

# Blessed Community: Quaker Faith, Testimony, & Practice

## Community as Quaker Faith & Testimony

*“...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, and so I became thus knit and united unto them, hungering more and more after the increase of this power and life, whereby I might feel myself perfectly redeemed.”*

**Robert Barclay, Apology, 1678**

*“For the first generation of Friends the testimonies were a prophetic challenge to what they perceived as a vain, unrighteous order around them. To be a prophetic challenge meant to follow the examples of the Hebrew prophets, who, following a direct leading from God, called society to righteousness and articulated what must change for the people to be able to live in justice, mercy, and love.”*

**Sandra Cronk, “Gospel Order:  
A Quaker Understanding of Faithful Church Community”, p. 12, 1991**

The Quaker Meeting is a faith community, grounded in the shared experience of God’s guidance and grace felt in our Meetings for Worship, our Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business, and our fellowship. We are a diverse group of individuals who have been drawn together by the Spirit. At some point in each of our spiritual journeys, a longing to find a faith and community that could speak to our condition brought us to Quaker Meeting. Many Friends describe the experience of their first visit to Meeting as “coming home.” It is only with God’s Spirit that such a diverse group of individuals can realize and embody the kind of unity, belonging, and community that answers to that of God within us.

The Quaker Meeting is meant to be a Blessed Community – a living testimony to a social order that embodies God’s peace, justice, love, compassion, and joy; an example and invitation to a better way of life. Like our other testimonies, Community can be a prophetic call to the rest of society.

From their earliest beginnings, Quakers have witnessed to their experience of the wholeness that God intends for us in this lifetime on earth. The Spirit calls us to live in a loving relationship with God, with each other, and with all of creation. George Fox showed us a way that was to be found not only through individual pursuit, but especially in a worshiping community. Early Quakers identified their experience of God’s presence among them with the Biblical message about living as a “People of God” – a community living under God’s guidance embodying peace, justice, joy, wisdom, and all the fruits of the Spirit.

We hold the calming peace of the Presence in our being, yet Friends today may feel overwhelmed with the many needs and injustices we see in our society and the world. Some may point to the loss of community as a reason that these problems are multiplying – and to the need for reclaiming and building community in order to solve the world’s problems.

Living in Blessed Community requires a shift in our thinking as the Light shows us our interdependence, and increases our empathy with all Creation. We come to understand that building compassionate and healthy relationships with others and with all creation is what God asks us to do. Our spiritual growth depends on it.

Because of this emphasis on interconnectedness and compassion, living in Blessed Community can be a vital part of our witness for peace, social justice and care for the earth.

*“Our inability to get along with each other threatens all life on this planet... I think our meetings become Blessed Communities by becoming places where we can engage in learning how to get along with each other, where we consciously learn by doing. Our meetings are the place we can experiment and experience, the place where we can make mistakes and then learn from our mistakes.”*

***Marty Walton, The Blessed Community, p. 8, 1994***

*“If there is to be a religious solution to the social problem there must also be renewed in a disintegrating society the sense of community, of mutuality, of responsible brotherhood for all...”*

***American Friends Service Committee, ‘Speak Truth to Power,’ 1955***

## **The Individual in Community**

*“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works, and give glory to your Father in heaven.”*

***Matt. 5:14-16, NRSV***

Each of us has unique and creative contributions to make as we allow the Light to shine through us. A Meeting community needs the God-given leadings and spiritual gifts of each of its members. Individuals, in turn, need the Meeting community to be a safe place to explore whether their leadings are from the Light, and to exercise their gifts and abilities. This individuality and diversity of gifts can develop and be celebrated because the unity of the group resides in the Spirit through real connections and commitments to God and to each other, not in outward conformity.

The spiritual understanding of individuality stands in sharp contrast to the “rugged individualism” which is rampant in our culture. For generations, people have abandoned traditional forms of community – small towns and extended families – for various reasons, among them the pursuit of personal economic mobility, “progress” and wealth. Individualism has become a value system in which the rights of the individual are often believed to be in conflict and competition with the needs of the community and the environment.

*“Our meetings are living entities, not theories. . . . We can’t nurture our spirits in isolation from all the other ways we relate to each other – our spiritual lives can’t be separated out. Whether we want it to be this way or not, we inevitably find that our whole being is engaged in spiritual growth.”*

**---Marty Walton, *The Blessed Community*, p. 8, 1994**

*“...Here in the United States we put great value in our individual freedom, in our right to choose, and we hold very tightly to that right. But it grieves me that so little is trumpeted about our responsibility to choose wisely . . . .*

*“People have come to believe it is our right to act however we wish, without looking at the consequences to either the human or wider community in which we are embedded. This is a big current battle zone: individual rights versus responsibility and the taking into account of long-term consequences. . . . If Quakers have nothing else to offer the wider world it might be this: our practice of using corporate discernment to determine what is best for the body as a whole, balancing the needs of the individual with the good of the community.”*

**Lisa Lofland Gould, “Be Ye Perfect: The Quaker Call to Wholeness,” 2002**

*“Our Gracious Creator cares and provides for all His Creatures. His tender mercies are over all His works; and, so far as His love influences our minds, so far we become interested in His workmanship and feel a desire to take hold of every opportunity to lessen distresses of the afflicted and increase the happiness of the Creation. Here we have a prospect of one common interest from which our own is inseparable, that to turn all the treasure we possess into the channel of Universal Love becomes the business of our lives.”*

**John Woolman, “A Plea for the Poor,” 1772**

*“Community is the context in which people come to understand their relatedness.”*

**Parker Palmer, *A Place Called Community*, 1977**

## **Quaker Social Order (Gospel Order)**

*“. . . and keep the gospel order . . . so that in all your men’s and women’s meetings, see that virtue flow, and see that all your words be gracious, and see that love flows, which bears all things, that kindness, tenderness and gentleness may be among you, and that the fruits of the good spirit may abound. . . . For you have the light to see all evil, and the power to withstand it, and to see that nothing be lacking.”*

**George Fox, 1671, *Epistle 284***

Another aspect of our Quaker testimony of Community also requires a shift in our thinking as we learn to live in a new social order. Friends’ experience is that the creative power of the Spirit empowers

us to recognize our interdependence and to live in a cooperative relationship with others. Gospel Order is a traditional Quaker term for the social order the Spirit desires for us.

Living in Gospel Order, also known as Good Order or Right Order, requires giving up our reliance on those social structures that are based in power over others. Friends' experience is that a social order based on hierarchies and privilege inevitably leads to injustice and war. In Gospel Order we learn to rely on God's power and guidance in building a non-hierarchical social order which values equality and peacemaking.

Our Quaker organizational structures of Monthly Meetings and Yearly Meetings, committees, and affiliations with other Friends' organizations embody a non-hierarchical order. All of our Quaker practices help to keep us organized according to our discernment of how the Spirit is leading us forward.

*"... living in Gospel Order means living in the power of God, in the organizing and harmonizing power of God. Dozens of times in his Journal Fox wrote 'The Power of God was over all.' He and early Friends saw this as a power which can bring forth the words and organizational arrangements which are appropriate in a given situation."*

**William Taber, "Building the Life of the Meeting", 1994**

*"Organization is a good servant but a bad master; the living fellowship within the Church must remain free to mould organization into the fresh forms demanded by its own growth and the changing needs of the time."*

**William Charles Braithwaite, 1905**

*One might say that gospel order is the vessel, which contains (and therefore shapes) the Quaker edition of the Christian gospel, giving the Quaker message its particular flavor. Gospel order is not God or any aspect of the Trinity, but it is an organizing principle by which Friends come to a clearer understanding of our relationship to God in all of the divine manifestations and the responsibilities of that relationship. An attention to gospel order enables the meeting faith community to perceive and accept the spiritual gifts, which God offers, as well as to develop and exercise those gifts as God desires. Finally, gospel order is both a distinctive aspect of Quaker witness and testimony and the means by which Friends come to understand how they are to witness to the world.*

*Gospel order is pervasive; it is the order and harmony that characterizes every part of creation when that part is functioning according to the divine will – the shining of stars as well as the making of bread. It has been the experience of Friends that no part of their lives as individuals or as a faith community is separate from their vision of gospel order.*

**Lloyd Lee Wilson, "Essays on the Quaker Vision of Gospel Order", 1993**

## The Practice of Community

### Responsibilities of Friends

*“And Friends, meet together, and know one another in that which is eternal...”*  
**George Fox, 1657, Epistle 149**

*“The way that Jesus lived among men shows us the way that God lives among men and the way in which we are to live with one another. It was a way of fellowship. And fellowship, as Jesus understood it, was not mastery, but a living comradeship which respected the freedom of others and safeguarded instead of crushing out the growth of their personalities.”*

**William Charles Braithwaite, 1921**

God guides us to a place of empathy, care, and joy in each other’s company. Fellowship in the Spirit has a distinctive liveliness, openness, mutuality and ease.

The more we grow in the Spirit, the more we care about the spiritual growth of others and learn to do the work of love. Friends listen, are patient, respect each other’s viewpoints, accept differences, and work through difficulties. Here, love is more than a feeling. It is action arising out of our faithfulness to the Light. To be faithful means to make a conscious effort to pay attention to the choices we make and how our behavior affects others.

*“William Penn said of George Fox that he was ‘civil beyond all forms of breeding.’ Courtesy, considered not as a formal code of good manners, but as a supple and sensitive pattern of response to other people’s needs, moods, and desires, has marked the lives of many Friends. Even in his last illness, John Woolman was ‘exceedingly afraid from the first of giving needless trouble to any...’”*

**London Yearly Meeting, Christian Faith & Practice, #435, 1959**

(The passage includes quotes from William Penn’s introduction to George Fox’s Journal and from a letter of Esther Tuke to Samuel Emlen, from John Woolman’s Journal)

*“Community is a place where the connections felt in the heart make themselves known in bonds between people, and where the tuggings and pullings of those bonds keep opening up our hearts.”*

**Parker Palmer, A Place Called Community, p. 27, 1977**

### Responsibilities of the Meeting

The Meeting has responsibilities for cultivating our relationships and building community. Time needs to be set aside for open fellowship, group discussion and education, and fun. Community-building activities such as shared meals, workdays, committee work, retreats, workshops, and community service projects are recommended. The Meeting is responsible for seeing that the work of the group is shared, and that members are not unduly or unnecessarily burdened. Friends of all ages need to be included in activities as appropriate.

The group is responsible for encouraging and recognizing spiritual gifts among its members. The Meeting Community is the place where an individual can find help in testing leadings, clearness for personal decisions and difficulties, and support for leadings and witnesses of conscience.

A Meeting that cultivates a strong sense of its Quaker identity, practice and testimonies, as well as a sense of mission and service to the wider community, will find that its unity and fellowship are strengthened as well.

Group discernment is vital for ensuring that activities, responsibilities, and commitments the group takes on are leadings from God. Our Meetings can become overcommitted when we try to live up to imposed expectations of what the Meeting 'should' be doing. This is destructive of community. If we consciously allow space in our time and emotional energy for the Spirit to lead us, we will not be overburdened with work.

*Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.*

*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*

**Romans 12:9-18 NRSV**

*Keep up your meetings for worship, and your men and women's meetings for the affairs of truth, both Monthly and Quarterly. And after you are settled, you may join together and build a meeting-house. And do not strive about outward things; but dwell in the love of God, for that will unite you together, and make you kind and gentle one towards another; and to seek one another's good and welfare, and to be helpful one to another; and see that nothing be lacking among you, then all will be well. And let temperance and patience and kindness and brotherly love be exercised among you, so that you may abound in virtue, and the true humility; living in peace, showing forth the nature of Christianity, that you all may live as a family.*

**George Fox, Epistle 340, 1676**

*Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand.*

**Isaac Penington, 1667**

*"Over-busyness is one of the diseases that has infected Quakerism, not only here, but throughout the Society of Friends.... Too many of us too often find ourselves caught in a merry-go-round of activities and responsibilities, and we do*

*not take adequate time to get centered or sufficient time to nurture ourselves... The world of the spirit is real, and our journey into wholeness has to include time for us to be consciously aware of the life of our spirits.”*

***Marty Walton, “The Blessed Community”, SEYM, pp. 14-15, 1994***

*“...one common dilemma in Friends meetings today is the inability to hear when God is asking us **not** to take on more committee work, more projects, attendance at more gatherings.”*

***Sandra Cronk, “Gospel Order: A Quaker Understanding of Faithful Church Community,” p. 25, 1991***

## **Pastoral Care**

*The spiritual welfare of a meeting is greatly helped if its social life is vigorous, and its members take a warm personal interest in one another’s welfare. The pastoral work of the Society is specially committed to the overseers [also known as the Care & Counsel Committee], but our members generally should not allow themselves to feel that they are relieved from responsibility. In the greater events of life, such as marriage, birth of a child, illness or death, it is our duty and privilege to share in one another’s joys and sorrows; and sympathy thus shown is a potent means of binding us in closer fellowship.*

***London Yearly Meeting, Christian Faith & Practice, #325, 1925***

Pastoral Care is a traditional term for the many ways the faith community extends aid and concern for the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical well-being of all its members. All of us from time to time need someone to confide in; a listening ear to help us in working through personal life changes, dealing with loss, coping with circumstances, making wise decisions.

While much of this care for each other flows spontaneously as all Friends listen and help one another, the Meeting may appoint a Care and Counsel Committee (see pp. XX-XX) to provide leadership and to carry the more formal aspects of this work on behalf of the Meeting. The work of this committee is best served if it functions with dedication, tact, and discretion – the ability to listen, to ‘speak the truth in love,’ to maintain confidentiality, and to listen with empathy without giving advice unless asked and without making judgements. Gifts of insight, experience and emotional maturity are most helpful.

The Care and Counsel Committee seeks to maintain humility in carrying out its work; particularly in acknowledging its limitations in abilities and resources, and in recognizing when an individual or the community could best be helped by finding expert assistance from other Friends or from outside the Meeting. Care & Counsel Committee needs to be able to recognize when an individual’s difficulties require professional counseling. It needs to feel empowered to make that recommendation, even if it may not be well-received; the sincere desire to help someone takes precedence. It is not compassionate to enable someone’s mental illness or to allow destructive behavior.

The work of facilitating the resolution of conflicts within the Meeting community is usually given first to the Care and Counsel Committee.

## Conflict Resolution/Peacemaking

*Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy times seven."*

***Matthew 18:21-22 NRSV***

*"Our meetings can be where we practice making life heaven on earth.... If we engage wholeheartedly, we'll find areas of disagreement, differences of approaches, even differences in values. How we handle those differences is critical. To make our meeting Blessed Communities, we have to be willing to face issues, we have to be willing to tell our truth, and we have to be willing to hang in there in the difficult times. There are few things as destructive to a meeting community as keeping your truth hidden, or leaving when things don't go your way. And the extent to which people in the meeting make it safe for each other to tell their truth and safe to disagree will determine the all-over health of the meeting, and its possibility of being, for the people who are part of it, a living example of heaven on earth. Heaven on earth doesn't mean "no problems." It means the full reality, the loving creative spirit at work in all our lives together, and in the spaces between our lives."*

***Marty Walton, "Blessed Community," p. 8, 1994***

*"It has been the experience of this Yearly Meeting in the past to know that Friends have met in division and uncertainty, and that then guidance has come, and light has been given to us, and we have become finders of God's purpose. This gives us ground for confidence. We shall not be held back by the magnitude of the questions which are to come before us, nor by a sense of our own unworthiness."*

***London Yearly Meeting, Christian Faith & Practice, 1936, #358***

The peaceful resolution of disagreements and conflicts that arise in our Meetings is vital if we are to carry our testimonies of Peace, Community and Integrity to the wider world. Friends' experience is that disagreement is inevitable in any community where people are honestly engaged in dealing with important issues. Sometimes conflict erupts in our Meetings despite our best efforts to prevent it. Friends' experience is that we need not despair when conflicts arise, but rather face our difficulties with courage and faith that the Light will guide us.

The foundation for peacemaking needs to be laid long before conflict arises. Peacemaking is grounded in how we relate to God and each other in Meeting for Worship, Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business, fellowship, and service. Understanding our faith and practice, knowledge gained from Friends' writings, and the regular practice of our spiritual disciplines are important if Friends are to be equipped with the spiritual maturity and guidance to be peacemakers. The development of skills in resolving differences peacefully is acquired over time as we walk in the Light, learning how to handle differences and disagreements with love and forbearance in everyday conversation, committee meetings,

and Meetings for Business. Friends need to feel that their Meeting is a place where it is safe to disagree; and that when they express themselves they will be listened to because they are valued.

It is often hard to discern when a disagreement between Friends ‘crosses the line’ and becomes a battle of wills. Yet it is important that we learn to recognize the symptoms of conflict, and begin our peacemaking quickly. We can more readily identify when discord begins if we understand where it comes from. George Fox often used James 4:1 – “What causes war and fightings among you? Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? ...” to illustrate how conflict comes from our desire to have things our way, to get what we want without due regard for others. We invite conflict into our lives when we value our own judgments and desires more than seeking God’s guidance and the shared Light of the group.

The peaceful resolution of conflict requires a covering of prayer and true humility. True humility is not about “being a doormat” or stifling one’s light, but means accepting ourselves for who we are, acknowledging our limits and our need for others and for God. It depends upon our understanding that self-respect and respect for others go hand-in-hand.

A process for conflict resolution may proceed in different ways according to who brings forward the concern, and who is involved or affected. Friends’ practice, in general, is to try to maintain confidentiality and care for the reputation of others as much as is possible, while also considering the need to prevent further hurtful behavior.

When individuals carry a concern for the difficulties between them, they are advised first to try to work out their differences together, with or without the help of others as they may mutually agree. If this fails, they may take their concerns to the Care & Counsel Committee, which can work with them in confidentiality, separately and/or together, to continue to engage with both parties while taking care to avoid even the appearance of taking sides.

*So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, then come and offer your gift.*

**Matt 5:23-24 NRSV**

The Care & Counsel Committee is entrusted and empowered by the Monthly Meeting to initiate a response to conflict when it is recognized. The Committee works with those involved, in confidentiality, to solve the problem using resources such as a clearness committee, outside professional help, etc. If they are not successful, they may bring the matter to the Monthly Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business for discernment and direction.

If a conflict is brought to Meeting, or already involves the group as a whole, the Monthly Meeting must pay attention to the matter promptly. They may ask the Care & Counsel Committee or Friends from another Meeting or the Yearly Meeting to provide the impartial leadership and facilitation required for the next steps in a group process. Some form of structured and facilitated listening for the group is recommended, such as threshing sessions or worship sharing, along with continued private dialogue with individuals as necessary. It is recommended that Friends also pay close attention to the group’s need for closure and healing.

Each difficult situation a Meeting faces is unique. There is no set process for Friends to follow in dealing with conflict. We turn to the Spirit and to the gathered group for insights and leadings to guide us. Nevertheless, we can identify some important ingredients of peaceful resolution.

At any or various points in the process:

- ◆ Friends may need to be reminded lovingly of their commitment to peaceful reconciliation, and to acknowledge together that their difficulties are shared. In community, it is a fact that we are all in this together, and blaming one another for a problem only works to prevent us from solving it.
- ◆ Friends are advised neither to deny their feelings nor to become ruled by them. While it is normal to have strong feelings at times, Friends are advised to learn to recognize them and to avoid any sense of acting out of crisis or anger. Strong emotions can become hurtful, irrational, and overpowering. Where a group of Friends have come together to listen to each other and God, anger can prevent centering down and the exercise of love and patience. When this happens, Friends are urged to enter into Worship in the silence for a time, to allow the group to re-center.
- ◆ Friends are asked to set aside agendas, the desire to control outcomes, and any attempts to convert others to their point of view. We are asked and expected not to engage in gossip, make or take sides on an issue, or use other attempts to manipulate others. These behaviors not only show profound disrespect for others, but are also a departure from the Quaker path of seeking God's guidance and unity in the Light.
- ◆ Friends are encouraged to strive to dispel confusion and misconception by practicing reality-testing and information-sharing. Recognize how different issues are interwoven and seek clearness in identifying them.
- ◆ Friends are urged to practice compassionate listening, compassionate speaking, and non-judgmental language.
- ◆ Friends are asked to consider what true forgiveness is, and what it is not, and to attend to closure and healing.

*“The Inner Light does not lead men to do that which is right in their own eyes, but that which is right in God’s eyes. As the Light is One, so its teaching is ultimately (though not superficially) harmonious. In actual experience, it is not found that souls truly looking to the Inner Light as their authority will break away from each other in anarchy.”*

*Ellen S. Bosanquet, 1927,  
London Yearly Meeting, Christian Faith & Practice, #182*

*“And be it known unto all, we cast out none from among us; for if they go from the Light and the Spirit, in which our unity is, they cast out themselves. And it has been our way to admonish them, that they may come to that spirit and light of God which they are gone from, and so come into the unity again.”*

*George Fox, Ep. 264, No More But My Love, Cecil Sharman, editor, p. 85, 1980*

## Advices on Community

### Maintaining Gospel Order and Good Order

*“...Remember that the Lord never lays work upon His people that He does not give them strength or ability to perform...”*

*Joseph John Armistead (1913)  
London Yearly Meeting, Christian Faith & Practice, #409*

*“Life in Christ is not the imposition of a system of ‘oughts’ and ‘shoulds.’ George Fox wrote: ‘Take heed of getting into a form without power; ... for that will bring deadness, and coldness, and weariness and faintings.’”*

*Sandra Cronk, “Gospel Order:  
A Quaker Understanding of the Faithful Church Community,” p. 8, 1991*

Our Religious Society endures as a community of Friends who take thought for outward society by first taking care of one another. Friends are advised to strive to maintain love and unity, to avoid tale-bearing and detraction, and to settle differences promptly and in a manner free from resentment and all forms of inward or outward violence. Live affectionately as friends, entering with sympathy into the joys and sorrows of one another's daily lives. Visit one another. Be alert to give help and ready to receive it. Bear the burdens of one another's failings; share the buoyancy of one another's strengths.

Remember that to everyone is given a share of responsibility for the Meeting for Worship, whether through silence or through the spoken word. Be diligent and prompt in attendance at all Meetings and in inward preparation for them. Be ready to speak under the leadings of the Light. Receive the ministry of others in a tender spirit and avoid hurtful criticism. In Meetings for Business, and in all duties connected with them, seek again the leadings of the Light, keeping from obstinacy and from harshness of tone or manner; be teachable, and admit the possibility of being in error. In all the affairs of the Meeting community, proceed in the peaceable spirit of Pure Wisdom, with forbearance and warm affection for each other.

Use your capabilities and your possessions not as ends in themselves but as God's gifts entrusted to you. Share them with others; use them with humility, courtesy and affection. Guard against contentiousness and love of power; be alert to the personalities and the needs of others. Show loving consideration for all creatures, and cherish the beauty and wonder of God's creation.

### Maintaining Unity

*“[It is] our concern that Friends should work with one another in a humble and loving spirit, each giving to others credit for purity of motive, notwithstanding differences of opinion, and being ready to accept the decision of the meeting even when it may not accord with his own judgment. The mutual forbearance and understanding which are produced by a constant dwelling under the power and control of Christ do much to prevent jealousies, misunderstandings, or any breach of love.”*

***London Yearly Meeting, Christian Faith & Practice, 1931, #351***

Focus on “speaking the Truth in love” (Eph. 4:15 NRSV), using non-judgmental language which invites others into dialog. For early Friends, “Truth” meant “how the Spirit is working among us,” which is much bigger than one’s personal ideas. Let the Light show you what your true concerns and motives are. Where the Light reveals a problem, it may show us care for others as well.

To be faithful, follow the process of discerning God’s will. Keep an open mind, otherwise, consciously or unconsciously, you will try to impose your own will on a situation. Give up trying to convert others to your viewpoint – instead, share your measure of the Light, respect the views of others and seek the reality that is unfolding. Leave outcomes to God.

Do not gossip or listen to gossip. Do not blame or listen to blaming. Learn to carry a concern for another’s behavior as a concern for that Friends’ spiritual well-being, and know that that concern supports the unity of the Meeting.

*“If we hope to be forgiven, we must also forgive one another. He who yields to a suspicious and unforgiving spirit is led on to imagine things against his brother that are exaggerated, or even false... It may be that thou hast just ground for offence. Is thy brother’s trespass against thee any warrant for thy own disobedience? ... Wait not until thy brother be reconciled unto thee, or until he shall make the first overture. Be thyself the first to seek reconciliation...”*

***London Yearly Meeting, Christian Faith & Practice, 1870 #322***

*“Maintain that charity which suffereth long, and is kind; put the best construction upon the conduct and opinions one of another which circumstances will warrant... Let each be tender of the reputation of his brother; and be earnest to possess the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. Watch over one another for good, but not for evil; and whilst not blind to the faults or false views of others, be especially careful not to make them a topic of common conversation...”*

***London Yearly Meeting, Christian Faith & Practice, 1834, #323***

## **Queries on Community**

- ◆ How do we recognize and respond to leadings of the Spirit? Do we test our leadings, seeking the help of others in discerning God’s guidance and the way forward? Do we wait patiently for ‘way to open?’
- ◆ Do we consider carefully which activities and responsibilities we commit ourselves to, taking into account our gifts and limitations and our sense of leading? Do we leave space for rest and renewal? Do we leave space to respond to needs that may arise, and to listen for new leadings of the Spirit? Are we careful not to burden the meeting or each other with pre-conceived or personal expectations of what they “should” be doing?

- ◆ How do we foster participation in the whole life of the Meeting? Do members regularly attend Meetings for Worship and Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business? Do all participate in some way in fellowship and in service?
- ◆ How do we care for one another within our meetings? Do we keep good communication with each person? Do we offer aid and support for those who are dealing with difficulties? How is our meeting a place where individuals find healing and encouragement?
- ◆ How do we recognize, encourage and support the development of gifts and leadings among our members?
- ◆ Do we deal with disagreements with love and forbearance, seeking God's guidance for peaceful resolution? Do members feel safe to voice their disagreement and concerns, confident that their input is valued?
- ◆ Do we have a sense of unity in joining with each other on the Quaker path? Do we foster an understanding of our Quaker identity — faith, testimonies and practice — such that all may find spiritual nourishment and growth?
- ◆ How do we reach out to the wider community? Do we serve, participate in, and celebrate the life of our Yearly Meeting and other Friends organizations? Do we respond to the needs of others in our local communities and the world? Do we build relationships with other organizations in our local communities?