

Introduction to Quakers and Friends Ways

Session 1 - The Experience of Early Friends

Introduction

In the introduction to Canadian Yearly Meeting's Faith and Practice, the following quote refers to the "Letter from the Elders Gathered at Balby, 1656". (See Appendix A, Faith and Practice of Canadian Yearly Meeting for the full text.)

"This epistle comprises a set of expectations that were considered to be necessary for the growing new movement. The fundamental elements of their advice are still vital to our practice although three and a half centuries have passed:

- *a practical organization of meetings for worship held in the right spirit;*
- *pastoral care;*
- *responsible family life;*
- *responsible corporate life, including careful registering of marriages, births and deaths;*
- *social responsibilities in one's employment and public life*

A living tradition grows, however, retaining the best of its past while adapting to the needs of the present. The Yearly Meetings that were formed as time passed, in faraway lands settled by Friends as well as in Britain, felt it wise to provide written guidance for faithful living in new and unforeseen situations. They included not only advice about dealing with outward behaviour but also counsel aimed at nurturing the inner life and fostering spiritual growth.

For a Book of Discipline to be useful in promoting learning, it must reflect the attitudes, experiences and challenges of a given body of Friends at a particular time and place. That is the aim of this Canadian Faith and Practice book."

We will be using both CYM's Faith and Practice and Organization and Procedure as primary resources for this course. In our first session, we will explore some of the history, the experiences of early Friends, and reflect on what we might learn from them.

Agenda (Lesson Plan)

1. Worship – 10 Minutes
2. Welcome and Introductions - Participants introduce themselves, giving their names, and responding to the following questions - 30 minutes
 - a. What first brought you to Quaker Meeting?
 - b. What keeps you here?
 - c. What do you most want from this course? (It may be helpful to take notes of these responses to guide the learning over the 6 sessions and ensure learners' needs are met)
3. Take turns reading of the passages on pages 2 – 5 – 20 minutes (Facilitator may want to vary the ways that this is done)
 - a. What questions come up for you from the readings? What was surprising to you?
4. Lessons from early Friends (split into pairs or threes if a larger group) - 30 minutes
 - a. Which of the readings speaks to you right now?
 - b. How do you take meaning from it for your own life?
 - c. What else might we learn from those who were Friends before us?
5. Worship Sharing (30 minutes)

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The Beginnings

"The middle of the seventeenth century in England was a period of religious questioning and social upheaval. Like many other restless Christian seekers, George Fox (1624-1691), the founder of the Society of Friends, became dissatisfied with the ceremonials, creeds and practices of the existing churches. After growing up in a devout family, Fox left home at nineteen and wandered for several years, questioning his Bible, ministers, and anyone who would listen, but remained unsatisfied. Finally, as he later recorded in his Journal:

"when all my hopes in ... all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, Oh then, 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."

The faith of John's gospel he "knew experimentally"—that "the true light which enlightens every man was coming into the world"—even in his day. To him this was a new revelation. Yet his finding re-emphasized Luther's priesthood of all believers, and drew unconsciously from the accumulated experience of saints and mystics. Although the Puritans also re-emphasized the power of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of people, Fox believed that his contemporaries were unwilling to trust the Seed, which was another name he used for the indwelling light. He knew from experience, confirmed by intensive study of his Bible, that this Light or Spirit is the source of unity, joining the good in each of us to our neighbour's good, and also identifying the evil revealed by hypocrisy." Organization and Procedure Canadian Yearly Meeting Section 1.1

"Friends spoke both with their words and with their lives. To a degree unusual for their times they practised equality of the sexes, equality of status, equality of ages; simplicity of clothing, speech and way of life; peace, in withdrawing from the army and in settling disputes among themselves. Suspected by the Stuarts as subversives, they published their first peace testimony in 1660, at the Restoration. These testimonies, inherited chiefly from the Anabaptist wing of Protestantism, they defended by quoting from the Bible. For this behaviour large numbers were jailed, whipped, branded, fined and deported. Penalties were uneven according to the temper of the judges and the locality, and more severe after the Church of England was re-established under Charles II." Organization and Procedure Canadian Yearly Meeting Section 1.1

North America

"In 1682 William Penn established a colony in Pennsylvania as a "holy experiment". One of his first acts was to meet with the Leni Lenape First Nation at Shackamaxon where a famous treaty of peace and friendship was signed. Because of their mutual respect, Quakers and Aborigines lived in peace in Pennsylvania for over 70 years. Colonial Rhode Island Friends, with William Penn and the Quaker leaders in the Jerseys and Pennsylvania,

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represent the best of political Quakerism. They were willing to hold power in order to move the state nearer to the Truth. Penn advised: "Keep the helm through the storm if you would steer the ship toward the harbour."

During the eighteenth century, Friends were only one of many religious communities that settled in America. Following Friends' testimonies such as simplicity, refusal to take oaths, and the peace testimony became difficult while mixing with the "world's people" and the "world's governments". To counteract this, Friends partially withdrew from participation in government, some Quaker magistrates resigned rather than administer oaths, and Pennsylvania Friends resigned from government in 1756 rather than administer tax money for use in the French and Indian War.

Contact with Aboriginal peoples and African peoples held in slavery in America led to the development of the first new testimonies based on the principle of equality. Progress was uneven and slow until the 1750's, when John Woolman began his mission to Aboriginal peoples and more especially to Quaker slaveholders and slave traders. With Anthony Benezet and others he aroused Friends' conscience until slavery and the slave trade were abolished in the Society in 1787. These concerns have continued, although broadening awareness of new implications has been painfully slow.

Education has been important to Friends. The William Penn Charter School was established in 1689, followed by other Friends schools in the next hundred years in Rhode Island, New York and Pennsylvania. Surrounded by different Protestant and Catholic sects, Friends tried to maintain their identity by laying down strict rules for their members, discouraging fashionable dress, rejecting activities in arts and music, and forbidding Quakers to "marry out". Unlike the seventeenth century when there were energetic activities to convince the wider population of Friends' beliefs, in the eighteenth century Friends were content to leave the rest of the world alone, to be separate." Organization and Procedure Canadian Yearly Meeting Section 1.2

"By the opening of the nineteenth century, two divergent tendencies became apparent among American Friends. Both had roots in early Quaker thought but had subsisted together without seriously disturbing the unity of the Society. One, eventually identified with the followers of Elias Hicks (1747-1830), was associated with ideas of political democracy and stressed the Inward Light as the basis of salvation rather than the atonement made by Christ on the cross. Accordingly, when Hicksites referred to Christ as their saviour, they meant the Christ within rather than the Christ of history. The other was a renewed interest in Evangelical Christianity, which centres upon the meaning and influence of events in Christian history and rests heavily on Biblical authority as understood by leading ministers. Both reformist and evangelical trends reflected influences dominant in contemporary Protestant thought. Fortunately in England these tendencies produced only the small Beaconite separation. The tension between the two American Quaker groups, however, grew steadily more severe until in 1827 a separation took place in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Similar separations followed in some of the American meetings, all the groups continuing to claim the title of Religious Society of Friends.

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Canada

During the first half of the nineteenth century there was a westward and northward movement of Quakers from the east coast to the Old North West, Ontario, Iowa, Kansas, Oregon and California. Arthur Garratt Dorland, the historian of the Religious Society of Friends in Canada, has written: "The migration of Friends to Upper Canada was simply the fringe of this great westward movement of which those who came to this Province constituted the merest fragment." The establishment of Quaker settlements in Canada was by pioneering emigrants from America but not, as is often assumed, by loyalists in the sense of United Empire Loyalists. The latter were active in their support and allegiance to the King's party while the former, as was indicated above, must necessarily have been neutral as they remained accredited members of their parent Meetings."

Organization and Procedure Canadian Yearly Meeting Section 1.3

A United Yearly Meeting in Canada

The desire for unity was also stimulated in 1928 when Genesee Yearly Meeting (General Conference) and Canada Yearly Meeting (Five Years Meeting) held their annual meeting in joint and concurrent sessions to coincide with a similar joint meeting held at the same time by the two parent branches of the New York Meetings on the one hundredth anniversary of the Great Separation of 1828. Meanwhile other straws in the current gave clear indication of the direction in which Canadian Friends were going. In 1933 a number of Conservative Young Friends attended Camp NeeKauNis for the first time. From that time on Young Friends began to take an increasingly important part in the movement towards union. Young Friends, having worshipped, worked and played together at Camp NeeKauNis over the years, were not aware of any significant differences which should keep them apart. While the Second World War was grinding slowly toward its final phase, an important step was taken toward an organic union of Canadian Friends when, in 1944, the Canada Yearly Meeting (Conservative) decided to join the other two Yearly Meetings at Pickering College in joint and concurrent sessions. A Committee on Closer Affiliation appointed to consider the question reported in 1954 that, since "unity has been a growing power over the years of our meeting together, we now accept the desire of Friends for a United Yearly Meeting in Canada....We are now prepared to proceed with ways and means whereby this may be accomplished." When the minute recording this decision was accepted, the Committee was further charged "to bring recommendations the following year for a basis on which to proceed as one Yearly Meeting."

"Growth of affection and familiarity among members working on common projects makes it hard to recall today the nineteenth century divisions. The accepted variety of outlook in the Canadian Yearly Meeting is the outward embodiment of inner unity. As Friends draw closer to each other they are drawn closer to God." Organization and Procedure Canadian Yearly Meeting Section 1.5

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"What is it that makes our Yearly Meeting's Quaker experience distinctive? Consider, first, who the Canadian Quakers are and where they came from — that is, their roots, in both a geographical and a theological sense. The Quaker settlers who began arriving in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as pioneers, moving northwards from the newly born United States, were members of established American Meetings, Meetings that would soon be suffering the disruptions and hurts of the unhappy Separations. They brought with them the doctrinal orientations of the Meetings with which they were affiliated as well as the usages detailed in their own Books of Disciplines.

In the twentieth century many small rural communities in Canada, such as those which Quakers had settled, began losing their populations in a general movement of urbanization. Also, especially after World War II, an influx of Friends from England and other European countries contributed yet another back- ground tradition. These arrivals tended to settle in cities, giving further impetus to the start of a new Meeting, often centred around a university. Such embryo Meetings might grow by attracting newcomers with no Quaker background at all. Today a large proportion of Friends in Canada have joined the Society by conviction, as adults; relatively few have grown up in Quaker families and Quaker communities.

It should, therefore, come as no surprise that the writings collected in a Canadian Faith and Practice express different ways of understanding the Quaker faith and, in particular, different points along the Christian-Universalist continuum. The extracts should be read in the same way that we listen to vocal ministry, even when it does not match our own beliefs. Rather than rejecting a message outright, we can welcome it as a means of testing the strength and validity of our own convictions and as a way of enlarging our vision. Nor should it be surprising that, in this collection, there seems to be a wide gap in time between the foundational writings of the first Quakers in the seventeenth century, mainly in England, and the written offerings of Friends in Canada, where the first Meetings were not established until the 1800s. Faith and Practice of Canadian Yearly Meeting – Introduction, Page 3.

References for those who wish further resources:

*Canadian Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice (The Lowe-Martin Group – 2011)
– Chapter 1 – Experiencing the Spirit: Our Faith, Sections 1.1 – 1.12 :
Historic Testimonies*

Organization and Procedure, Canadian Yearly Meeting (Available as a PDF – [click here](#)) Section 1 – Historical Outline

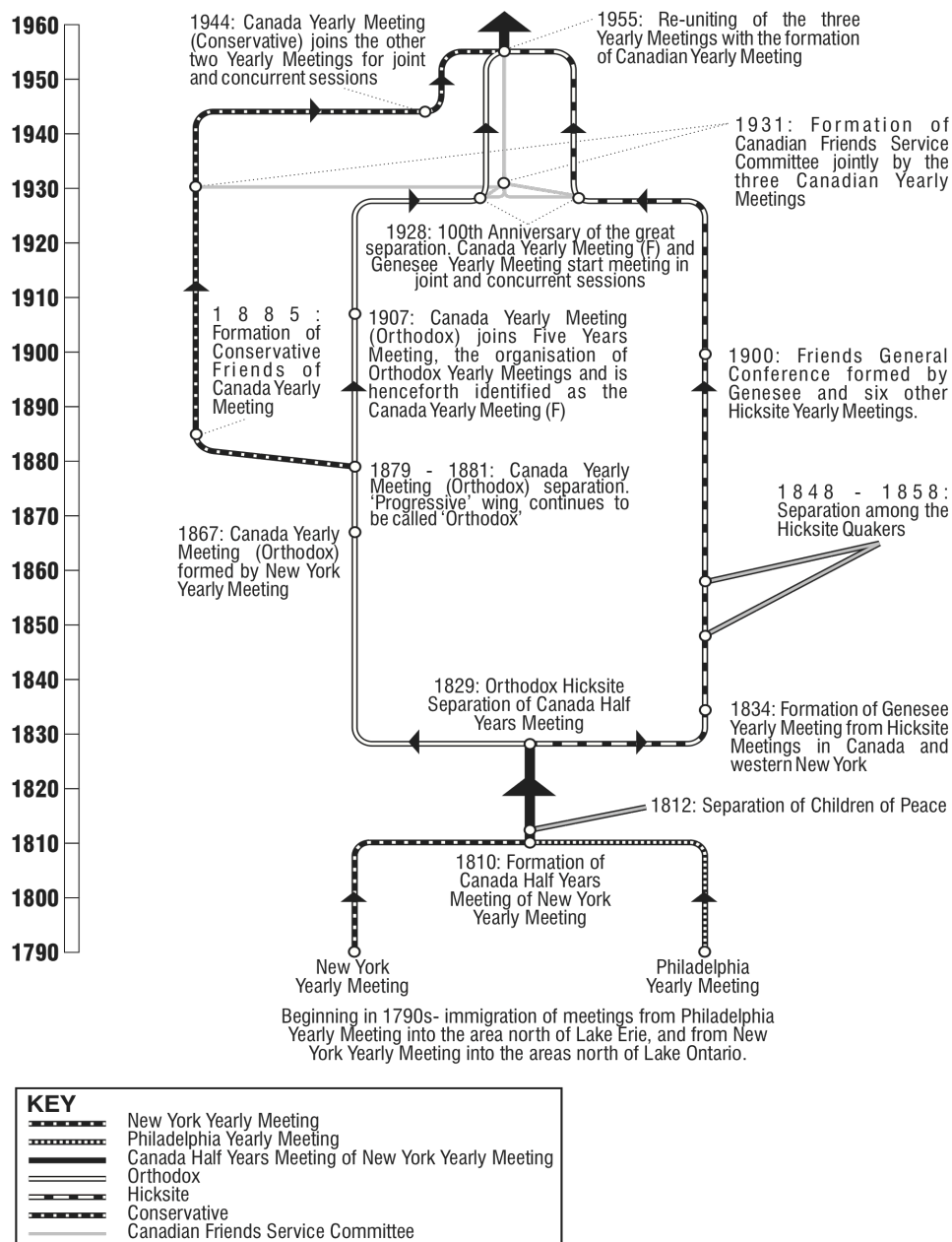
Howard Brinton, (Historical Update By Margaret Hope Bacon), Friends For 350 Years, Pendle Hill 2002

*Elaine Bishop Quakers in Canada – A Flow Chart of division and re-uniting.
(attached)*

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Quakers in Canada

A flow chart of division and re-uniting
1790 - 1960



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