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A Quaker Study Guide of the Canadian Book *Faith and Practice*

The handouts, notes, and audio links in this study guide were used in four monthly study sessions hosted in the spring of 2016 by the Committees of Outreach and Education and the Ministry and Council of the Victoria Friends. The purpose of the study sessions was 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.

Participants were asked to read chapters of the Canadian *Faith and Practice* relevant to a session. The study sessions concentrated on Chapters One, Three, Four, and Six of *Faith and Practice*, while encouraging participants to explore the remaining Chapters Two and Five on their own.

Authors

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Version 2

Session 1: Introduction

1. Worship (~8 minutes)
2. Topic Summary (< 2 minutes) A review of our beloved Canadian Faith & Practice (See above)
3. Welcome and Introductions - Participants introduce themselves (starting with the facilitator!), giving their names, meeting, and responding to the following questions (15 minutes)
 - a. How familiar are you with Quakerism?
 - b. What do you most want from this course?
 - c. Are there particular aspects you'd like to cover? Anything you'd like to discuss?
4. Ground rules—these are all suggestions, can be modified, other aspects can be added (15 minutes)
 - a. Duration—six meetings, two hours maximum per meeting, probably between 1.5-2 hours per meeting.
 - b. Floor—Who has the floor? The goal is to experience rich, spontaneous yet orderly conversation despite being on the phone. Decide between two traditional Quaker methods for determining whose turn it is to speak: Worship Sharing (also known as popcorn-style, not to be confused with a popcorn meeting!) or Claremont Dialog (going in a circle—David Summerhays recommends this method. If popcorn-style, which is fine, note that everyone must ensure that people speak no more than once per round)
 - c. Interrupting
 - i. Let us use great restraint and discernment around interrupting, but interrupting especially makes sense if there are concerns about:
 1. Safety (physical or emotional)
 2. Time constraints
 3. Technical difficulties (e.g. can't hear)
 4. Following a necessary order of discussion (e.g. agreeing on ground rules before launching into potentially sensitive subjects).
 5. Regrounding the conversation in worship and purpose,
 6. Clarification if this is crucially needed
 - a. Let us use particular restraint around interrupting to clarify. Here are some queries to consider:
 - i. Might the person clarify soon?
 - ii. Can we wait until s/he's finished speaking or even later in the day or week?
 - iii. Might we understand later upon reflection?

- iv. Is what we'd like clarified really the core of what the person is trying to say?
 - b. Let's ask each other lots of questions and, don't get me wrong, there are certainly times when interrupting to clarify is justified. I'm simply inviting us to focus on what is most essential, which may in certain cases require us to let go of our noble desire to understand everything.
 - d. Kindness—Because we're learning, it's important to create an environment where we are kind to each other AND to ourselves.
 - i. We can fear seeming like (or being) a "bad Quaker," whatever that means to us.
 - e. Confidentiality—Discuss with the group: how far will information travel? (I suggest agreeing as a group to generally anonymous stories about others, and taking great care and precaution with what we share about the course with others).
 - f. Anything else anyone would like to ask the facilitator or the group in order to feel at our best?
 - g. We will return to these ground rules, if only to ask if there needs to be any revisiting of them, at the beginning of at least the first three meetings for learning. (I suggest revisiting the ground rules every meeting, if only to ask if anyone has any comments: it only takes a moment and, in my experience, it's easier to tweak a problem with the ground rules than mop up conflict later in the discussion!)
 - i. The facilitator should ideally offer to be available to e-mail or speak on the phone in between Meetings for Learning about any concerns, questions, pits in the stomach, or anything that felt uneasy.
5. Spiritual background (interesting discussion but also crucial important for creating a safer space!) (25 minutes)
- a. Ask Friends to discuss our spiritual background (starting with the facilitator!).
 - b. This means answering three questions:
 - i. What religion were you raised in (e.g. atheist)
 - ii. Do you have a spiritual practice now and from what tradition (e.g. I do a Zen meditation every morning)
 - iii. Which traditional or not-so-traditional religious language is closest to your heart (e.g. Christian language, paganism).
 - c. If the group were to fully answer this question in writing, collectively we would fill a library! So encourage Friends to keep the answers a little brief. Interruption may be necessary because it's easy to ramble with this kind of question.

- d. Then, based on what participants have shared, ask if there are particularly painful, sensitive spots for Friends, e.g. if someone talks about “sin” it may bring up *very* unpleasant memories for some.
 - e. Talk about listening in tongues (hearing the Spirit through people’s words (note: even the symbol “the Spirit” may be lost on some. Be careful to unpack jargon! The symbol “Spirit”, for instance, returns often in the rest of the course))
 - i. **Note: Listening spiritually is a key Quaker practice, that can be practised anywhere, with anyone. It takes practise and attention, and yet one is always a beginner. Begin in silence, waiting for discernment. Listen deeply to yourself and the other person, especially to where words come from, and to that which is eternal. Avoid making judgments, positive or negative, and keep words confidential. If you write in your journal or speak later with others about what you heard and learned, say “A Friend says...”**
 - f. Upon hearing the spiritual backgrounds of everyone, does everyone have “translations” for key words that might be used by participants?
 - i. For instance, if there’s a Christian Quaker who may talk about “Christ-consciousness,” how can a non-theist friend translate that so that it resonates?
 - ii. Make sure everyone has translations for key words that are important to folks, e.g. Christ, God, Spirit, spirit guide, prayer
 - 1. This course at times makes heavy use of God/Spirit language, so be ready
 - iii. The goal is to prepare everyone to speak from the heart and have it resonate in everyone’s hearts.
6. Homework for next time: Read Chapter One of Canadian Faith and Practice, especially relevant excerpts typed out and read by Catherine Novak. Click on [link](https://soundcloud.com/catherine-novak/quaker-faith-and-practice-readings-week-1) below:
<https://soundcloud.com/catherine-novak/quaker-faith-and-practice-readings-week-1>
 Also, be aware that the homework for the rest of the sessions is to contact at least one member of the course with a thought, a thank you, a resource they might like, or just to say hi and check in. Feel free to start early! Building these kinds of ties is very important for the success of this course.
7. Closing (Questions, Homework, Check-out) (5 minutes)
- a. Check-out: we began the session by asking how everyone is. Checking out means talking about how we’re feeling now that we’ve spent this time together. Anything you’ll be thinking about, any intentions you’re taking away, any thank you’s to be said?
8. Closing worship (5 minutes)

(Total ~ 1 hour 55 minutes)

Session 2: Expressions of Faith

Preparation: Read Chapter One of Canadian Faith and Practice, especially relevant excerpts typed out and read by Catherine Novak. Click on [link](#) below:

<https://soundcloud.com/catherine-novak/quaker-faith-and-practice-readings-week-1>

Begin with opening worship, a check-in, and by reviewing the ground rules

A. Overview of session.

“Where two or three are gathered in my Name, there will I be also.”

This is the source, the mystery, the centre of Quakers.

And the heart of all spiritual groups.

What then defines Quakers? What ties us together and inspires us? 350 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 ex-Presbyterians, Ex-Anglicans, ex-agnostics, ex “no faith”, or combined Buddhists/Friends as well as birthright Quakers continue to come together, calling ourselves Quakers. What does that mean to us?

B. Faith Expressions.

The following expressions of the Religious Society of Friends, illustrated with excerpts of our *Canadian Faith and Practice*, may serve as a frame, a guide to our discussions. Each of you, especially seasoned Friends, may have your own frames, your own way of understanding Quaker faith and practice. I expect my frame, and maybe yours, will shift over time, as we study together, and learn from each other.

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 the divine, present throughout the ages, is central to our understanding of our shared humanity.

Why do we speak of that of God in *everyone* rather than in *everything*, in all of creation? God, in the words of Lutheran theologian Paul Tillich, is here and now the creative force and the ground of all that is. But in Biblical words of John, we hear: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*” Within the Christian-humanist tradition, humans, as capable of abstraction and language and art, have a special ability to comprehend and express God. That is why, in another verse from that Gospel, Margaret Fell Fox writes 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.” As Quakers we seek the holy in each person, the Good behind their aims and desires—no matter how ultimately misguided—we speak to the part that Christ has Lit, we seek that our words and actions express that “secret power.”

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 wells: Allah, Gaia, Jaweh, Sophia, Lillith. 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 this 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 many 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 that spark lies **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 others, including humanist ones. It challenges us to rethink war and the way our society locks people away without hope, because each person is holy, and has that of God is in them. Our testimonies of peace and equality flow directly from the holiness of each person.

The particular way that Quakers affirmed “that of God in everyone” was revolutionary in the 1650s, and still quite challenging today; for instance, it calls on us to see, feel, and treat women

as equal to men, which is the logical consequence of Quaker thought from its earliest 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:

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 (and has and will?) 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. This is part of why, as Friends, we have no formal creed. Do we have *informal* creeds and dogmas, however? Do we have revelations that admit no further truth (such as the doctrine of continuing revelation)? Certainly we do—the challenge of living in the Light, liberated from dogma, is a very difficult one and perhaps impossible. It is debatable whether there exists any concrete difference in behaviour between Quakers historically and other religions on this point: are we truly less dogmatic in our practice? It would be nearly impossible to prove and prideful to claim. But what we can claim is unique to Quakers is that the way we refuse again and again to confine the truth into scriptural or oral traditions of the past—whether it be in the Bible, the Torah, or the Koran—focuses our attention on the revelation happening here and now, in this very time and place, to all of us. And that is a profound testimony we give to the world.

Patricia Loring, inspirational author of several volumes on Quaker Spirituality speaks to this. 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 unprogrammed ones without clergy, as is common among Canadian Quakers, we affirm that a revelation, a Nudge, a way can open to each of us. And the more we are in loving community, the better we can hear and test this Nudge.

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."*

C. Query and Listening Spiritually (10 to 15 minutes).

Reflection: what in the above text stood out, challenged you, inspired you? (Invite participants to speak a few times)

The query is:

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 way?

This query emerges from the above affirmations of Quaker faith that there is that of God in everyone, and there is no end to divine revelation.

What does "that of God" mean from a non-theist perspective? (If there is "that of God" in a human, what is the part that is "that of human" in a human?)

Should we Quakers say "that of God in everything?" (If we say everyone is it human-centric? If we say everything what insight is lost?)

Are there informal Quaker dogmas? If so, what do you make of this?

Continued

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.

There is heaven on earth.

Heaven is now. Heaven is for everyone. Quakers (and other mainline churches) do not believe that if we are good, or live the right way, there will be a heavenly life for us, later, or even now. Nor that only the select few will be saved. Unlike secular utopian movements, we also deny that changing the world can ever create a perfect heaven on earth.

This affirmation “there is heaven on earth” is more radical and liberating, and joyful. It means that if we feel we can do nothing, if we have bad days, if we make endless mistakes, or 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.

That, to me, is the testimony of simplicity: that plain and simple fact that the “mysterious Light” continues to burn, no matter what. Creation is simply good, despite the evils in the world; symbolically speaking, God conquers all evil, here and now.

In the days of Fox and Fell, civil war raged around them, and Quakers were being put into jail for their practices, and losing their livelihood, and health. 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. The fact that Christ has clearly *not* risen (at least not fully, and never will), that we clearly do not live in the end-times (we are squarely in the meantime), and the fact that this millennial expectations are simplistic and wrong (c.f. the Millerites)—these facts must not prevent us from appreciating the beauty, power, and truth of these affirmations.

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, that speaks to our condition, and tells us that there is heaven on earth always, despite all the terrible suffering. Quakers 350 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 pure heaven on earth, because there is—whenever we let that joyful divinity in. This root of all our testimonies gives us strength and resolve to “see what Love can do.”

Queries

How can we access this heaven on earth in the most difficult of times?

What kind of balance must be sought between spiritual root and activist fruit? How can action be restful and how can rest be just?

Another, very different query could be:

What brings you to Quakers or what keeps you a Member of the Religious Society of Friends?

Session 3: Quaker Faith Expressions

Begin with opening worship, a check-in, and by reviewing the ground rules

[READ and interpret each passage in turn]

1.2 George Fox, 1647

*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.*

That the ocean of light is seen by Fox as an “infinite ocean”, bigger, more eternal and ineffable than the ocean of darkness. And he 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.

Let us turn to the familiar old phrase “What canst Thou say”

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. This speaks to the Quaker affirmation that it is up to each of us to find our spiritual path.

Recently, a Vancouver Friend and teacher, Tim Bartoo led our 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.

Journey and words can be momentous. 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 little or big experiences of leadings, callings, persuasions, or convincements. 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.

Read Excerpt 1.11 by Margaret Fox. What did Margaret Fox mean? How the words speak to us today? Interpret the last phrases.

*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?"

Note: Concentrate on the last phrase "what thou speakest is it inwardly from God?" This speaks to the discernment required in Quaker life: we ask the question how do we know what we sense to be divine revelation? Are our words and actions loving, and of service? This question "is it inward of God?" is key to developments, fissures, and decisions in our 350 years of Quaker history throughout the world, in our Meeting here, and in each of us in our own lives. It is our faithful attention to Quaker practices that will help us discern, however imperfectly, what is "of God for us in this situation", and what is not.

Excerpt 1.13 As an alternate to the excerpt from Margaret Fell, consider exploring together the one written by Caroline Fox in 1882,

This excerpt 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.

E. Faith expressions

Consider the words of Ruth Walmsley, 1997 in Excerpt 1.65:

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 I 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.

If time, or for later discussion, consider excerpt 1.15 by American Quaker Theologian and mystic. Thomas Kelly, 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.

Again, if time and if there are seasoned Friends who can add some comments that speak to the concerns of young people in Canada and the USA about preventing further divisions between evangelical programmed and liberal unprogrammed folks, consider the Quaker faith expressions embedded in Excerpt 1.82 .

1.82 Context for the following passage. In 1985 three hundred Young Friends from 34 countries gathered in a meeting at Greensboro, North Carolina, under the care of the Friends World Committee for Consultation. They represented different theological outlooks, diverse doctrinal language, various Quaker worship practices and differing forms of organizational structure. They reported that they had been “challenged, shaken up, at times even enraged, intimidated, and offended by these differences.” Yet they were able to express their spiritual unity in their final epistle, of which the following paragraph is one part (though I suspect if a non-theist Friend had been in attendance, they wouldn’t have been in unity. Listening in tongues may be required):

We have often wondered whether there is anything Quakers today can say as one. After much struggle we have discovered that we can proclaim this: there is a living God at the centre of all, who is available to each of us as a Present Teacher at the very heart of our lives. We seek as people of God to be worthy vessels to deliver the Lord's transforming word, to be prophets of joy who know from experience and can testify to the world, as George Fox did, "that the Lord God is at work in this thick night." Our priority is to be receptive and responsive to the life-giving Word of God, whether it comes through the written word — the Scriptures, the Incarnate Word — Jesus Christ, the Corporate Word — as discerned by the gathered meeting, or the Inward Word of God in our hearts which is available to each of us who seek the Truth.

(Query: how can further division be avoided, even among those who may not resonate with this minute?)

F. Four Expressions of Quaker Practice

1. Waiting in expectant silence and Meeting for worship . These are the foci of Chapters 1 and 3 in Canadian Faith and Practice

2. 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, in Chapter Four, inspire and comfort us on the Lifelong Journey Quakers life—whether they come to a Quaker community as a birthright one, or much later in life.

These two sets of Quaker practices can, and are practised anywhere, anytime, by any group, however small or large, or however troubled or broken 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. Still, we can worship and create relationships of connection—with the Divine, with ourselves, and with each other.

3. Responding to queries, reading, and writing journals and guides. 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.

Key to historical Quakers, and to over half of the Quakers in the world today, especially those with programmed meetings and pastors, is the Christian Bible. See 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, nature, etc...

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.

- There is the first corporate expression of discipline for gathered Quaker groups to attend to. Page 195 in *Can. Faith and Practice*. 1656 Letter from the Elders gathered at Balby, — And the well known final words :

“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—Chapter Six in *Canadian Faith and Practice*, that we will discuss in the our last study session.
- There 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, and membership. These reports are printed in a book, and for 350 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 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 you search 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.

4. The last key set of Quaker practices is making decisions in large meetings and small groups by, in Quaker language, “coming to unity.” All of the expressions of *Faith and Practice* come together in that which is most unique in our spiritual tradition: our 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.

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 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.

Queries: Thoughts and reflections on these readings? What stood out as important, what was challenging or that you disagreed with?

Then, what books do you treasure? Can you give an example of spiritual listening or of being heard through a spiritual listening?

How do you seek unity in everyday life?

Resources consulted for this session

Ambler, Rex. *Truth of the Heart: An anthology of George Fox 1624-1691*. London, Friends House, QuakerBooks, 2001, 2007.

Kelly, Richard M. Kelly. *Thomas Kelly: A Biography*. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.

Loring, Patricia. *Personal Spiritual Practices Among Friends: Listening Spirituality*. Vol 1, Washington, DC, Openings Press, 1997.

Punshon, John. *Portrait in Gray: A short history of the Quakers*. London, Friends House, QuakerBooks, 1984.

Ross, Isabel Margaret Fell. *Margaret Fell: Mother of Quakerism*. London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1949

Session 4: Quaker Worship

Preparation: Read Chapter three in *Canadian Faith and Practice*. Catherine Novak has prepared an audio recording of the excerpts used in this session. They are posted to Soundcloud. Click on the link <https://m.soundcloud.com/catherine-novak/quaker-f-and-p-study-readings-session-two>

Begin with opening worship, a check-in, and by reviewing the ground rules

A. **Overview.** The focus of today's session is on the worship practices to help Friends discern "*What canst Thou say?...What thou speakest is it inwardly of God?*" (*Excerpt 1.11 Margaret Fell Fox, 1694*). We will also examine the readings of Chapter Three on "The Meeting Community" in *Canadian Faith and Practice*. The first half of the session will look at all types of worship, and in the next part of this session, the focus is the worship in Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business. There will be a pairs exercise and a small group one.

B. **Holding regular meetings for worship** is the very first collective or corporate advice in the Quaker History. See 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." David Summerhays' first thought was "Lady, you have clearly never tried to attend Montreal meeting in a blizzard!" But the wisdom of her statement dawned on him over time.

"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" Excerpt 3.12 by Muriel Bishop Summers 1995.

C. Query and Listening Spiritually (15 minutes).

Take about five minutes for silent reflection and prayer to reflect on a Meeting for Worship that was meaningful to you. Journal about it. 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. 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?

Take turns sharing your reflections. Practice listening spiritually.

To review from last session: Listening spiritually is a key Quaker practice, and is about listening deeply to yourself and to others, especially to where words come from, and to that

which is eternal. Avoid making judgments, positive or negative, and keep words confidential. (See Excerpt 3.23 by Rachel Maxcy, 2003: *“One of the most profound things that Friends ‘do’ in Meeting for Worship is listen....”*)

D. Comments? Reflections on your sharing groups?

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 at 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” as writes Walton, p. 11.

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.

1. 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 making 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."

[Optional query: How might a non-theist Friend express this idea of "offering up that barrenness to God"?)

2. 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.*" [Optional query: how might "God's message for the Meeting" be expressed by a non-theist Friend?] 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 to discern messages from the Spirit from those of our own thoughts, or what 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. Then we ask if we are led to wait further (an especially important question for those who tend to speak too freely). Perhaps we will be led to more expectant silence and discernment. If the message persists, and gets stronger, then perhaps some among us must ask ourselves if we are the right person to give it. 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 is coming 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 is propelled to his or her feet and then speaks—briefly, clearly, and sits down.

And yet what was spoken may only be a fragment of an idea. It may seem bizarre and cryptic, or painfully incomplete—we may be baffled by the strangeness of what we are tasked to say.

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. Yet we must not wait too long: we must be faithful. Sometimes, a message just comes suddenly and loudly, and a Friend finds oneself standing up, speaking, 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 [Query: how might a non-theist Friend express this?], and not infrequently, as Betty Polster says, "that Ministry may not be meant for me." Or could it be that the giver of Ministry was not true to the spark that was given? 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, but not name the person who spoke. Very, very occasionally, seasoned Friends put 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.

Three. 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 steals 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.

The queries listed above are quite rich and should lead to a good discussion

If you're lacking material, here's one: What do you do in silent worship? Or see the afterthought below.

AFTERTHOUGHTS. Read later for reflection.

In the Introduction to Chapter 3, Deborah Haight on p. 70 introduces us to the fundamental importance of not just going to Meeting for Worship, but also living the worship meeting. She writes:

"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."

Resources

Catherine Novak has prepared an audio recording of the excerpts used in this session in February 2016. They are posted to Soundcloud. Click on the link <https://m.soundcloud.com/catherine-novak/quaker-f-and-p-study-readings-session-two>

Betty Polster. Meetings for Worship and Meeting for Worship for Business—March 27th. Victoria Monthly Meeting Quaker Study 2002.

Marty Walton, The Meeting Experience: Practicing Quakerism in Community, Canadian Quaker Pamphlet Series, #45, 1997

Session 5: (Meeting for Worship for Business)

Preparation. Read Chapter 3 in *Canadian Faith and Practice*.

Catherine Novak has prepared an audio recording of the excerpts used in this session. They are posted to Soundcloud. Click on the link

<https://m.soundcloud.com/catherine-novak/quaker-f-and-p-study-readings-session-two>

Begin with opening worship, a check-in, and by reviewing the ground rules

A. Meeting for Worship with attention to business:

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, 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 the 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.

B. Participation in Meeting for Worship for Business:

Every Monthly Meeting (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.

GROUP DISCUSSION (for 15 to 20 minutes.). Does your Meeting for Business embody this spirit? Why or why not? What motivates you or others to attend or not attend? ?

Queries: How can we know when we are collectively led?

What can be done when unity cannot be found?

How can a meeting deal with unruly behaviour, or one or two Friends who generate problems?

What might be difficult questions that are not asked because of fear of not being able to find unity?

C. Beyond the Monthly Meeting

(Together and After Thought). 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, such as the Canadian Friends Service Committee.

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.

Resources

Patricia Loring, *Spiritual Discernment: the context and goal of clearness committees*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet #305, 1992

Barry Morley, *Beyond Consensus: Salvaging Sense of Meeting*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet #307, 1993

Bill Taber, *The Mind of Christ: Bill Taber on Meeting for Business*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet #406, 2010

Michael J. Sheeran, *Beyond Majority Rule: voteless decisions in the Religious Society of Friends*, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1983

Session 6: Quaker Testimonies

In Chapter 4 and other chapters in Canadian Faith and Practice

Begin with opening worship, a check-in, and by reviewing the ground rules

A. Overview of Session There are two purposes for this session. First, we share our experiences and understandings of the Canadian Quaker testimonies of Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Stewardship (SPICES). Marjory wrote up the following notes after the March 21st, 2016 session, and includes excerpts selected by Friends in the 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, that requires action, regardless of the outcome.

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

B. 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:

“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.” Excerpt 4.1

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. The modern notion of Quaker testimonies (e.g. the peace testimony) was invented in 1949 by Howard Brinton, a Quaker theologian. In Canada, we now speak of the following testimonies:

Simplicity
Peace
Integrity
Community
Equality
Stewardship-Sustainability

The Community Testimony is not specifically included in Chapter Four, as it is not a stand-alone testimony. Community is so important—and so easily forgotten not just in our individualistic, liberal societies but also within the inward-looking silent worship of Quakerism—that I would argue that it must be seen as the basis of Quaker faith and practice. Arnold Ranneris, who was a member of the committee that oversaw the production of our *Canadian Faith and Practice*, considered it the “foundational testimony.”

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, talking about our leadings, 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.

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.

C. 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-fuels, 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.*” Metaphorically speaking, when God is with us, then we know how simple and ever-accessible it is to live the way we are truly called to.

Yet we could ask ourselves—if joy is so simple—are we not blaming the poor for their misery? Or perhaps the testimony of simplicity can become an excuse to avoid the complexities and hassle of trying to change our world and institutions for the better. Or how often is “plain speech” a resignation of complex thinking within a complex world? Wisdom can’t always be clothed in “plain” words but needs a lifetime to even begin to grasp. Those dangers are real. But countless Quakers have also learned that God simply calls us to struggle throughout our entire lives—sometimes making our lives *very* complex!—to try to make our world a little bit more divine.

Let us look at another aspect of simplicity: John Woolman wrote years ago 1763, in Excerpt 4.41: “*Every degree of luxury of what kind soever, and every demand for money inconsistent with Divine order, hath some connection with unnecessary labour.*” A profound thought; a beautiful vision of a world where the needs of all are the priority; a world that doesn’t hurry after ambitions that leave us feeling empty in the last analysis. Still, let us not forget the horrifying fact that Woolman may well have mentally included music-making in the list of unnecessary labours (as many Early Friends would certainly have). This brings us to another danger which is that an overzealous quest for unadorned simplicity can lead to barren, joyless, drab and unimaginative living — an assault on the arts and by correlation on the capacity of the arts to remind us of joyful way that the divine calls us to live. When we choose simplicity, we must choose the *right* simplicity! Truly, the testimony of simplicity is not simple to live, even if its puzzle can be richly rewarding. Let us close by considering this final, relatively tongue-in-cheek quotation:

4.52 by Ursula Franklin, 2006.

“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 a serious issue and also a good way of getting into conversation with people about Friends testimonies.”

Simplicity Testimony in Advices and Queries 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?

D. 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:

“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.” (see <http://esr.earlham.edu/dqe/index.html> for full text of “Declaration from the Harmless and innocent People of God called Quakers”).

One of the excerpts chosen in March 2016 by the Victoria Friends discussing this old, fruitful Quaker testimony 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 and collective transformation to live in peace, even as we must strive to do good in our world despite our own imperfections. One path is by accepting our own fears and those of others, while learning compassion from reactions to situations that arouse fear and anger.

Another path is to understand what Hugh Campbell-Brown said in 1970 (Excerpt 3.4) 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.”*

The image we have of Jesus is of a man who was so peaceful it was *as if* the nations and indeed the universe had realized perfect peace. No matter the situation (and our responsibility for it), the peace testimony is also a reminder that perfect inner peace, as modeled by the Biblical image of Jesus for example, is available to us always as a fruit of the Spirit.

Peace Testimony in Advices and Queries

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.

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?

E. 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 (even if some Early Friends may have reduced it to this). 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? Integrity is less simple than it may seem. 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-seeking 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.

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.

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 taking unpopular stands. Do not let the desire to be sociable, or the fear of seeming peculiar, determine your decisions.

F. Equality

As with the previous testimonies, equality too seems to be inside the other testimonies, and 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 formally come to pass until late in the 19th century. Informally, women still do not always experience full equality within our meetings, to say the least. Similarly the Quaker position against slavery was not easily won. 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.

In the small groups, 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.”*

But the Quaker testimony is more than the humanist ethos of affirming the dignity and worth of every person, indeed, every being. It is rooted in the symbolic, perhaps-baffling statement that we are all equal before God. How are the criminal and the saint equal before God? Equality before God certainly doesn’t mean that all humans, in all our diversity, should all be treated the same way. Nor does it mean we are somehow equal in our capacities or our decency, nor can we ever expect to live in a perfectly equitable society. It does mean, however, that we are all equally created by and dependent upon the Creator and symbolically speaking, equidistant and infinitely distant from the divine. We are also all essential to, symbolically speaking, the divine purpose of Creation. Symbolically speaking, we are in need of love and forgiveness by the divine.

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.

G. Testimonies Unity with creation

(See also transformative Justice and human right, Excerpts 4.53 to 4.79.)

Advice and Query on Testimony of Unity with Creation.

No. 42. We do not own the world, and its riches are not ours to dispose of at will. Show a loving consideration for all creatures, and seek to maintain the beauty and variety of the

world. Work to ensure that our increasing power over nature is used responsibly, with reverence for life. Rejoice in the splendour of God’s continuing creation.

H. Quaker processes to discern concerns and leadings regarding testimonies

Quakers are not called to *believe in* testimonies, as a “cognitive affirmation.” The root of the word believe is below. Originally this word had little to do with what we think. Similarly, what matters about the testimonies is not what we think; what matters is what we cherish, the ideas we hold close to our hearts (that is the true meaning of believing in God), what we contemplate. Like all fruits of the Spirit, we experience the testimonies, always learning more about them and making them further our own as we 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 more often.

The testimonies and the related specific advices and queries are not a “call to increased activity by each individual Friend” (Advices and Queries, British Yearly Meeting, 1994, p. 3). 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.

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

Rather, as Quakers we aim to accept that everyone has different gifts, and personal situations vary, and must be considered. Most important Friends “maintain that expressions of faith must be related to personal experience” (p. 3). It is the subjective, intimate, personal understanding that is key to practising faith-in-action, not obedience to hierarchical proclamations or Meeting traditions—and this goes for pacifism as well.

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 both 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, the key way Friends use to test whether a concern embodies a Quaker testimony, and is a leading or not, is through worship and expectant waiting, and

conversations with seasoned Friends. As well as sorting out thoughts and feelings by writing emails, letters, texts, and proposals.

For example, Friends who started mid-week worship at Fern Street, monthly Soup and Stories, and Singing for Worship, felt a concern to testify to the importance of creating community and peace in new small ways in the Meeting. When the concern felt stronger, after time and conversation with seasoned Friends, and 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, for example, 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 Friends at Fern Street in Victoria did, in the early 21st century, after 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.

See further information on processes, such as Clearness Committees, Service, Nominating Committees and so forth, that are used in large and small Quaker meetings to test concerns in “Organization and Procedure”, as approved and published in 2002 by Canadian Yearly Meeting, now available in text and online at quaker.ca. We ended the third Quaker Study with 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.”

Queries: What is honesty/integrity in a context of oppression?

What is the difference between the testimony of peace and pacifism or is there a difference?

How does the testimony of simplicity relate to our material possessions — is it a puritanical testimony and what is the relationship to art?

What does the testimony of equality mean — how does it make us equal to those who do great evil, and is that a good thing?

What’s the difference between the democratic value of equality and the testimony of equality?

What is a leading you’ve had (by the way, E&O has published an entire course about leadings), and how did you know?

Homework for final session.

Read Chapter Six of Canadian Faith and Practice, or your little Red Book, on Advices and Queries. Read the 42 queries. Choose one that speaks to you strongly in a helpful, affirming, or comforting way. Chose a second one that baffles you, or that you do not like, or that you are troubled by. Think of the phrase in the introduction of the British pamphlet (1994).

“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.”

We will spend some time at the end of the session taking time to thank each other and reflect on the course. FYI an evaluation form relating to the facilitator will be sent via e-mail, to help plan future educational sessions.

Session 7: Quaker Advices and Queries

Begin with opening worship, a check-in, and by reviewing the ground rules

Preparation: Read the 42 queries in Chapter Six of Canadian Faith and Practice, or your little Red Book, on Advices and Queries. Here is the link to an audio recording of the 42 Advices and Queries adopted by Canadian Yearly Meeting by Catherine Novak.

<https://soundcloud.com/catherine-novak/advices-queries>

Choose one that speaks to you strongly in a helpful, affirming, or comforting way. Chose a second one that baffles you, or that you do not like, or that you are troubled by. Think of the following phrase in the introduction of the British pamphlet (1994).

“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.”

A. History and Use of Advices and Queries (A & Q). The Advices & 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” (P. 1 of the 1994 Advices & Queries in “Little Red Book”). Advices & Queries have changed in tone and use over the centuries, and vary by country. How we read and use Advices & Queries may also change in our own individual lives. Sometimes one Advices & 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. As Emily says to Benjamin, the Meeting House mouse, in a favourite Quaker children’s story written by Clifford Pfeil about how a Quaker question is answered. “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. 158ff). 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.

In the Wikipedia, as of May 2016, a query is defined in several ways, including “a question used for reflection and spiritual exercises among members of the Society of Friend”. Links are given to various publications of queries in Faith and Practice books by Australians and

British Quakers. E.g. [Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's Faith and Practice, which contains a set of queries](#). [Australia Yearly Meeting Questions for all Quakers \(2008\) \(.pdf\)](#)

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. For further information see the Introduction and History of the 1994 Advices & Queries, “Little Red Book”, and “Letter from the Elders Gathered at Balby”, 1656, in *Can. Faith and Practice*, pp. 195-197. Online at quaker.ca under educational resource, there is a good Quaker history in the first chapter of the 2002 *Organization and Procedure* of Canadian Yearly Meeting.

B. Spiritual Work 20-30 minutes, with someone volunteering to keep time. After a moment of worship, read and reflect in words or pictures an Advice or Query that you speaks to you in an inspiring, comforting way, and another that challenges or troubles you.

Or reflect on how you use, or could use the Advices & Queries on a more regular basis.

C. Discussion (20-30 minutes) Ask if several volunteers, both new attendees and seasoned Friends, would read and speak briefly on a Advices & Queries that brings them “comfort or discomfort”, inspiration or challenge, in each of four chapters in *Canadian Faith and Practice*.

Advice and Queries	Canadian Faith and Practice Chapters
#1 to #7	Experiencing the Spirit—Chapter One
#8 to #16	The Meeting Community-Chapter Two
#17 to #30	The Lifelong Journey—Chapter Five
#31 to #42	Testimonies--Chapter Four

D. Write your own

- a. Imagine that you are a Crocker, a splinter version of the Quakers, and you’re writing your own book of Advices and Queries, but couldn’t use Quaker because of copyright concerns. Take 15 minutes to write two advices or queries (or one of each) and share them with the group. What kind of queries would your fellow Crockers (who are in every way similar to the Quakers) need to hear and think about?