

Concerning this Book of Faith and Practice

Early Quakers had a vivid sense of the Holy Spirit as an active presence, transforming themselves, their dealings with each other, and the entire world. They honored each person's direct access to the Light, yet were aware of the frailty of human judgment. Their response was to develop practices of communal listening, seeking, and discerning. Meeting for worship, meeting for business, and some more specialized practices were all developed to allow the group to clarify and support individual guidance and revelation. Today, Quakers continue to revise, refine, and hand on their characteristic practices of corporate listening and waiting, because these practices work.

The practical details of this corporate listening and waiting are of immediate concern to all Quakers. We have insisted on an open and freely shared ministry; as a result, the ongoing life of our meetings is shaped to an extraordinary degree by each meeting's members. Caring for ourselves and one another well - calling forth the Holy Seed effectively - requires (and elicits) very careful attention. Each situation is a fresh opportunity, yet our experimental approach has led to a body of experiential learning.

Quakers have naturally supported each other by sharing approaches that have worked well in the past: methods of listening, discerning, and acting that have reliably embodied our core leadings, especially in situations that recur again and again. A book of Faith and Practice records such shared learnings, brought together for the guidance of meetings and their members, and endorsed (in this case) by the Yearly Meeting. Books of Faith and Practice exist to coach Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups, individual members and attenders, in how to care for themselves and each other in basic ways. Books of Faith and Practice have proved to be effective means to convey our faith, inspiring and guiding expression of the Spirit's leadings.

This Faith and Practice is intended as a guide to Friends' characteristic practices, embodying the wisdom and experience of Illinois Yearly Meeting Friends. Not every detail of every practice described here will fit the real life situation of every Meeting or Friend. It would be unfaithful to insist that they be followed in preference to the Spirit's present guidance! Nevertheless, we have tried to assemble here descriptions of tested ways of doing things, practices it would be good to follow whenever practical, apart from unusual circumstances or special leadings. This Faith and Practice also includes perspectives on the spiritual meaning and underlying coherence of our current practices, often in the form of excerpts from Friends' writings. Glimpses of this deeper pattern can illumine our usual practices, and can guide improvisation in exceptional cases or new circumstances. These practices and perspectives have empowered our meetings to find unity and move forward in that unity - both unity with each other, and a deeper unity in and with the Holy Spirit.

Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all with a measure of the light which is pure and holy may be guided, and so in the light walking and abiding, these things may be fulfilled in the Spirit, - not from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.

Postscript to an epistle from the meeting of elders, Balby, Yorkshire, England, 1656