

Introduction to Quakers and Friends Ways **Session 6 - The Meeting Community – Living the Spiritual Community**

Introduction

In 2006, Deborah Fisch, wrote the following to Toronto Monthly Meeting, as quoted in our Faith and Practice. As we spend time together in this last session, you are invited to consider what it means to you to be part of this community of Friends.

"We have been in danger of forgetting that we have also been given faith communities in which to test what it is we believe we are hearing, to share our experiences and learn from each other, to give each other encouragement, courage to act when called, and wisdom to know when we are not called to act. We have been given community to comfort us when we mourn, to give us a place of rest and safety when we are afraid, challenge us when we have grown complacent or misstepped, and celebrate with us when we are faithful. And our meeting communities can do this because we have come to know each other, as Friends of old would say, in that which is eternal. We have been intentional in risking to share of the Spirit with each other, to spend time and really listen to each other, to grow together in love. Oh, dear Friends who so willingly opened your hearts and homes to us when we travelled among you, look at the blessed community which you have inherited and be mindful to continue to nurture it. 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 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."

Faith and Practice, Canadian Yearly Meeting, Section 3.37

Agenda (Lesson Plan)

1. Worship (15 minutes)
2. Preparing to be present – a brief check-in: (15 minutes)
 - a. What do you bring with you to this Meeting for Learning?
 - b. What are you leaving at the door?
3. Reflections on our Spiritual Community (30 minutes): Read aloud the introductory quote.
 - a. What aspects of community, as described in Deborah Fisch's letter, have you experienced or observed in your Meeting or Worship Group?
 - b. What aspects of community do you long for and may not have yet found?
 - c. What challenges you most about our faith community?
4. Committees of Care – Discussion (15 Minutes): If you were first-named on a Committee of Care for an older Friend going into long-term care, how would you approach the first meeting of the Committee?

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5. Clearness Committees – Discussion (15 minutes): A Friend has been offered an opportunity to attend Pendle Hill, or Woodbrooke Study Centre for 6 months. What queries/questions would you ask them to help them with discernment about taking the opportunity? (Caution - Be careful to avoid including your 'opinion' in the questions)
6. Evaluation (15 minutes)
 - a. What has been most helpful to you in these sessions?
 - b. How would you describe them to someone else?
 - c. What thoughts do you have about possible changes or improvements?
7. Closing Worship (15 minutes)

Selections from Faith and Practice, Canadian Yearly Meeting

3.28. Community reminds us that we are called to love, for community is a product of love in action and not of simple self-interest. Community can break our egos open to the experience of a God who cannot be contained by our conceptions. Community will teach us that our grip on truth is fragile and incomplete, that we need many ears to hear the fullness of God's word for our lives. And the disappointments of community life can be transformed by our discovery that the only dependable power for life lies beyond all human structures and relationships.

—Parker J. Palmer, 1977

3.32. Meeting is not a place of shelter from the world so much as a place where we are shaped in order to become God's instrument in the world. The primary reality is our relationship with God, and the world is an arena in which that relationship is lived out.

—Lloyd Lee Wilson, 1993

3.53. I am clear in my own mind about the importance of membership. It is spiritual in nature; it is based, not on doctrinal agreement, nor on our worthiness, but on an attitude of humble learning; it is a way of life involving responsibilities, not least to the Society of Friends. —Philip L. Martin, 1974

3.66. Let us not underestimate our own ability to help each other. Perhaps we delegate too much of such responsibility to committees because we fail to see the caring that we ourselves may give.

Care can be very simple and yet be appropriate and valuable. A smile can take on a meaning far beyond appearances. We are not always thinking about the other person, but often of how they might think about us. The little things are an important part of caring.

—Canadian Yearly Meeting, 1980

27. Live adventurously. When choices arise, do you take the way that offers the fullest opportunity for the use of your gifts in the service of God and the community? Let your life speak. When decisions have to be made, are you ready to join with others in seeking clearness, asking for God's guidance and offering counsel to one another? – Chapter 6, Advices and Queries

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**From - Organization and Procedure, Canadian Yearly Meeting 2012 -
Section 8.1, Clearness Committees, Committees Of Care And Oversight
Committees**

Faced with difficult decisions, or imperative concerns, Friends have often asked others to help them to discern the will of God and the leading of the Spirit in their lives. Friends in difficult situations have also asked others for help and encouragement to enable them to carry out their tasks rightly. Sometimes these arrangements are informal; sometimes the Meeting itself takes the initiative. Friends are then found who will meet those in need and offer their presence, prayers, love and support.

There are three types of committees on which Friends may draw. These are: Clearness Committees, Committees of Care, and Oversight Committees. In the work of all of these committees, the qualities of clearness and discernment are paramount.

References for those who wish further resources:

Canadian Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice – Chapter 3 - The Meeting Community, pp 81 – 85, 89 – 99. The Lowe-Martin Group – 2011

[Organization and Procedure, Section 8 - Clearness Committees, Committees Of Care And Oversight Committees. Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends – 2012.](#)

Geoffrey Durham, *The Spirit of the Quakers*, (Yale University Press, New Haven and London - 2010)

Charlotte Fardelmann, *Nudged By The Spirit - Stories Of People Responding To The Still, Small Voice Of God* Pendle Hill 2001