

# THE QUERIES



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NORTH CAROLINA YEARLY MEETING  
(CONSERVATIVE)

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# *Introduction*

BY *DEBORAH SHAW*

SEVERAL YEARS AGO the committee responsible for planning our yearly meeting sessions was challenged to create intentional opportunities for those present to meet in small intimate settings that they might come to know one another better. Given that the schedule is always full, if not overflowing, it was acknowledged that something would have to be laid aside in order to accommodate this new

focus. The matter was discussed at a representative body meeting. Unity was reached swiftly on the conclusion that, what else might be recommended, the reading of the queries and the answers from all the monthly meetings must remain. There was also clarity that we would not alter how we approached the queries and their answers as a community of faith – as long as it was within the context of worship.

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Given the strength of this unity, and still attending to the concern shared in the first issue of this journal that we, as a yearly meeting, are hiding our light under a bushel, the editorial board felt clear that the theme for this issue should be the “queries” and our yearly meeting’s particular way of engaging with them during our yearly meeting sessions. In one of this issue’s articles, Mike Arnold shares an account of taking this method of query answering “on the road” and the especial joy and wonder he experienced from the very positive reception it received.

Our Faith and Practice tells us that “the Queries are designed for study and periodic answer by each member and each Meeting, to help discover shortcomings and overcome them.” It further states that “a qualified answer arising from introspection is more meaningful and constructive than an uncritical ‘yes’ or ‘no.’”

Faithfully employed, the queries and their answers provide a window into the spiritual state of our monthly meetings. Queries, by their very nature, remain in the realm of openings and invitation into greater obedience for Friends than do rules or guidelines of conduct. While the articles in this issue focus on the corporate practice of answering the queries, it is understood that the individual practice of reflecting on the queries can only deepen and enrich that corporate experience.

There are four contributors to this second issue of the Journal of North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative). Three are members of the yearly meeting, the fourth, David Eley of Hill Country Meeting (South Central Yearly Meeting), has been such a faithful and constant attender of our sessions over the years that it is easy to forget that he is not a member.

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Carole Treadway examines the historical context out of which the queries come, following their development with particular attention to how they have evolved in our yearly meeting. Her gleanings give evidence of how the evolution of the queries was, in itself, a corporate spiritual engagement with how Truth was prospering with the body. Carole brings to our attention the shift in the Queries “from emphasis on the outward expression of our faith and testimonies to an inward orientation toward the teachings and spirit of Christ that results in a certain way of life.”

Lloyd Lee Wilson and David Eley share observations about the Yearly Meeting’s query process in a dialogue, as “insider” and “outsider” respectively. Our Faith and Practice states that “Friends can employ the Queries to determine the extent of prog-

ress on the spiritual path, in what way they should proceed, and how they may help others; and also to solve many related problems.” David Eley reflects on how he has come to know us more fully through hearing the query answers, noting here the “evidence of a depth of faith,” and there a “growth in some aspect of a meeting’s life,” that otherwise might not have come to light. Lloyd Lee explores the celebratory, communal nature of this practice, in which we take “encouragement from the experiences of our brothers and sisters in the faith.” Throughout the process the Holy Spirit is at work, lovingly and skillfully guiding each one of us forward. Both David and Lloyd Lee lift up the evidence of how the query answers reveal the common struggle to be faithful, despite differences in the detail of outward condition.

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As our faithful companion and observer David Eley shares so beautifully: “In the Answers are a measure of the knowing and being known, of the ways in which we have responded to the reality of the mystery into which we together have entered, which is Christ in us, our hope of glory.”

In engaging with the Queries we seek that Truth which Friends throughout the ages have sought; in sharing the Answers with one another we share how that Truth has prospered among us, both as individuals and in the body. Rejoicing in this communal opportunity to apprehend the Truth, we hope our readers will also experience this sense of celebration.

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Deborah Shaw is a recorded minister, and a member of Friendship Monthly Meeting in Greensboro, NC.

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# *The Queries of North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) 1809-1983*

BY CAROLE EDGERTON TREADWAY

“ARE LOVE AND  
A unity preserved among  
you? And do you discourage  
all tale-bearing and detraction?  
And when differences arise,  
are endeavors speedily used  
to end them?” This is a ques-  
tion or “query” that Friends in  
North Carolina Yearly Meeting  
have been considering annu-  
ally since at least 1809 when  
the first printed Discipline  
was published. Answering the  
Queries is the process that  
Friends in our meetings have  
used to assess how well we

measure up as a meeting and  
as individual members to the  
standards of faith and practice  
that are implied or explicit in  
the Queries. The underlying  
question of the Queries col-  
lectively is “How does Truth  
prosper among you?” The  
custom of allowing ourselves  
to be queried and to answer as  
honestly as we can is one of  
the most distinctive features of  
Quaker practice. It originated  
in the early days of Quakerism,  
although the Queries became  
institutionalized only in the

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eighteenth century when formal Disciplines were adopted. They have been revised and additional queries added in response to changes in conditions in the culture and in understanding of how life should be lived in the spirit and under the guidance of Christ. Despite many changes, there is also a constancy that attests to their enduring witness to Truth.

Very early, George Fox introduced some guidelines for the orderly functioning of the new meetings that were emerging out of the creative chaos of the earliest years. In 1656 there was a gathering of elders at Balby in Yorkshire at which these guidelines were adopted. The guidelines, or Advices as they came to be called, generally covered the proper manner of holding meetings for worship and for discipline (now understood as our meeting for business), behavior in meeting, the recording of

births and deaths, the procedure for marriage, the care of widows and orphans and the poor in general. Friends were to maintain love and unity among themselves and to avoid talebearing. They were admonished to keep to plainness and moderation in their manner of living, and to avoid gambling, excessive drinking of alcoholic beverages (“spiritous liquors”), and places of amusement. They were to avoid participating in all military activity and to refrain from suing at law except with the permission of the meeting. Great concern was shown for children who were to be “trained up in the principles of our religious profession, to reading the Holy Scriptures, and use the necessary restraints for their preservation.” There was little in the way of explicit doctrine.

The Queries were drawn from the Advices and were answered informally until

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the middle of the eighteenth century. At that time there was growing concern that Friends were sliding into a secular manner of living and becoming nominal Friends only. Those who bore this concern inspired a widespread re-emphasis on observing the Advices. Written Disciplines were adopted by all the yearly meetings, generally based on the London and Philadelphia yearly meeting Disciplines, with adaptations to local conditions and concerns. North Carolina Yearly Meeting revised its Discipline in 1755 and a handwritten copy was distributed to each monthly meeting where it circulated among member families. After Friends began to answer the Queries formally and in writing in their monthly meetings, the answers were forwarded to the quarterly meetings, summarized, and passed on to the yearly meetings. This system of accountability resulted in a

more distinctive and separate people, recognizable by their dress and speech, and known for their upright moral character and integrity, and it also led to many more disownments from membership for violations of the Discipline.

The first printed Discipline was produced in 1809, making it possible for each family to have its own copy. As Friends became more familiar with its contents, there was a noticeable decline in the number of disownments for behavior “contrary to discipline.” The Discipline was revised again ten more times between 1823 and 1983, each revision incorporating changes that had been made in the intervening years.

The Disciplines of 1809 and 1822 included eight queries (the 1983 edition has twelve) which were nearly identical from one edition to the next, but one small change in the latter reveals that stricter adherence to the Advices

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was expected. In the 1809 Discipline, the first query asked, “Are meetings for worship and discipline duly attended? The hour observed? And do Friends avoid all unbecoming behavior therein?” In 1822 a sentence was added that read, “And is due care taken, when any thing appears amiss, that the rules of our discipline be timely put in practice?”

Changes in the Queries were minor until the edition of 1869. Two important exceptions must be noted, however. In 1838, a new fifth query was added in which Friends asked themselves, “Do Friends bear a faithful testimony against war?” That this query had not appeared earlier is surprising when we consider that the testimony against war had been a part of Quaker witness since the 1660s and that Friends in North Carolina had suffered for their faithfulness to it throughout the

Revolutionary War. The peace testimony does appear in the Advices in the earlier editions, so why there had been no related query is a mystery. The other exception of note was the change in the wording of the query pertaining to slaves. In the yearly meeting sessions of 1776, the holding of people in bondage was declared unacceptable and any Friends who did so, or who were not making an effort of clearing themselves of this practice, could be disowned. An earlier query that had advised humane care and spiritual concern for those held in slavery was revised to read, “Are Friends clear of purchasing, disposing of, or holding mankind as slaves ...? And do they use those well who are set free, and under their care, ... endeavouring to encourage them in a virtuous life?”

The 1869 edition of the Discipline shows greater concern for maintenance of the

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traditional manner of worship and is more explicit about the daily practice of reading Holy Scriptures. It omits the query concerning slavery since it was no longer practiced legally in any state of the union. A replacement for this query inquired whether Friends avoided the exploitation of laborers and encouraged them in a virtuous life.

A significant innovation in the 1869 Queries was the addition of the “unanswered queries.” They were to be read “and seriously considered” by each quarterly, monthly, and preparative meeting at least once each year “as may seem to each meeting most suitable.” These queries go more deeply into the spiritual life of the meeting and its members and are concerned with the development of the Christian life. They give expression much more explicitly to the nature and content of religious faith than previous queries.

Several of the queries were entirely new and others were not new but were deemed more suitable here. They inquire about the spiritual disciplines of scripture reading, “private retirement” and “waiting upon the Lord,” prayer, and dependence on the “help and guidance of the Holy Spirit.” They probe the “religious state” of the meetings and the spiritual state of their members. The Christian basis of faith is clear: “Do you maintain a faithful allegiance to the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the one head of the Church and the Shepherd and Bishop of souls, from whom alone must come the true call and qualification for the Ministry of the Word?” In addition, the queries asked if meetings are faithful to the testimony of the free Gospel ministry, if honesty and integrity in the outward life of members are maintained, and if meetings “exercise a loving

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and watchful care over ... younger members; promoting their instruction in fundamental Christian truths, and in the Scriptural grounds of our religious principles ....” It will be seen that these concerns in modified form were carried over into later editions and, in much modified form, remain in our current Faith and Practice.

Whereas the 1854 Discipline simply asked if Friends bore a faithful testimony against hireling ministry and included it in the query concerning the testimony against war, the 1869 Discipline devoted a separate query to ministry and expanded it so that it read, “Do Friends faithfully maintain our testimony to a free gospel ministry, agreeably [sic] to our discipline?”

Three queries were added seeking information about the number of ministers recorded during the year, their age and

length of service, how many died; the number of families, and of members, male and female; the number of convictions, and information about newly established meetings.

The Discipline of 1893 was revised considerably and only five queries were to be answered in writing. They concerned love and unity and the maintenance of discipline; simplicity and moderation; and a much stronger query than previously written about the use of alcoholic beverages, reflecting Friends’ participation in and agreement with the precepts of the temperance movement. Now, Friends were asked if they were clear of the use of intoxicating liquors as a drink (permitting its medicinal use) as well as the manufacture, importation or sale of them. The final query was an expansion of the peace testimony: To the traditional query, “Are you faithful

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in maintaining our testimony against all war?" a phrase reading "... as consistent with the precepts and spirit of the Gospel" was added.

In 1902, North Carolina Yearly Meeting, along with most other yearly meetings in the United States, adopted the Constitution and Discipline for the American Yearly Meetings, informally known as the "Uniform Discipline." This move marked an important stage in a revival and renewal movement among Friends that had begun after the Civil War. For several reasons, the renewal and expansion of Friends Meetings, especially in the Midwest, had opened them to influences that threatened to weaken the distinctiveness of Friends' faith and practice. The "Uniform Discipline" was part of the effort of most American yearly meetings that were cooperating to preserve the distinctiveness while at

the same time to eliminate or to de-emphasize some of the features of Quakerism that, while distinctive, were thought to be unnecessary and even harmful to its vitality. The earlier emphasis on plainness and other outward peculiarities in manner and speech were de-emphasized and the sanctions against marriage to non-Friends were eliminated. For some members of the yearly meeting these changes were alarming, but the most serious complaint about the "Uniform Discipline" was that it opened the door to forms of worship that had not been associated with traditional Friends' practice. The query in the "Uniform Discipline" on worship does not ask if meetings are faithful in upholding a free gospel ministry, but asks only if meetings are duly held and regularly and punctually attended. Some meetings had begun to hire pastors and to introduce an order of worship

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with congregational singing, a prepared sermon, and planned prayers and Scripture readings. The “Uniform Discipline” did not prohibit or even discourage these developments.

A minority of Friends in North Carolina Yearly Meeting did not support the adoption of the “Uniform Discipline,” and they believed that the changes in worship and manner of living moved Friends away from the original inspiration and vision of Friends. These Friends established North Carolina Yearly Meeting-Conservative (NCYM-C), which met for the first time in 1904. As noted above, NCYM-C published its own Discipline in 1908. Not surprisingly, the query concerning the manner of worship was expanded so as to make explicit just how worship should be conducted.

“Are you concerned faithfully to uphold our testimony to a waiting spiritual worship,

and a free Gospel ministry, exercised in dependence upon the Head of the Church and under the immediate authority and prompting of His Holy Spirit? And do you maintain our testimony against that system which requires a ministry to be exercised at stated times or for pay?” (Query 3).

Interestingly, the “unanswered queries” were dropped.

The Discipline was not revised again until 1950 and the Queries were unchanged. In 1969, the Discipline was revised again and this time there were substantial alterations and additions to the Queries. The number was increased from nine to ten with the addition of a query on racial discrimination and social justice. This, of course, reflects the great changes and large concerns that were affecting American society during this time.

An interesting change in each of the 1969 queries



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is the shift from second or third person to first person. For example, previously the first query read as follows: “Are Friends diligent in their attendance of Meetings for Worship and Discipline at the hour appointed...?” In the 1969 version the first query begins, “Are we diligent and punctual in our attendance at meetings for worship and for business ...?” Earlier, the second query asked, “Are Love and Unity preserved amongst you, and do you discourage all tale-bearing and detraction, ...?” The revised query asked, “Are love and unity preserved among us?” The shift would seem to point to a sense of shared authority, of mutual accountability, and of greater intimacy.

The third query in the earlier Discipline on our manner of worship ended, “And do you maintain our testimony against that system which requires a ministry to

be exercised at stated times or for pay?” The revised query ended, “Is our meeting encouraging those who may have a gift in the ministry?” Perhaps over the years, as the yearly meeting matured and realized a strong sense of its own legitimate identity, the need to emphasize the issue that had been so important in the establishment of the yearly meeting had lessened. Now the focus could be on nurturing the ministry rather than on policing it.

The fourth query had previously asked if Friends did, “by example and precept, ... train up their children ... in plainness of speech, deportment and apparel ...? Do they guard them against pernicious books, ... and are they encouraged to read the Holy Scriptures and other religious books?” Now the query asked, “Do we endeavor, by example and precept, to cultivate in our children a sense of expectancy

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and openness about life; to aid them in their growth in spiritual understanding and moral discernment; ... Do we seek to share our religious beliefs with our children, leaving them free to develop as the Spirit of God may lead them?" The shift in this query is striking. No longer is the emphasis on the outward restraints and on training, but on the nurturing of spiritual growth by example and encouragement.

A query was added to ascertain if each member assumed a share in the work and expenses of the monthly meeting. The query on the peace testimony was, like the query on rearing children, dramatically changed from inquiring if Friends are faithful to the testimonies against "oaths, bearing arms, training and other military services" to inquiring if we "endeavor to live in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars ...?"

While references to plainness were dropped, a new query that retains the essence of the earlier query asked, "Do we keep to moderation in our standards of living, avoiding excesses of self-indulgence and display?" "Do you avoid such places of diversion as are frivolous and demoralizing...?" became "Do we choose those activities which will strengthen our physical, mental, and spiritual life, and do we avoid those harmful to ourselves and others?" A long-standing query about taking responsibility for the needs of the poor in the meeting was dropped.

An appendix to the 1969 Discipline contains twelve suggested queries for individual Friends, continuing much the same spirit of the former "unanswered queries." The latter had not appeared in either of the previous editions of the NCYM-C Discipline. Like the "unan-

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swered queries,” the queries for individuals delve into faith, spiritual practices, and moral and ethical issues. Concern for the environment appears for the first time. The queries for individual Friends are a significant addition to the Queries and were brought over intact into the 1983 edition, the last to be produced to date. These queries challenge those who take the time to read and ponder them in the key areas of spiritual growth and responsibility, and provide guidance in those areas as well. Ten of the twelve queries were carried over to the 1983 edition, while two were moved to the general queries.

The general queries in the 1983 edition were, again, substantially revised and reorganized, and incorporated some of the elements in the queries for individuals. A comparison of what in the 1969 Discipline is the third query and in the 1983 edition is the

first, gives some sense of the direction of the changes.

1969, number 3: “Do we faithfully uphold our testimony to a waiting spiritual worship and a free Gospel ministry, exercised in dependence upon the Head of the Church and under the immediate authority and prompting of His Holy Spirit? Is our meeting encouraging those who may have a gift in the ministry?”

1983, number 1: “Do we faithfully uphold our testimony for worship which is based on silent waiting, and for a free and unprogrammed ministry that may be shared by all? Is there a living silence in which we feel drawn together by the Light of Christ, the power of God in our midst; and is this inspiration carried over into our daily lives? Do we come to meeting with hearts and minds open and ready to worship in silence or in vocal ministry or prayer as the Holy Spirit leads us? Does our Meeting encour-

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age those who may have a gift in the spoken ministry?”

The changes and additions in the 1983 query indicate an increasing awareness of the needs of new Friends. The traditional phrase “free Gospel ministry” is eliminated in favor of a description of what that ministry is, that is “... a free and unprogrammed ministry that may be shared by all?”. The query further instructs the reader about the nature of a meeting for worship, and with what preparation, attitude, and expectation the worshippers come to it. For earlier generations of Friends, these explanations may not have been needed, or perhaps earlier there was greater understanding and awareness of the process of learning what it means to be a Friend and a person of faith in the Friends’ tradition.

The 1969 queries had no references to the use of alcoholic beverages, unlike nearly

all of the previous editions. There was only a general reference to “avoiding excesses of self-indulgence ...” and “... those ... activities harmful to ourselves and others?”. The query is reinstated in the 1983 Discipline with greater emphasis, and concerns other substances as well. What has come to be a controversial phrase was added that justifies the standard expressed in the query: “...do we refrain from using [alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and other harmful drugs] ... realizing that abstinence is the clearest witness against overindulgence?” It is apparent that the writers of the 1983 queries brought to the task a much greater awareness of the widespread and destructive pattern of substance abuse than the writers of the 1950 queries, and that the reference to abstinence is not just a relic of the temperance movement, but reflects an awareness of the realities

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of the disease of addiction. Many Friends object to the emphasis on abstinence with the argument that moderation is a more effective and realistic standard. This query is likely to come under scrutiny in future revisions.

A new query was added in the 1983 Discipline: "Do we endeavor to live in harmony with nature? Are we careful in our stewardship of the world's irreplaceable resources?" This concern had been included in the individual queries in the 1969 Discipline. By 1983, Friends' awareness of this critical issue led to placing it more prominently and asking us to consider it corporately as well as individually. But like the query on addictive substances, it has become a controversial query, often stimulating the criticism that it is inadequate. In 1998 the Durham young Friends took this concern to heart and presented a new query on the environment to

the yearly meeting. Friends were moved by the careful thought and great awareness of how our understanding of our relationship to the natural world has shifted and expanded in recent decades. Their revision is as follows:

"Do we sincerely seek to understand our place in the universe and our purpose here on earth? Are we willing to make sacrifices and to ask others to join us in changing the things we use and the way we use them in order to preserve life everywhere? Are we willing to persist gently in persuading others, not giving up, but being receptive to others' needs as we strive to establish life-styles dedicated to the preservation of all life? Are we open to the strength, the purpose, the joy, the desire within and beyond ourselves as a resource in truly living in and genuinely loving the world?"

No doubt, when the queries are revised again, the Durham

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young Friends' concerns will be taken into consideration.

There is another set of queries that has appeared in each edition since 1809. These are the queries for the meeting of ministers and elders, or as the designation is now, the meeting of ministry and oversight. They invite those who serve in the capacities of ministers, elders, and overseers, to examine how well they carry out the duties and responsibilities to serve, to mentor, to nurture, and to be examples to others. As with the general queries, they show the same shift through the many years and editions from emphasis on the outward form to emphasis on the inward spiritual condition and its expression.

There seems to be a shift in the Queries from emphasis on the outward expression of our faith and testimonies to an inward orientation toward the teachings and spirit of Christ that result in a certain way of

life. It is tempting to observe that the changes that have occurred in the Queries over the centuries indicate progression from inferior to superior, and from primitive to more advanced. Perhaps the wiser assessment is that each age has called for different emphases and each generation has been faithful to discern how the Queries may best serve us as Friends in our own times so that we may live lives of integrity, open always to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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# *Take This Show on the Road!*

BY MICHAEL ARNOLD

OVER THE PAST several years, the North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) has been struggling with how other Friends perceive the yearly meeting, and there has been concern that unless we provide an adequate definition, those outside the yearly meeting will provide their own definition. We have also been told time and again that we need to share the truth as experienced by North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative).

On the seventeenth of third month 2001, the Friends World Committee for Consultation - Section of the Americas held its annual meeting in Greensboro, North Carolina, co-hosted by North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Friends United Meeting) and North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative). As a regular part of the annual meeting agenda, FWCC provides an opportunity for the host organizations to prepare the seventh day evening program.



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It was decided that for our portion of the program, North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) would read the responses to our monthly meeting queries, which would provide a window into the events of our yearly meeting sessions. Our yearly meeting still holds to the practice of a representative of each monthly meeting reading that meeting's responses in the face of the yearly meeting. The reading of those responses during yearly meeting is a treasured part of our sessions and helps everyone there to better understand how other monthly meetings face the realities of being Friends. I held a great deal of skepticism about reading the responses and I feared that we were not destined to be a big hit. As a relatively new member of the yearly meeting, I had come to appreciate the reading of the queries and responses, but I can also remember that during my first

yearly meeting, this process seemed to take forever.

Our plan was that each meeting supply a representative who would sit with the other representatives at the head of the gathering (as we do during yearly meeting sessions). An individual query was assigned its own representative, who would read it and then read his or her meeting's response to it. During recent times, in our yearly meeting sessions, every monthly meeting, rather than a single meeting, responds to the same query before moving to the next.

I arrived at the meeting location a little early, which is somewhat uncharacteristic for me; usually I arrive somewhat closer to the appointed time. The meeting was held in a local hotel, and the lobby was full of Quakers lining up for the evening meal (if Friends were only this theologically ordered!). As I wandered around, I recognized

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a number of nametags of weighty Friends from all over Quakerdom. This wasn't going to be easy at all! It took me a couple of years of reading the responses from my monthly meeting in the face of the yearly meeting before I became comfortable with the process. Reading in front of these Friends was going to be a challenge, for there seemed to be hundreds of Friends here!

Though my arrival had been earlier than it normally would have been, most of the others who were to read that night had gotten there even earlier and were a good deal further up in the line, and sat at a table quite full by the time I arrived. Being mindful that these things are rarely coincidence, I sat at a table with a group of Friends I had not met before. Of course, these encounters are the real reason for this kind of event. There were wonderful spirits at this

table, some who had been participating in FWCC events for a very long time.

After dessert, the evening program began and started with Max Carter, of the Friends Center at Guilford College, who gave a joyful account of some Friends from North Carolina. He was followed by group singing, and it was then our turn. However, instead of chairs arranged at the same height as the group, there were tables and chairs set up on a small stage. We lined up in the order of our query number and sat down in our appointed chairs. From the stage, it seemed as if there were even more people, and as the hotel staff were clearing the tables, I wondered how the room would be able to settle sufficiently to enter a worshipful frame of mind.

I have no idea what the other representatives were thinking, but I thought that if we did our best to trust the

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Lord, then anything was possible. The yearly meeting clerk, Robert Gosney, explained the process that we would follow: the reading of a query, the response, and a time of worshipful meditation on that response. We all settled in, and in a short time the room was quite silent.

By the time we reached the second query, Christ's presence was evident and much truth was heard. During the times between queries, there was well-guided ministry from those present. My query was number eight:

*Are we mindful of Friends testimonies against alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and other harmful drugs; and do we refrain from using them or dealing in them, realizing that abstinence is the dearest witness against overindulgence? Do we seek to avoid all kinds of gambling and places of diversion that tend to be demoralizing? Do we keep in mind how diverse and widespread are the temptations to grow richer at the expense of others? Are we faithful to our testimony against taking oaths?*

Thankfully my meeting has exceptionally short responses. In this case:

*We know of no substance abuse among our active members. Our members avoid places of diversion that are demoralizing. We know of no one becoming rich at the expense of others. Our members are faithful to our testimony against taking oaths.*

A Friend rose to state that we are always taking advantage of someone somewhere. As I understand it, this was not the original intent of the query, which was more along the lines of being fair to the ones we do business with. However, this is not an unknown interpretation of the query.

Another Friend rose to say that perhaps we should be open to changing the queries from time to time. This ministry was very well timed, as the next query was number ten, first read by the clerk:

*Do we endeavor to live in harmony with nature? Are we careful in our stewardship of the world's irreplaceable resources?*

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Then, Robert Passmore from Durham Monthly Meeting rose to provide their response. A number of years ago, the Durham youth put together a revised query ten, to which the monthly meeting has since been responding. Robert read the revised query :

*Do we sincerely seek to understand our place in the universe and our purpose here on earth? Are we willing to make sacrifices and to ask others to join us in changing the things we use and the way we use them in order to preserve life everywhere? Are we willing to persist gently in persuading others, not giving up, but being receptive to others' needs as we strive to establish life styles dedicated to the preservation of all life? Are we open to the strength, the purpose, the joy, the desire within and beyond ourselves as a resource in truly living in and genuinely loving the world?*

He read the response, which was well received.

After all the meetings had read their responses, we quietly took our seats back at our tables. Though it had been

clear from the stage that the group had been well settled with a wonderfully strong spirit moving many, it had not been clear how strong that spirit really had been. When I returned to my dinner table there were tears of joy, and expressions of gratitude for sharing our practice.

In what seemed like an instant after we sat down, a group sponsored by the other yearly meeting came to the microphones to sing a series of gospel songs. Though I had felt led to ask for a few more minutes of silence, in deference to the schedule I did not. This was a painfully obvious mistake, when after the first song ended, the audience continued to sit in silence, not yet ready for applause!

Immediately after the conclusion of the meeting and for a time after, we continued to receive heart-felt thanks and appreciation from those present. I realize that if I

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had kept my faith strong, my apprehension might have been minimized, for all things are possible in Christ.

This event was an epiphany for me. Besides being again shown that faith is the answer and the power, as well as being shown the necessity of FWCC, I realized three important things about the faith as practiced by this yearly meeting: that it is transportable; that it is expandable (there were many more Friends in attendance than at our yearly meeting sessions); and that it could transcend differences (there were a number of Friends at this gathering who were clearly not comfortable with that much silence, yet who found this event valuable).

We, as a yearly meeting and as a Society, need to do more to spread the truth as known and practiced by Friends. It has become more clear to me that God requires us to be faithful and that we take this show on the road.

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Michael Arnold is a member of West Grove Monthly Meeting in Snow Camp, NC.

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# Reading the Query Answers: A Conversation

BY DAVID ELEY & LLOYD LEE WILSON

**I**T HAS BEEN SAID that the eyes are windows to the soul. Carrying this forward, the reading of the answers to the queries can be understood as a window to the soul of North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative). Read slowly and deliberately, with ample time for reflection and for taking in whatever might be revealed in spirit, the query answers offer views of the very heart of the yearly meeting and the work of the Lord within it. At the same

time, what is seen through this window differs somewhat for each Friend who looks therein. As an active member of both the yearly meeting and one of its constituent monthly meetings, Lloyd Lee (**LLW**) sees from a different perspective, and with differing interests and concerns, than David (**DE**), who visits the yearly meeting annually but only infrequently has the opportunity to visit any of the monthly meetings. And so, though we have each seen much of NCYM(C) through

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the reading of the Query answers each year, we have differing stories to tell.

**LLW** Queries and answers have been used for over three hundred years. I feel all around us, as we gather for this exercise and settle into a preparative silence, that a cloud of witnesses also gathers around, all unseen, to hear our accounting and to encourage us to be strong and true in our own witness, as they were in theirs. I am greatly indebted to the faithfulness of that long thin line of Friends who have kept the faith and preserved Friends way of life over many generations. They built and preserved my spiritual home. Today, when the Queries are read aloud in the face of the gathered yearly meeting, and a representative of each monthly meeting rises to read the corporate answer of his or

her monthly meeting, I feel in part we are reporting back to those who have gone before, telling the story of the ways Truth has prospered in our home meetings since the yearly meeting last gathered.

We should be cautious about assuming that in a few years of life as a Friend we have such a clear idea of what is helpful and what is not in the life of the Spirit, that we can cast away practices that generations of our fathers and mothers in the faith have found useful and even essential. Continuity with those who have kept the faith alive is important to our own growth and groundedness in God. Still, if all that the answering of queries had to recommend to us was that it had been done for many years previously, that would not be sufficient to continue the practice.

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**DE** Strong hints about the yearly meeting and some of its monthly meetings first came to me through individual NCYM(C) Friends that I met in places other than their home turf. Upon visiting the yearly meeting more than a dozen years ago, before having visited any of its monthly meetings, I gained my first real glimpses into each of the monthly meetings through their answers to the Queries. Naturally, their collective answers did much to shape my initial impression of the yearly meeting as a whole.

**LLW** First and foremost, the answering and reading of the Queries is a corporate practice. The answer formulated by the monthly meeting is not that of an individual, or even an anthology of individual answers, but the response of a faith community. The Queries are read to a larger

faith community, of which the monthly meeting is a part. Community speaks to community, giving an account of the ways in which the Spirit of God has been present and at work among the local faith community over the past year, and sharing those times and places where faithfulness has been difficult and we know we have once again fallen short of the glory of God.

Those earlier Friends never faced many of the issues that demand our attention in the current day, and our responses to those issues might well seem greatly different from their own decisions and practices. The important thing, what our accounting tells, is how we have struggled to be continually dependent on the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit in this day, as they were in theirs. What



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I look for in the responses to the Queries is not a set of “correct” answers, but the story of how Friends have been attentive to the Holy Spirit in their several places and circumstances over the past year. The faithfulness of Friends and the continual grace of the Holy Spirit never fail to make my eyes moist.

**DE** Through the years, my impression of NCYM(C) has changed steadily as I have come to know and be known by NCYM(C) Friends on an individual, monthly meeting, and yearly meeting basis. While the changing impression and the knowing are based largely on a host of interactions other than the reading of the Queries and Answers, the responses remain a powerful medium for experiencing the changes which have occurred. I am always stunned by some of the

answers I hear, as they give evidence of a depth of faith which I previously had not perceived in a particular monthly meeting, or which I perceive, for the first time, to be missing in me.

If the seeming growth in some aspect of a meeting’s life comes as a surprise at times, a part of the power lies in not knowing exactly where or how the growth has occurred. Was it really in the monthly meeting, or perhaps more in the Friend who spoke for the meeting when the answers were read? Could it have been in the yearly meeting as a body, finally gathered to the point of hearing what has always been there to be heard? Could the growth be in me?

All that can be known with complete certainty is that the Lord is at work, and is speaking to us and through us. Sometimes it is through the reading of the

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queries and answers that we are given eyes to see and ears to hear.

**LLW** We hear the query answers as a community, celebrating the reality of God with us, taking encouragement from the experiences of our brothers and sisters in the faith. Perhaps in silent reflection we realize where there has been a beam in our own eye over the past year, but the exercise is not intended as a confessional wherein the majority passes judgment and imposes some sort of penance on the reporting meeting. If there is any correctional aspect, it comes in the conviction by the Holy Spirit as we compose our response or as, sitting with the body of Friends, we hear our response with fresh ears. There is no need for human, outward reproof, when the Inward Guide is

already at work, more skillfully and more lovingly than we could ever hope to act.

**DE** It always affects me to learn that one or more queries have not been answered by one or more monthly meetings. While the lack of an answer to any query disappoints, the lack of answers to a second or third query causes me to shudder inside, as I sense that not only has something been lost, but that something has been violated. In not answering a particular query, a monthly meeting and its members lose an opportunity to strengthen the covenant relationship they share with each other and with God. In choosing not to answer several queries, a monthly meeting violates the covenant relationship shared with the rest of the yearly meeting and with God – or so it seems to me.

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**LLW** The reading of query answers is a confessional practice. This is a term more used by other Christians than among contemporary Friends, and I would like to use it here without many of the trappings it has gathered in other traditions over the centuries. The query answers are an outward confession of our faith in the Inward Teacher, who with great love and patience leads us out of darkness into light, and a concrete and specific account of where and how the Teacher has been active with us and among us this past year. They are a confession that we are not done yet, that there are still lessons we struggle to learn. In this they offer seasoned Friends valuable humility and newcomers encouragement that they, too, have a place at the table. Finally, the answers

are a mutual confession that we are all alike, all struggling to be faithful, even when the details differ from meeting to meeting, and all infinitely loved and infinitely valued by God, who shows great mercy and grace and blessing to us year after year.

**DE** Scripture teaches that we shall know as we are known. As I reflect on how much has come to me from knowing and being known by NCYM(C), I marvel to think how much has come to all Friends, not just in this present day, but over hundreds of years, as we have engaged in the process of knowing and being known by each other and our God. This occurs in its purest form, or perhaps in purest formlessness, in the stillness of meeting for worship, as we individually and collectively commune with the Living God, through the

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Living Spirit of Christ. No words need be spoken for the Word to be heard.

And yet it is with the speaking of a few words, conveying only a few elements of form, that what we experience inwardly in worship is given outward dimensions. Through the asking and answering of a few questions (the Queries), the Word beyond words can be translated – and verbalized – as the Word’s reflection in the lives we lead. In the answers are a measure of the knowing and being known, of the ways in which we have responded to the reality of the mystery into which we together have entered, which is Christ in us, our hope of glory.

**LLW** Finally, the reading of query answers is an affirmation of commitment and continuity. In this practice we re-affirm our commitment to God and

to a particular relationship to God that reaches back hundreds of years on the one hand and thousands of years on the other. We affirm that God, who is our help in ages past is Immanuel, who is God with us today. Not just with us and not just today, but also with all who seek Truth in years to come.

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Lloyd Lee Wilson is a recorded minister and a member of Rich Square Monthly Meeting in Woodland, NC.

David Eley, of Hill Country Meeting in South Central Yearly Meeting, is a recognized attender of our yearly meeting sessions and lives in Austin, TX.

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# THE QUERIES

*From the 1983 revision of the Book of Discipline of NCYM(C)*

These Queries are designed for study and periodic answer by each member and each Meeting, to help discover shortcomings and overcome them. Although the Queries may often be answered with a simple affirmative or negative, it is vital to ask corollary questions such as “why”, “how”, or “when.” A qualified answer arising from introspection is more meaningful and constructive than an uncritical “yes” or “no”.

Friends can employ the Queries to determine the extent of progress on the spiritual path, in what way they should proceed, and how they may help others; and also to solve many related problems.

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# QUERIES FOR MONTHLY MEETING

## *Meeting for Worship*

1. Do we faithfully uphold our testimony for worship which is based on silent waiting, and for a free and unprogrammed ministry that may be shared by all? Is there a living silence in which we feel drawn together by the Light of Christ, the power of God in our midst; and is this inspiration carried over into our daily lives? Do we come to meeting with hearts and minds open and ready to worship in silence or in vocal ministry or prayer as the Holy Spirit leads us? Does our Meeting encourage those who may have a gift in the spoken ministry?

2. Are we faithful in our attendance at meetings for worship and are we careful not to disturb the spirit of the meeting by our late arrival? Is our behavior therein that of open submission to God in silent communion?

## *Love and Unity*

3. Do we follow the teachings of Jesus and seek the inspiration of His Holy Spirit in our daily lives? Are love and unity maintained among us? Do we cultivate a forgiving spirit, and do we avoid and discourage needless and destructive criticism of others? When differences arise, do we endeavor promptly to resolve them in a spirit of love, honesty, and humility?

## *Work of the Meeting*

4. Do we assume our rightful share in the expenses of our Meeting? Do we regard our time, our talents, and our possessions as given us in trust, and do we use them freely for the needs of others?

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### *Meeting for Business*

5. Do we regularly attend our meetings for business, and are they held in a spirit of love, understanding, and forbearance? Do we seek the right course of action in humble submission to the Authority of Truth and in the patient search for a sense of unity under Divine guidance?

### *Growth of Our Children*

6. Do we endeavor by example and precept to cultivate in our children a sense of openness and expectancy about life, and to aid them in their growth in spiritual understanding and moral discernment? Do we share with them the faith that guides the practice of Friends, while encouraging them to develop their religious insights as the Spirit of God may lead them?

### *Peace Testimony*

7. Do we endeavor to live in the life and power that takes away the occasion of all war, seeking to do our part in the work of reconciliation between individuals, groups, and nations? Do we faithfully maintain our testimony against nuclear and all other military preparations, the bearing of arms, and all participation in war?

### *Manner of Living*

8. Do we observe simplicity and honesty in our manner of living? Are we careful to live within the bounds of our circumstances, punctual in keeping promises, prompt in the payment of debts, and just in all our dealings? Do we choose those activities which will strengthen our physical, mental, and spiritual life; and do we avoid those harmful to ourselves and others?

9. Are we mindful of Friends testimonies against alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and other harmful drugs; and do we refrain from using them or dealing in them, realizing that abstinence is the clearest witness against overindulgence? Do we seek to avoid all kinds of gambling and places of diversion that tend to be demoralizing? Do we keep in mind how diverse and widespread are the temptations to grow richer at the expense of others? Are we faithful to our testimony against taking oaths?

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10. Do we endeavor to live in harmony with nature? Are we careful in our stewardship of the world's irreplaceable resources?

*Social Justice and Equality*

11. Do we reverence that of God in every human being with concern for the needs of each individual? Are we seeking to rectify existing social injustice and racial discrimination in our local communities and in the world at large?

*Outreach*

12. Do we welcome newcomers and non-members to our meetings? Are they encouraged to share in Meeting activities and to consider membership when they are in agreement with the principles and practices of Friends? Are our younger members appointed to committees and encouraged to share in other responsibilities of the Meeting? Do we visit one another frequently, remembering those who may be lonely? Does this visitation and caring extend beyond the members of our own Meeting?



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# QUERIES FOR MEETING OF MINISTRY & OVERSIGHT

1. Are we aware of our duties as ministers, elders, and overseers; and do we conduct ourselves in a manner commensurate with our responsibility?
2. Do we attend regularly all meetings for ministers, elders, and overseers? Are we faithful in attending all other meetings for worship and business, taking our families with us when appropriate?
3. Do we seek to wait for and to move under Divine inspiration in the exercise of our gifts?
4. Does our ministry promote the spiritual growth of our members, building it up in the faith that is in Jesus Christ? Are we all kept aware of the basic principles of Friends faith and worship? Do we strive to make our lives blameless before God and man?
5. Are we in unity one with another and with the Meeting to which we belong?
6. Are we careful not to become involved in the business and activity of everyday life to the impairment of our religious lives and the service to our Meeting?
7. Do we watch over one another for good? When asked for counsel, do we consider carefully what may be truly needed, being especially attentive to the young and inexperienced?

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## SUGGESTED QUERIES FOR INDIVIDUAL FRIENDS

The following Queries are provided for the earnest consideration of our members privately, in the belief that spiritual watchfulness may guide us to right belief and action. The corporate Quaker witness in behalf of our testimonies depends upon our individual progress toward grace.

1. Do I cherish that of God within me, that His power growing in me may rule my life? Do I seek to follow Jesus Christ who shows us the Father and teaches us the way?
2. Am I striving to develop my physical, mental, and spiritual abilities and to use them to the glory of God? What have I recently undertaken to this end, and what future opportunities are sought?
3. Do I make a place in my daily life for inward retirement and communion with the Divine Spirit? To what extent has this brought satisfaction spiritually? Are there ways in which I might attain greater satisfaction or inspiration? Does my daily schedule need review and revision at this time?
4. Am I careful to wait upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit in all my ways? Have I learned to distinguish inspiration from impulse? Insight from temptation? Patience from laziness?
5. To what extent is the performance of my worldly duties promoting or hindering my growth in grace and my service for God?

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6. As I face differences of opinion and circumstances, do I seek for unity with the help of God? Do I constantly seek a greater understanding of the conciliatory power of love and how it may be exercised in my life?

7. What can I do to make my home a place where friendship, peace, and refreshment of spirit may be found? To what extent am I trying to do these things?

8. Remembering that excesses which are harmful to human beings are abhorrent to Friends, what can I do to lessen such excesses in my own life, or by example to help others?

9. How have I contributed to the spiritual growth of the Society of Friends? What have I done as a member of my meeting for worship and meeting for business to carry out my responsibilities as a member of the Society of Friends?

10. Are we concerned that man's increasing power over nature should not be used irresponsibly, but with the reverence for life and with a sense of the splendor of God's continuing creation?

11. Do we regard our possessions as given to us in trust, and do we part with them freely for the needs of others?

12. Do any of our interests, important though they may appear to us, unduly absorb our time and energy to the hindrance of our growth in grace and of our service to God?

## FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION & INFORMATION

To join continuing discussions, send a blank email to [practice-1-subscribe@ncymc.org](mailto:practice-1-subscribe@ncymc.org). This action will allow you to continue to explore various aspect of queries by subscribing you to both receive and contribute emails as exchange takes place.

Send letters to the editor, subscription requests, and donations to NCYM(C) Journal, Post Office Box 647, Woodland, NC 27897-0647 or email to [journal@ncymc.org](mailto:journal@ncymc.org). More information on the Journal, including an electronic edition can be found at <http://ncymc.org/journal>. For information on North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative), including our Faith and Practice, see <http://ncymc.org>.