live as if there is heaven on earth, as we set out to “see what Love can do”.

In Chapter One’s Excerpt 1.2, Quaker founder George Fox wrote in 1647 that the ocean of light is an “infinite ocean”, bigger, more eternal and ineffable than the ocean of darkness. Fox wrote and believed and acted as if the infinite ocean of lightness flowed over the one of darkness. Heaven is on earth, now. And this force of good over evil gave him hope, and the way opened to act.

*George Fox writes: "There was an ocean of darkness and death,
but an infinite ocean of light and love,
which flowed over the ocean of darkness.
And in that also I saw the infinite love of God;
and I had great openings."*

“But what canst Thou say”

This familiar old phrase speaks to the Quaker affirmation that it is up to each of us to find our spiritual path. In the Religious Society of Friends, we affirm that experiencing “that of God” is direct, inward, and unique to each person. There is a journey for which we are responsible—to wait, to sense, to be present to the Presence, to listen to the Inward Teacher, and to respond as we can.

In the fall of 2015, a Vancouver Friend and teacher, Tim Bartoo led our Victoria Meeting in a weekend workshop on experimenting with the Light—a disciplined contemporary approach inspired by Rex Ambler’s modern translation and organization of George Fox’s journals. In this approach, there are “steps” or stages of learning to understand the application of “what canst Thou say”. The steps turn our leadings—that are inwardly of God – into deeds. These steps are: (1) minding the Light, (2) opening our hearts to the Truth, (3) waiting in the Light, and lastly (4) submitting to the Truth.

Leadings may emerge from momentous events. For example, shortly after he failed his attempt to defend his second doctoral dissertation, Thomas Kelly, a Quaker scholar and preacher, felt propelled out of his depression by the Light Within to write and speak. His mystical writings speak of “yielding to these persuasions gladly” in Excerpt 1.15 written in 1941. Many Quakers, however, do not report big experiences of a leading, calling, persuasion, or conviction. Instead, they decide to live “as if they have a commitment to a Light-filled Life”, and to live fully in their daily lives. ‘What canst Thou sayest’ is an expression about truth in word and deed. A Quaker life, thus, is one of faithful practice.

The Mother of Quakers, Margaret Fell, and later Margaret Fell Fox upon her marriage to George Fox, wrote about her experience of listening to George Fox preach. In Excerpt 1. 11, written in 1694, we read a key excerpt that reflects this Quaker affirmation of the importance of personal experience.

You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this;

but what canst thou say?

Art thou a child of Light and hast walked in the Light,

And what thou speakest is it inwardly from God?”

When I read these words, I see how Margaret Fell emphasizes the significance of seeking to speak from her own experiences. But more than that, she points us to the importance of source: are the words “inwardly from God?”

This search for source is fundamental to Quaker living. We ask the question: how do we know what we sense to be divine revelation? This steadfast self and collective examination is about testing if our words and actions are both loving and truthful. This question “is it inwardly from God?” is key to developments, fissures, and decisions in our 370 years of Quaker history throughout the world, in our Meeting here in Victoria, and in each of us in our own lives. It is our faithful attention to Quaker practices of worshipping, making decisions in unity with the Spirit, creating peaceful communities, and testifying to peace, simplicity, equality and truth, that will help us discern, however imperfectly, what is “that of God for us in this situation”, and what is not.

There is another excerpt, Excerpt 1.13, by Caroline Fox, written in 1882, that speaks to how each person is given a different measure of Light. Rather than compare ourselves to each other, or to an invisible Quaker standard of goodness, or lightness, one is exhorted to look inwardly, and to live up to what is given to us.

*The first gleam of light, “the first cold light of morning”,
which gave promise of day with its noontide glories, dawned on me one day at Meeting
when I had been meditating on my state in great depression.
I seemed to hear the words articulated in my spirit,
“Live up to the light thou hast,
and more will be granted thee.”*

Expressions of Quaker Practice

There are several practices that are common to Quakers and their organizations, whether programmed with clergy, or unprogrammed, without clergy or liturgy, as is the situation in Canada.

First there is the regular practice of waiting **in expectant silence in Meeting for Worship**, a practice that will be explored in the next section of this Self-Study Pamphlet.

Second, there is the practice of listening spiritually in relationships and building peaceful communities. We read of individual Quakers who have faithfully lived their faith in the memorials published in Chapter Two of our ***Canadian Faith and Practice***, while the many, rich excerpts presented in Chapter Four the Lifelong Journey Quakers, inspire and comfort Friends, whether they come to a Quaker community at birth, or much later in life.

These practices--waiting in worshipful silence and building peaceful, spiritual relationships in communities—are ones that can be, and are practised anywhere, anytime, by any group, however small or large, or however troubled or poor in spirit. Whether one can or cannot read: whether there is a Monthly Meeting nearby or no meeting house for hundreds of miles: whether there are Friends to clerk or none free to serve. In all these conditions, Quakers can worship and create relationships of connection—with the Divine, with ourselves, and with each other.

The third type of Quaker practice is also common, but not necessarily practised by all Friends and attenders. This is the practice of reading, as well as writing spiritual journals and responding to spiritual questions. There are the old and newer writings that each of us may use, in our own ways, as inspiring guides and sources of comfort. These writings and queries help Quakers debate, guide, and heal the inevitable tensions between discerning the leadings or callings of individuals and the ties that bind Quakers into a common discipline, enforced by the authority of love and truth.

The Bible is a key text to historical Quakers, and to over half of the Quakers in the world today, especially those with programmed meetings and pastors. Consider the excerpts on Quakers and the Christian faith the Bible starting with 1.69 in ***Canadian Faith and Practice***. Most Quakers also use other inspirational sources in their own lives, including the many books in the Quaker libraries, poetry, and so on.

Then there are the writings agreed to by corporate Quaker groups that provide statements of faith, standards of behaviours or expectations, and inspirational references. These writings are revised every generation or two. For example, the first corporate expression of discipline for Quaker groups was written in 1656, in a short letter called “Letter from the Elders gathered at Balby”. That letter ends with the well-known final words, published on page 195 in ***Canadian Faith and Practice***.

“Dearly beloved, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form 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 life.”

There is our little red book, *Advices and Queries*, adopted by Canadian Yearly Meeting in 1997—published as Chapter Six in ***Canadian Faith and Practice***. This will be discussed in the last section of this Self-Study Pamphlet.

Another key form of writing is the annual State of Society report that each Monthly Meeting submits to the Canadian Yearly Meeting, responding to queries about spiritual and community matters, including births, marriages, deaths, major events, imprisonments, and membership. These reports are printed in a book, and for 370 years these State of Society reports have been printed and archived in every country. Quakers do have good archives with the internet now being put into service.

There is the *Organization and Procedure of Canadian Yearly Meeting*—available online at quaker.ca. It details how membership and marriage committees are to be set up and to function, and all matters relevant to good organizational discipline in worship groups, Monthly Meetings, Semi-Annual Half Yearly Meetings, and the annual Canadian Yearly Meeting.

And, finally, now there is our own new 2011 *Canadian Faith and Practice*. This book is an anthology of inspiration excerpts and queries, similar to anthologies approved by corporate bodies in England, various American states, Australia, and other countries. If one searches online for “Quaker Faith and Practice”, you will see some of these anthologies online. Our Canadian book is “a reference of our values, witness and tradition. This book connects our small community spread across a large country.”

We continue to give thanks to our Canadian Friends who laboured over a decade to bring forth this book. Some of you have contributed excerpts to this book. You may recognize authors of some excerpts. In the decades ahead, some of you here will be leaders in creating the revised *Canadian Faith and Practice*, as “there is no end to divine revelation”, and new guides will be needed to speak to the conditions of the future.



Fourth. The last set of Quaker practices is making business decisions in large meetings and small groups by, in Quaker language, ‘coming to unity’. All of the expressions of Quaker faith and practice throughout the world come together in that which is most unique in the spiritual tradition the Religious Society of Friends: the way of making decisions. In this process, Quakers practice our affirmations that there is “that of God in everyone”, that there is no end to divine revelation, that there is heaven on earth, and that each of us is to find our own unique spiritual path.

Quakers do not have a published, public creed or Articles of Faith that must be agreed to for entry into membership. No. Our way is to practise our faith. Nowhere is this truer than in the ways we make decisions: in our families, friendship groups, and Meetings for Worship with Attention to Business. Each decision is an attempt, however flawed or awkward, to come to Unity in Truth and Love, with the Light, within each of us and beyond all of us. Then the decision, made in the Light that has gathered together as much of the Light that is in each of us that responds to the Light in others becomes authoritative for action in a small Meeting, or in our national organization. Making collective decisions as Quakers is explored further in Section Three of this pamphlet, written by Gale Wills.



Two: Quaker Worship

The focus of this section is coming together to worship. This practice of communal silent worship among Canadian Quakers comforts and inspires us, and helps us individually, and collectively, discern

‘What canst Thou say?....What thou speakest is it inwardly of God?’ (Excerpt 1.11 Margaret Fell Fox, 1694).

Holding regular meetings for worship is the very first collective or corporate advice in the Quaker History. In Appendix A, Advice Number one, p. 195, in ***Canadian Faith and Practice*** where we read in the Letter from the Elders Gathered at Balby, written and distributed in 1656, that the “settled meetings[are] to be kept each first-day.” A few years ago, here in Victoria, there was a snow and ice storm on a Sunday, a date for the Christmas music as well. I phoned an elder Friend, asking if Meeting for Worship would be held. She said quietly: “I do not know if ever a Meeting for Worship on First Day has been cancelled. Those who can come, come.” As Muriel Bishop Summers writes in Excerpt 3.12 (1995):

*“Through all my changing certainties and uncertainties,
there runs a constant thread.*

My connection with God is fostered in worship.

*And worship is essential to our lives
together”*

Who is it we are Meeting?

Marty Walton asks this provocative, inspiring question about the Meeting for Worship (1997). She asks: Quakers speak of their worship times as Meeting; we do not say we are going to church, or service, or communion, but going to, or being in Meeting. That word, “Meeting”, what does it suggest? Her way of answering this question is as follows. Quakers in any Meeting for Worship, large or small, short or long, are first of all meeting each other-- members of our community, visitors, and new people. Then, Friends turn inwards to meet ourselves—our thoughts, feelings, prayers, hopes, and concerns. And in the silence, each of us tries to open ourselves to meeting God, the Light, the Promptings of Love and Truth.

Occasionally some words or a song come forth. Once we have discerned those words to be of God and meant for others at this particular time, we may stand and share what Quakers call Vocal or Verbal Ministry. Mostly, we wait expectantly, silently, with the worshipping presence of others around us, waiting to visit and to be visited, to be met by this Light, the mysterious eternal wonder. We may feel a touch, or be shaken by a wind. Or we may not meet any presence, other than our uncertain squiggly selves, and the restful support of other people. And noises of birds, whispers of children, creaky joints, or sounds of machines.

We stay in the silence, with that hopeful worshipful desire to meet each other, ourselves, and the possibility of the Other. There are special times when Friends speak of not only meeting the Divine Other, but being gathered by this sense of mystery into a huge oneness with the people in the room and elsewhere. A sense of being covered and held, completely alive and one in the Presence, a “binding together of the group” writes Marty Walton.

A gifted teacher and Friend, Betty Polster, posed three questions regarding Meeting for Worship. I draw from her Quakerism 101 Lesson Plan that I attended in Victoria in 2002 for some of the following comments on each of these questions.

How do Friends prepare and “centre down”?

To paraphrase Betty Polster, the Meeting for Worship is a “corporate experiment of communion with God,” the ineffable mystery, the deep silence. In this, it differs from almost every other activity that we undertake, as we seek to experience the presence of “that of God” in ourselves and each other, and discover what we are called to do. It is an experiment as there is no particular way for it to proceed. Each person’s experience in worship is different. Each of us has to find our own way, and begin every time at the beginning.

It helps to greet each other at the beginning of worship, by touching hands or nodding to those present, as we acknowledge our delight in the desire to worship together. Or relief that we made it despite a tough week. We sit. Still the body, open the heart, and try to quiet the mind—perhaps harder for active people than those who are more contemplative by nature.

Sometimes we find ourselves preparing by baking cookies, gathering fruits or vegetables, reading, or walking before Meeting. We may make a practice of saying a silent “hello” or “touch” all those who come, and reach out to those who may not be present. We reach into ourselves, and we reach out. We may say prayers of thanksgiving or request for forgiveness and strength. Or we meditate on a colour or a phrase or the flame of a candle, or savour the presence of the children attending until they leave for stories and play.

Above all, we prepare by “coming again and again”, whether we are busy and happy, sad or weary, full of hope or deep disbelief. Over the weeks and years, we practise worshipping. That is what the majority of our worship is: a practising of being in the eternal Presence; a cultivation of letting go in expectant waiting; a willingness to be vulnerable and open to a relationship with the Light—in ourselves, in each other, and beyond.

We centre down with an attitude of listening to this strange Otherness, sometimes becoming a vessel or a gateway for the Spirit. It helps if there are individuals who are already “*gathered deep in the spirit of worship*” writes Thomas Kelly, the American Quaker preacher, pastor, mystic and writer. In 1940, in Excerpt 3.5, he writes that the spiritual devotion of a few persons can kindle the hearts of others when the Meeting begins, helping to quiet and enflame the hearts of others. We thank those who can come so prepared.

Joseph Rogers in Excerpt 3.24 (1997) writes of a very different preparation for worship. That is, preparing by reaching out. A simple act of kindness can make a significant difference, keeping a person safe and showing we care—whether by taking someone home for breakfast, or holding someone in prayer. Worshipping and ministry does not only take place in silence, or in a Meeting. As we read in Excerpt 3.20,

“The daily activities of our lives are ministry when they are rendered in the spirit of using the talents we have in the loving and unassuming service of the communities to which we belong...” Ottawa Monthly Meeting, 1990.

We may also come full of unbelief and noise. But still we come. The key preparation for Meeting is in the coming, again and again. Olga Ghosh describes this type of preparation in Excerpt 3.6 in 1965. She is drawn to the words of that man who cried out to Jesus long ago: ‘Lord, I believe. Help thou my unbelief.’ Ghosh adds:

“These words have for years been in my mind when I have come to Meeting. Many of us come week after week, waiting and hoping to find something—something intangible. Perhaps a revelation or a new inner feeling of peace and tranquillity. We try to compose our minds. We even try to pray—and nothing happens. The mind is full of noisy thoughts at the end of Meeting as much as at the beginning. The magic hour has passed and left us as empty spiritually as before. Nothing has ‘spoken to one’s condition’. Yet next Sunday we are back again. Why?The mere fact that we come, offering ourselves as we are, willing to wait for God for at least one hour...is perhaps all we have to give on any one Sunday....In fact, even a barren Meeting is probably better than no Meeting, as long as we can offer up that barrenness to God. The fact that we come is a beginning, and a beginning is better than no effort at all, for it does imply growth.”

How do Friends know when to speak?

All Friends are clergy, and every one may be called upon to speak. Traditionally vocal ministry, writes Betty Polster, “*has been seen as what God has given a particular person to share with the Meeting...it is God’s message for the Meeting.*” In Excerpt 3.22 by Richard Allen, 1998 writes:

“Yes, the silence does impose a discipline, but it is also the source of the prompting to speak...And when all advice and encouragement is done, what really matters is obedience to the inward prompting, whether it is to speak or to remain silent.”

But how do we know when to speak and what to say? How do we discern messages from the Spirit, compared to those of our own thoughts, or a movie we watched recently, or book we read? First, a little time regularly, every day if one can, for silence, prayer, reflection, and meditation is important preparation for worship. Second, there are questions to ask ourselves about when to speak, and when not, that I borrow from *The Island Friend*, Feb 1999.

Out of the silence, comes an image or idea or song that gradually evolves into a message. A Friend then asks herself if that message from the Spirit is for herself, or for others who are present. Wait. More going back into expectant silence. If the message persists, and gets stronger, then the Friend asks himself, is the message to be given now, and is he the right person to give it. More waiting. In a gathered Meeting, it may well be that another Friend is called upon to speak the same message you are sensing. When there is a strong sense that a message meets all these tests, and no one else has spoken that particular message you have received from the Spirit, and one is truly certain the message comes not from one’s ego, or because the Meeting is too quiet, or because there is just an internal pressure to find a platform to speak from, then the Friend waits some more, until propelled to his or her feet. Again one waits. And then speaks—briefly, clearly, and sits down.

Sometimes it takes a month, a year, or more before a Friend feels the time is right for a particular Ministry to be spoken aloud. Sometimes, a message just comes suddenly and loudly, and a Friend finds himself standing up, speaking, and quaking perhaps. Oftentimes, one is relieved or feels light after giving Ministry that has met these tests, and later, after worship, Friends may come and say ‘thanks for your Ministry’, or ‘it spoke to my condition.’

Friends are rarely certain that a message is from God, and one can hear spoken Ministry that is bewildering or as Betty Polster says, “That Ministry may not be meant for me”. But when Friends are faithful together in expectant waiting and practising the Presence, and willing to be listeners and occasionally a speaker, then we affirm our belief there is no end to Divine revelation. If revelation sometimes comes in the form of vocal ministry in worship, we speak the words we have been given, and let them go. As the words are of the Spirit, they are rarely written down. Friends may speak or quote Ministry that spoke to them, or simply say “that Friend speaks my mind”.

Very, very occasionally, a seasoned Friend puts a hand on a speaker or stands to say “we have heard your words”. More likely a seasoned Friend speaks quietly to a person at a later date about words that seem too much like a personal rant or political speech or particular argument or prepared talk that may best be spoken at another time or place, and not in worship.

What can we do to promote a “gathered” Meeting?

Thomas Kelly describes a “gathered” Meeting as the “*special times when an electric hush and solemnity and depth of power steal over worshippers.*” (Excerpt 3.5, 1940). Robert Barclay wrote long ago in 1678:

“When I came into the silent assemblies of God’s people, I felt a secret power among them, which touched my heart: and as I gave way unto it, I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up.” (Excerpt 1.69).

There is a sense of being completely alive, whole, limitless, freed, light, and a part of the whole. It may come rarely, and be present for only a moment. One may feel part of a miracle, as if present at a birth of a child, or when someone knows they have learned something new. George Gorman, 1982, in Excerpt 3.8 speaks of going deep into a “*still, quiet centre. At this point two things happen simultaneously. Each of us is aware of the unique value as an individual human being, and each of us is aware of our utter interdependence on one another.*”

To promote the possibilities of a gathered Meeting, whether in a moment of worship with two or three people, or on Sunday morning, or at Half Yearly, or at the large gatherings of Canadian Yearly Meeting, we prepare by our regular spiritual practices, our daily moments of silence, coming to Meeting “deep in Spirit” (Kelly). We hold ourselves and others in prayer, in the Light, in the expectant silence. When a Friend speaks, we hold them, and listen to where the words come from. Most of all, we let go of ourselves, our private concerns. We open the door to the Other, to the mystery of others and eternity.

Borg, a Christian pastor and writer, gives me a fresh understanding of being gathered through retelling the Bible story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Borg says Jesus acts: he knocks and calls Lazarus to come out. Lazarus does something too: he lets go of his hiding, his fears, his death, and comes to the door when the Spirit knocks on it. Lazarus opens the door, and goes forth. Sometimes it is for us to be as if we are Jesus, to knock on the doors of another person, and to be “that of God” calling forth the sad, bewildered, dead Lazarus in another person. Other times it is we who feel like Lazarus, and need to open the door when there is a knock.

Each of us, in our own way, comes to Meeting for Worship, prepared to be gathered forth back into life, into the wholeness of eternity, by calling forth others and by opening our door when there is a knock.

Three: Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business

By Gale Wills



There is much written about the Quaker practice of conducting their “church affairs” during a Meeting for Worship. It is stated simply in the discipline of London Yearly Meeting (which was used in Canadian Yearly Meeting before we started to build our own) in excerpt 3.43:

We see our meetings for church affairs not as business meetings preceded by a period of worship, but as “meetings for worship for business.” Ideally, the sacred and the secular are interwoven into one piece. Believing that all our business is brought before God for guidance, we deprecate all that may foster a party spirit or confrontation. We therefore seek for a spirit of unity in all our decision making.

Patricia Loring, whose thought provoking and challenging writings on the subject of discernment takes this a step farther in excerpt 1.58:

Discernment...is the capacity we exercise in a centred meeting for worship for the conduct of business to sense the right course for the meeting to take in complex or difficult circumstances.

As a Meeting for Worship, as an exercise in corporate discernment, it follows that the spoken words during a business meeting ideally should arise from a deep sense that it is what we are being led to say rather than simply following our usual human instincts to respond to an issue or make a political point. It is a form of vocal ministry that underlies the way in which we conduct ourselves in our Meetings with attention to business. (Bill Taber, p. 11)

A sense of the meeting.

A sense of the meeting, expressed in our minutes, is the record of our decisions. And this is the fruit of the sacred process described above. It is finding this commonly held sense of where we are led that lies at the heart of how we work together as Friends. Barry Morley, in excerpt 3.48 suggests that the practice of this process is a gift, a blessing of the Spirit:

In seeking the sense of the meeting, process is paramount....

*As you come to treasure sense of the meeting,
awareness of the Presence becomes part of you.*

You begin to take it with you. You are changed by it....

*[I]n Quaker business meeting, it is not decisions [we] respond to,
but a process and a Presence
through which [we] sense [our] joyful connection to one another.*

How we work together on those matters that require us to make decisions is part and parcel of our ability to come together as a worshipping and gifted community. It is integral to everything we do together and as Rufus Jones reminds us in excerpt 3.39, *The Quaker custom of “gathering the sense” was grounded in the religious life. If the religious life ran dry, the method became weak.*

Many Friends and attenders have assumed that our approach to making decisions mirrors the secular practice of consensus and that we strive for unanimous agreement. This is simply not our way. We strive for unity in the Spirit, which is neither agreement nor consensus. Jan Hoffman in excerpt 3.45 puts it bluntly:

The sense of the meeting is not unanimity. I have had the experience of concurring in a sense of meeting with which I disagreed, knowing it was the sense of the meeting. I have wept, wishing the meeting could go further than it clearly was ready to go, but it clearly was not. But my concurring with the sense of the meeting meant that I accepted my faith community where it was, for it is only in affirming clearly where we are that we can add more on.

If our business meetings are truly Meetings for Worship, it follows that they may also, upon occasion, give us a sense of “being covered”, of being “gathered in the Spirit.” When there is a difficult question before the Meeting and those present are centred and listening attentively to the Spirit, the outcome can be both unexpected and awesome. The sense of having been gathered is no different than what we sometimes feel during a spiritually moving regular Meeting for Worship.

Participation in Meeting for Worship for Business

Monthly Meetings (and sometimes Half-yearly and Yearly Meeting) have a number of members and regular attenders who do not attend business meetings. Deborah Haight gives us a gentle but firm nudge that more is expected of us in excerpt 3.55:

At the sessions of a Friends Meeting – be it Monthly, Quarterly, Half-Yearly or Yearly – as a member you fulfill your privileges and responsibilities yourself; or if unavoidably absent, it is with regret. If matters have been dealt with in your absence contrary to your view of the matter, you take upon yourself a share of the responsibility, and also you recognize that you are not in a position to unduly criticize because you were not present to take part in the divinely-guided decision-making process. The best one can do if unavoidably absent, is to be prayerfully present.

Yet attendance at business meetings is more than simply a duty. We may come to understand that there is a symbiotic relationship between the various forms of worship, be it our regular gatherings on Sunday or Wednesday or our coming together to attend to the affairs of our Meeting. It may be argued that our own spiritual journeys are enhanced by our attendance at business meeting and that the very health of the Meeting may be reflected in how we participate as a community. As such, participation in Meeting for Worship for Business becomes part and parcel of our own as well as our corporate spiritual journey.

Beyond the Monthly Meeting

A very helpful way to experience deeply grounded corporate discernment is to attend the sessions at Yearly Meeting, Friends General Conference or gatherings sponsored by Friends World Committee for Consultation. I would also include the myriad of committees and working groups that carry out the ongoing work of any central organization.

Many Friends find the practice of community discernment within the various wider Quaker bodies to be both an opportunity to learn much about the Quaker Way and a deeply moving spiritual experience. Those of us who are able to participate in these bodies, both small and large, can enhance our personal experience and return to enrich the primary worshipping community, the Monthly Meeting, of which we are all a part of.



Four: Quaker Testimonies

One purpose of this section of the Self Study Pamphlet is to explore Quaker experiences and understandings of the Canadian Quaker testimonies of Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Stewardship (SPICES). Marjory wrote up these notes after the March 21st 2016 educational session with Victoria Friends. Excerpts had been selected by Friends to discuss in groups that formed around a particular testimony. Inserted into boxes are examples of Advices and Queries that speak to particular testimonies.

The second purpose is to mention some of the Quaker processes that can be used to discern whether or not a concern about a wrong, or a desire to create something new, is a leading of the Light, laid upon a Friend or group, which requires action, regardless of the outcome.

**“Follow the gleam—why else born? “
Mother of Winifred Awmack, 1993, Excerpt 4.39**

What are testimonies?

Testimony is the Quaker word for actions and practices that affirm ‘there is that of god in everyone’ and ‘there is heaven on earth now’. As George Fox wrote in 1656 in Excerpt 4.1 of our *Canadian Faith and Practice*.

“Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them. Then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one, whereby in them ye may be a lesson, and make the witness of God in them to bless you. “

Testimonies are not creeds, ethical teachings, principles, or ideals, but ways of being and acting that imply deeply felt experiences and convictions. We may share these ways with persons who are not Quakers or never heard of the Religious Society of Friends. (See provocative book that Jeneanne Kallstrom introduced to me by Quaker minister Peter Gulley *Living the Quaker Way*).

For Quakers, testimonies are ‘faith-in-action’, rooted in personal or spiritual encounters with the Divine Light. Robert Griswold writes in Excerpt 4.4 that testimonies “*are the fruits of their spiritual foundation, not the foundation itself.*” Lorna Marsden says in Excerpt 4.6 :

“Our testimonies arise from our way of worship. Our way of worship evokes from deep within us at once an affirmation and a celebration, an affirmation of the reality of that Light which illumines the spiritual longing of humanity, and a celebration of the continual resurrection within us of the springs of hope and love; a sense that each of us is, if we will, a channel for a power that is both within us and beyond us.”

The specific names, nature, and expressions of the Quaker testimonies vary over time, and between countries and Meetings. In Canada, we now speak of the following testimonies:

Simplicity
 Peace
 Integrity

Community
 Equality
 Stewardship-Sustainability

The testimony on sustainability of the earth and our resources is an emerging one. Hopefully there will be more understanding and excerpts on it when the next generations of Canadian Friends revise the Canadian Faith and Practice. The Community Testimony is not specifically included in Chapter Four as it is not a stand-alone testimony. Community is implicit in all the testimonies, and is the basis of Quaker faith and practice, and can be considered the ‘foundational testimony’ according to Arnold Ranneris, who was a member of the committee that oversaw the production of our *Canadian Faith and Practice*.

Community Testimony in Advice and Query no. 18. How can we make the meeting a community in which each person is accepted and nurtured, and strangers are welcome? Seek to know one another in the things which are eternal, bear the burden of each other’s failings and pray for one another. As we enter with tender sympathy into the joys and sorrows of each other’s lives, ready to give help and to receive it, our meeting can be a channel for God’s love and forgiveness.

In Chapter Two, on “Faithful Lives”, Arnold states, it is clear that Friends live in the context of the Quaker community, and in other communities. Chapter Three, named “The Meeting Community”, emphasizes that worshipping in silence and making decisions, Quakers create and test community, by members of that community. So too, in Chapter 5, “The Lifelong Journey”, a wonderful chapter with inspiring and comforting excerpts that may speak to us deeply at different times of our lives, we see Friends living their lives as members of various intimate, spiritual, working, tiny, and large communities. Living as a Quaker means being mindful and committed to the spirit-led relationships in communities.

The Testimony of Simplicity

Simplicity is not about a set of rules or doing without or conforming to a particular Quaker way of living, such as becoming a ‘granola head’ or never using fossil-fuel to ride in a car, as one Quaker Friend wondered--unless that is what one feels called to do. Ann Kriebel in 1984 writes in Excerpt 4.40

True simplicity should connote not poverty but, rather, a richness of spirit, a joy in living, the nurturing of creativity, sensitivity to the natural world, and love for all its creatures. As an expression of this love, this true simplicity, we must then, too, commit ourselves to building a more equitable world—a world in which this simplicity may thrive and be enjoyed by everyone.”

Thus, simplicity is of the spirit, using God as a guide in daily living. As Thomas Kelly stated in 1941, Excerpt 4.43, simplicity is about living life from the Centre, “*a life of unhurried peace and power.*”

Simplicity Testimony in Advice and Query No. 41: Try to live simply. A simple lifestyle freely chosen is a source of strength. Do not be persuaded into buying what you do not need or cannot afford. Do you keep yourself informed about the effects your style of living is having on the global economy and environment.

Living simply is necessary so others can simply live, as the proverb states, meaning a society with equality and adequate means for everyone to live in dignity, without oppression, involuntary poverty, or forced labour. John Woolman wrote years ago 1763, in Excerpt 4.41: *“Every degree of luxury of what kind so ever, and every demand for money inconsistent with Divine order, hath some connection with unnecessary labour.”* The Quaker testimony of simplicity is now being extended to the whole of creation, as Keith Helmuth urges us to consider in Excerpt 4.69, written in 1989. Ask ourselves how are we enhancing and damaging the earth as we are *“being joined by a new experience of solidarity—solidarity with the whole sacred system of Earth Process, ecosphere solidarity.”*

In Excerpt 4.52 by Ursula Franklin, 2006, we read:

Simple daily ways of witness can open. For instance, I have a special wish for the Society of Friends. Let’s have a new testimony against the use of acronyms. It seems to me that acronyms are the very device that plain speech tried to avoid. Acronyms are time-saving devices that discriminate between the ins and the outs, those who know and those who don’t matter because they don’t know. We should always introduce and define acronyms if we cannot avoid using them. It is serious issues and also a good way of getting into conversation with people about Friends testimonies.

Peace Testimony.

This is one of the oldest testimonies associated with Quakers. In the Declaration to Charles II, in 1660, Quakers declared, quoted in Excerpt 4.21. (See <http://esr.earlham.edu/dqe/index.html> for full text of “Declaration from the Harmless and innocent People of God called Quakers”).

We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretence whatsoever. And this is our testimony to the whole world. The spirit of Christ, by which we are guided, is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing as evil and again to move unto it; and we do certainly know, and to testify to the world, that the spirit of Christ, which leads us into all Truth, will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdoms of this world.

One of the excerpts chosen in March 2016 by the Victoria Friends discussing this old, fruitful Quaker testimony of peace was 4.10 written by Vivien Abbott.

*As I thought of the sufferings of our brothers and sisters in this world,
[and] of the widespread military and economic aggression of which we are all a part...
I have come to the conclusion
that we should be asking ourselves in the words of Saul of Tarsus,
“Lord, what wilt Thou have me do?”*

That challenging phrase “What wilt Thou have me do?” suggests there is a need for individual inner transformation to live in peace, even while not knowing the outcome of our actions and words. One path is by accepting our own fears and those of others, while learning compassion from reactions to situations that arouse fear and anger. And that can include looking to see what there is of god in politicians we oppose, and persons warring with others.

Another path is to understand what Hugh Campbell-Brown said in 1970 (Excerpt 3.40) about the creative sources of peace.

“Our Society has always had a genius for turning stress and turmoil into creative tension. Strongly held opposing views tied together by trust and love are truly creative.”

Peace Testimony in Advice and Query No. 31. We are called to live “in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars.” Do you faithfully maintain our testimony that war and the preparation for war are inconsistent with the spirit of Christ? Search out whatever in your own way of life may contain the seeds of war. Stand firm in our testimony, even when others commit or prepare to commit acts of violence, yet always remember that they too are children of God.

Advice and Query No. 32. Bring into God’s light those emotions, attitudes and prejudices in yourself which lie at the root of destructive conflict, acknowledging your need for forgiveness and grace. In what ways are you involved in the work of reconciliation between individuals, groups and nations?

Integrity Testimony

Elsewhere there are testimonies called Truth or Honesty, but in Canada, Quakers speak of the testimony of integrity. This testimony is rooted in the history that plain declarations and simple words of Quakers can be believed, in all settings, whether in business, the courts, family discussions, or in private matters. Oaths or swearing to creeds are not required for words or actions to be believed. Integrity, however, is more than constant, credible accuracy. It is the faithful practice of listening to the promptings of both love and truth, and acting from a quiet, integrated centre.

There may be many sides or truths to a situation as well as complex facets to a person. How can one know what is a truthful and loving response in a particular moment of time? The excerpt 4.15 chosen by Victoria Friends spoke to the reality where integrity lies, when truth and love may be in conflict. Kenneth C. Barnes wrote in 1972 about the challenging decisions faced by Quakers under military occupation in Europe as well as for those in the United States in the Underground Railroad helping escaping slaves.

“Integrity is one of the virtues for which Quakers in the past have been praised. It is a quality worth having, but it is doubtful it can be reached by self-conscious effort or by adherence to a principle. Integrity is a condition in which a person’s response to a real situation can be trusted: the opposite of a condition in which he would be moved by opportunist or self-seeing impulses breaking up his unity as a whole being. This condition of trust is different from the recognition that he will always be kind or always tell the truth. The integrity of some Dutch Friends I have met showed itself during the war in their willingness to tell lies to save their Jewish friends from the Gestapo or from starvation.”

Integrity Testimony in Advices and Queries

No. 1 Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life.

Another Integrity Advice and Query. No. 37. Are you honest and truthful in all you say and do? Do you maintain strict integrity in business transactions and in your dealings with individuals and organizations? Do you use money and information entrusted to you with discretion and responsibility? Taking oaths implies a double standard of truth; in choosing to affirm instead, be aware of the claim to integrity that you are making.

And the Integrity Testimony in Advice and Query. No. 38. If pressure is brought upon you to lower your standard of integrity, are you prepared to resist it? Our responsibilities to God and our neighbour may involve us in tasking unpopular stands. Do not let the desire to be sociable, or the fear of seeming peculiar, determine your decisions.

Equality

As with the previous testimonies, equality too seems to be inside the other testimonies. It is foundational to all Quaker faith-in-practice, rooted in bringing to life ‘that of god’ in everyone, and creating heaven on earth. Huge inequalities and hierarchies were the reality for everyone in the days of George Fox and Margaret Fell. Thus, the testimony that women were equal in the Spirit was revolutionary in the 17th century.

Long before other religious groups did so, Quaker women gave ministry, made decisions, read and published epistles, taught in schools, and went on travelling ministries, leaving husbands and others to care for children – powerful practices that testify there is ‘that of god’ in everyone. As Margaret Fell, the ‘mother’ of Quakers who married George Fox after her first husband died, declared in 1666, Excerpt 4.48.

“Those that speak against the power of the Lord, and the Spirit of the Lord speaking in a woman, simply by reason of her sex or because she is a woman, not regarding the Seed and the Spirit and Power that speaks in her, such speak against Christ and his Church.”



The full equality of female Quakers in daily matters and in Meetings for Worship for Business, however, took time and struggle, and did not come to pass until late in the 19th century. In their small group session, the Victoria Friends spoke of the continuing revolutionary nature of equality testimony, and the continuing ‘hunger for a new world order’, even in apparently progressive places such as academe in democratic countries.

Advice & Query on the Testimony of Equality.

No. 17. Do you respect that of God in everyone though it may be expressed in unfamiliar ways or be difficult to discern? Each of us has a particular experience of God and each must find the way to be true to it. When words are strange or disturbing to you, try to sense where they come from and what has nourished the lives of others. Listen patiently and seek the truth which other people's opinions may contain for you. Avoid hurtful criticism and provocative language. Do not allow the strength of our convictions to betray you into making statements or allegations that are unfair or untrue. Think it possible that you may be mistaken.

In the small groups devoted to exploring the testimony of equality, a Victorian Friend read out loud the long excerpt 4.51 written by Jack Ross, a B.C. Quaker jailed for refusing to not return to a blockade on the logging road at Perry Ridge, B.C. This Friend spoke of how much it meant to read an excerpt written by a man he knew and campaigned with. The testimony of equality was practised in prison, Ross wrote, when he treated guards and prisoners as people, with pleasantness, and included a guard, who was particularly hard and uncommunicative with prisoners, in a game of basketball. Ross concludes: "*Soon we were just a couple of kids again, shooting baskets at the school playground after hours. He got cheers too, maybe his first as a guard. It was almost worth those weeks in prison for just those few moments.*"

Quaker processes to discern concerns and leadings regarding testimonies.

Quakers do not *believe in* testimonies. They *experience* them, and try to live them, in regular worship and daily life. Sometimes, they experience a call to take special measures to turn a concern about a situation into a leading, a calling, that they feel is laid upon them. A testimony then becomes something they cannot not do. This may happen in small or large ways; once in a lifetime, or often.

The testimonies, however, and the related specific advices and queries are not a "call to increased activity by each individual Friend" (Advices and Queries, *Canadian Faith and Practice* p.180). Not everyone can, will, or should take action on every testimony. Nor is there an expectation or obligation to 'work harder' to be a better, more active, testifying Quaker.

**Advice and Query no. 28 asks of Friends:
“Attend to what love requires of you, which may not be great busyness.”**

Rather, Quakers accept that everyone has different gifts, and personal situations vary, and must be considered. Friends “maintain that expressions of faith must be related to personal experience” (p. 180). It is the subjective, intimate, personal understanding that is key to practising faith-in-action, not obedience to hierarchal proclamations or Meeting traditions.

But, how do Quakers come to understand when a concern for a problem or a desire for a change, is to be turned into a leading - something they can and must do, or be. Something that is laid on them by the Divine? How do Meetings support the quiet inner voice or consuming fire of individual encounters with the Spirit, and the ongoing order required by communities of people?

Early on, George Fox, Margaret Fell, and other Friends listened and talked in thousands of short and long conversations with individuals, and in small groups about what ‘the Truth called them to do’. And met in worship, sometimes for days, as well as writing regular long letters, epistles, and pamphlets exploring the specifics of a concern and whether way opened to move forward, to speak, to endure. Still today, Friends test whether a concern embodies a Quaker testimony is through worship and expectant waiting, and conversations with seasoned Friends. As well as sorting out thoughts and feelings by writing emails, letters, texts, Facebook posts, and proposals.

For example, Friends who started mid-week worship at Fern Street Victoria Meeting House, and those who initiated monthly Soup and Stories and Singing for Worship, wished to add to a sense of community and peace in new small ways in the Meeting. When the concern felt stronger after time and conversation with seasoned Friends, and after the way opened practically that the one or two Friends could follow up steadfastly, then the concern became a leading.

In another example, Linda Taffs spoke in the Quaker Session on March 21st of her concern about Palestinians living in their homeland, as an open prison guarded by the people of Israel. She talked with others, read, waited, and turned down an opportunity to go on one of blockade running ships to Palestine, as the time and way did not open for her. She continued for months to wait, worship, look, and listen.

Upon a Friend's suggestion, Linda took a day to visit Betty Polster, who spoke of her various peace-making visits with people of Israel and Palestine. That opened up new possibilities for Linda. Another opportunity arose, this time to join a peace mission, as a videographer, to visit Occupied Palestine, in December 2014, to help witness the experiences of both Israelis and Palestinians who had to live with the wall that divided them, and the violence that surrounded them on a daily basis. Linda was encouraged to submit a proposal for funding to Canadian Yearly Meeting, and to her own Meeting. With help she did so, and was warmly supported, with words, letters, and some funding.

Ways had opened, and she said she felt lighter now that her concern had become a leading. Friends and family committed to specific ways of supporting her, including holding her in the Light during her journey, including the specific times she had to go through checkpoints. Linda reports that the trip changed her. Linda continues to testify to the need for peace and equality of both peoples in Palestine, with her films, talks, and hosting people from Israel in her home.

There are other Quaker ways to discern if a concern is a Quaker testimony, and whether it is laid upon a person to take action, such as service on the Education and Outreach Committee, or as Clerk of Meeting. Or whether a concern points to a new service. The Meeting itself, or the Ministry and Council, or a Nominating Committee, may recommend a small committee of three Friends to gather and help someone seek clarity and clearness, sometimes named a Clearness Meeting.

Or the Meeting as a whole may meet, and thresh out a direction, as Victoria Friends did a decade ago about selling the Meeting House. The Property Committee explored the pros and cons of several options around the property and land, in light of the testimonies and stewardship. After a report was written, summarized, and distributed widely, a day-long Threshing Meeting was held in Duncan for all Friends and attenders on the island. Unity was reached on one direction alone: to not sell the building, designed as Quaker Meeting House in 1913. Unity was strong, and beyond the varied reasons of stewardship of finances; continuity of history and community; the peace and equality testimonies; and the emerging 'unity of creation'.

As the years unfolded thereafter, small groups of Friends and neighbours were led to refurbish the Meeting House, bringing forth the integrity of its simple Arts and Crafts design. Others led the Meeting in renovating the Resident Friends' apartment. Still other Friends turned their concerns about ecology into a leading that transformed the gardens and property into ecological preserves with native, drought resistant plants, tree guilds, and space for neighbours to come together in unity with creation, outside of the heavily built-up space.

For specific information on processes used in large and small Quaker meetings to test concerns we can read further into the document “Organization and Procedure”, approved and published in 2002 by Canadian Yearly Meeting. This document is available in text and online at quaker.ca

We end this section on exploration of Quaker testimonies by reading the last part of Excerpt 3.37 from a letter written by Deborah Fisch.

“Remind yourselves often what you already know, that there is no opposition between those calling the Meeting to grow deeper spiritually to know God and Christ, [the Light and the Ineffable] more intimately (the mystics and contemplatives) and those calling the Meeting to put faith into action (those calling for the Meeting to be active in peace and justice work.) The roots and fruits are both important to survival and dependent on each other. If either is allowed to wither, the tree (faith community) will be in danger of dying away. We have all been given different gifts and we are called to use those gifts in various ways. And the greatest gift which we have all been given is Love.”



Five: Quaker Advices and Queries

This section briefly explores **Advices and Queries**, found in Chapter Six of *Canadian Faith and Practice*, and online at quaker.ca. We also read them in what is affectionately known as “the little Red Book”. A wonderful audio recording of the 42 Advices and Queries adopted by Canadian Yearly Meeting has been prepared by Catherine Novak, and is available <https://soundcloud.com/catherine-novak/advices-queries>.

“So it is for the comfort and discomfort of Friends that these advices and queries are offered, with the hope that we may all be more faithful and find deeper joy in God’s service.”

Introduction to the British and Canadian Advices and Queries (1994).

The *Advices and Queries* nourish the spiritual seeking and decisions of individuals, and help in the right ordering of the Meeting community. They are not commandments, creeds, nor a “call to increased activity by each individual Friend, but a reminder of the insights of the Society.” (Introduction p.1)

Advices and Queries have changed in tone and use over the centuries, and vary by country. How we read and use *Advices and Queries* may also change in our own individual lives. Sometimes one *Advices and Queries* speaks to us; at another time, those same words bring out a new understanding. Although we may attempt to answer a query, mostly Quakers mull over the words, and the inspiration behind the words in a particular advice or query.

There is a favourite Quaker children’s story written by Clifford Pfeil about a mouse named Benjamin who lives in the Meeting House. Benjamin likes the food that drops from the tables when the humans eat, talk, and laugh after sitting ever so long quietly. Benjamin is learning about these people from Emily his Quaker human friend. One day Benjamin asks about are these things called queries or questions, and how does one find the answers to them. Emily stoutly answers:

**“The question is not to answer!
It’s to think about.
It’s too important to just answer.”**

John Punshon describes how the compilation and distribution of queries, extracts, advices came to pass as part of “stating what Friends are committed to”, in his book *Portrait in Grey: A short history of the Quakers* (1984, 2006 2nd ed, pp. 158). Both abstracts and queries are revised every 50 to 75 years by groups of experienced Friends, with contributions by many, helping thereby to bring cohesion and consistent guidance in an accessible form. The 42 *Advices & Queries* that the Canadian Quakers currently use had originally been written and approved by the British Yearly Meeting in 1995, and were approved by Canadian Yearly Meeting in 1997.

In Wikipedia, a query is defined in several ways, including “a question used for reflection and spiritual exercises among members of the Society of Friend”, cited in May 2016. The following links illustrate various publications of queries in Faith and Practice books by Australians and British Quakers that exist, and are the internet, such as [Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's Faith and Practice, which contains a set of queries](#). [Australia Yearly Meeting Questions for all Quakers \(2008\) \(.pdf\)](#). It is the intent of our Canadian Yearly Meeting to upload the entire Canadian Faith and Practice to the internet at quaker.ca. As of spring 2017, various excerpts of each chapter are on currently uploaded, as is the entire Chapter Six that is all our 42 Advices and Queries.

As one reads, studies, and meditates on a particular Advice and Query, it may help to see that there is an order to them which corresponds to excerpts particular chapters in our 2011 *Canadian Faith and Practice*, as listed in the following table.

Number of our 42 Canadian <i>Advices and Queries</i>	Number of Chapters in <i>Canadian Faith and Practice</i>
No. 1 to No. 7	In Chapter One: Experiencing the Spirit
No. 8 to No. 16	In Chapter Two: The Meeting Community
No. 17 to No. 30	In Chapter Five: The Lifelong Journey
No. 31 to No. 42	In Chapter Four: Testimonies

Six: Questions, Resources, and Note on Authors

Questions for Self-Study

1. What text or action have you experienced as a revelation, or Divine Nudge, or a Loving Force, that prompted you to consider living differently—in however small or invisible a way?
2. What brings you to Quakers or what keeps you attending Meetings of the Religious Society of Friends?
3. Explore the four Quaker expressions of faith woven by Ruth Walmsley, 1997 into Excerpt 1.65 of Chapter One of Canadian Faith and Practice. *“I can count on one hand the number of times in my life when I have experienced what I would consider to be a true leading of the Spirit. In each case, these leadings have been characterized by a compulsion to act, fears that I would not be able to live up to what was being required of me, and a deeper sense that wasn't being asked to do this entirely on my own strength. In any case, I knew that a decision not to act upon my conscience would be like a small death, a failure to allow myself to grow and discover in myself new strengths and courage.”*
4. Examine the four Quaker faith expressions in excerpt 1.15 Chapter One of Canadian Faith and Practice written by American Quaker Theologian and mystic, Thomas Kelly, who wrote in 1941. *“Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Centre, a speaking Voice, to which we may continuously return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto Itself. Yielding to these persuasions gladly committing ourselves in body and soul, utterly and completely to the Light within, is the beginning of true life. It is a dynamic centre, a creative Life that presses to birth within us. It is a Light Within which illumines the face of God and casts new shadows and new glories upon the face of men. It is a seed stirring to life if we do not choke it. It is the Shekinah of the soul, the Presence in the midst. Here is the slumbering Christ, stirring to be awakened, to become the soul we clothe in earthly form and action. And He is within us all.”*

5. Take about five minutes for silent reflection and prayer to reflect on a Meeting for Worship that was meaningful to you. The Meeting for Worship could have been short, with two or three people, or the longer Mid Week or Sunday Meeting with more folks here in Victoria or elsewhere worshippers in attendance. Or it could be the worship in Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business.
 What 'happened' during this Meeting? What did you or others "do"? What was happening spiritually?
6. Reflect on what Deborah Haight on p. 70 writes about the fundamental importance of not just going to Meeting for Worship, but also living the worship meeting. She says: *"we say we go to Meeting; and we are the Meeting. In the first sense we assemble and disperse; in the second we live, day in day out, acknowledged by, known to one another. For the first usage, we need a calendar, clocks, and maps; for the second, we need to be named; we need to know who we are, and whose we are; we need to know by whom we are gathered."*
7. How can we reach out to encourage as many as possible to participate in our business meetings?
8. What Quaker testimony calls out to you these days that you wish to understand more, and respond to in daily living?
9. What advice and query in Chapter Six of *Canadian Faith and Practice*, a duplicate of the Little Red Book, inspires you these days?
10. What advice and query challenges or battles you?

Resources Consulted for this Self-Study Guide

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- Taber, Bill. *The Mind of Christ: Bill Taber on Meeting for Business*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet #406, 2010.
- Walton, Marty. *The Meeting Experience: Practicing Quakerism in Community*. Canadian Quaker Pamphlet Series, #45, 1997.

Note on Authors of Self-Study Pamphlet on *Canadian Quaker Faith and Practice*

Marjory Reitsma-Street and Gale Wills have doctorates from the University of Toronto, and are retired Professors in Social Work. Gale has served as clerk in local and national Quaker committees, while Marjory has concentrated on music and other service close to home. Catherine Novak is currently on the Canadian Yearly Meeting Publications and Communications Committee; in addition to mothering, she is working in digital marketing and communications, having recently completed a Masters in Interdisciplinary Studies. Pashta MaryMoon, has an Honours degree in World Religions; and as a Member of the Communications Committee of the Vancouver Island Monthly Meeting, completed an edit of this Self Study Pamphlet in 2021 and prepared its layout for uploading to the VIMM website. Photographs are taken by Marjory, except for Meetinghouse.

