

The Interim Discipline - 7/15/2017

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Part One

Introduction to the Discipline [Seeking Second Approval]

This latest revision of *Faith and Practice: Book of Discipline of North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) of the Religious Society of Friends* represents the efforts of members of this yearly meeting to re-examine their faith and practice and set them down in a way that is both faithful to their religious heritage and applicable in the contemporary world.

The first books of discipline were collections of relevant minutes that had been approved by yearly meetings over a period of years.¹ Particular minutes were chosen for inclusion that would be helpful to Friends encountering an unfamiliar life situation or spiritual challenge. In this way isolated groups of Friends, many new to the Quaker faith, could have access to the counsel of experienced Friends in their own discernment process. When North Carolina Yearly Meeting issued its first Discipline in 1755, a handwritten copy was distributed to each monthly meeting for its use. The first printed Discipline for North Carolina Yearly Meeting was produced in 1809, making it possible for each family to have its own copy. The Discipline was revised again ten more times between 1823 and 1983, each revision incorporating changes that had been made in the intervening years.

In a body of Friends that places its highest authority in the immediate and perceptible guidance of the Holy Spirit, a written *Discipline* is a collection of advice and counsel offered from seasoned Friends of many generations to the current membership. It is not intended to be the final authority on any subject. However, the guidance of the *Discipline* on any subject should be carefully weighed and considered, in the same way that a traveller over a difficult and unfamiliar mountain pass would consider the advice of an experienced guide before beginning the ascent.

We believe that the promptings of the Holy Spirit have guided members of the monthly meetings that make up North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) to find unity in the organizational structures, methods of operation, and faith commitments included in this *Discipline*. The authority of the *Discipline* in any given circumstance stems from the continuing perception that it expresses the ongoing guidance of the Holy Spirit. A specific situation may lead Friends to follow a different course of action than what the *Discipline* recommends without changing the authority of that recommendation in general. If, however, it appears that a section of the

¹ For a fuller history of the development of books of discipline, see Evans, William and Evans, Thomas, "Institution of the Discipline", *Friends Library* Vol. 1, pp. 109-141, Philadelphia: Joseph Rakestraw, 1837.

Discipline is no longer relevant to present circumstances or in unity with Friends continued growth in understanding of God's guidance to us as a faith community, then it is our responsibility to consider whether it would be right to revise the *Discipline*, or some part of it, once again.

Another name for a book of discipline is a book of faith and practice. This reflects that the guidance in the book concerns both the faith of Friends and their practice of that faith in living out their lives. The older name, book of discipline, reflects the experience of Friends over the centuries that living in accordance with the guidance of God is a discipline - a body of knowledge that involves both head and heart and requires long practice and dedication to attain.

This *Book of Discipline* or *Book of Faith and Practice* is offered to the members of North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) in the same manner as the Quaker Elders at Balby offered their twenty specific items of guidance to Friends in 1656: "From the Spirit of truth to the children of light, to walk in the light; that all in order be kept in obedience; that he may be glorified, who is worthy over all, God blessed for ever."²

And like those elders of an earlier day, we affirm that:

*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 in the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.*³

² <http://www.qhpress.org/texts/balby.html>, accessed 8/31/2016.

³ Ibid.

The Beginnings

[Seeking Second Approval]

Friends began as a religious movement in England in the 1640s, a time of great religious and political ferment. Early Friends experienced the Light of Christ as an inward and spiritual power that reordered their lives. This revelation found fertile ground in scattered groups of religious seekers throughout the country, igniting explosive growth in numbers and a prophetic challenge to the established social order. These quotations express the powerful spiritual experiences of early Friends in their own words.

George Fox (England, 1624-1691)

And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, Oh, then, I heard a voice which said, ‘There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition,’ and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy. Then the Lord did let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give him all the glory ... that Jesus Christ might have the pre-eminence ... and this I knew experimentally.

[And continuing] ... My desires after the Lord grew stronger, and zeal in the pure knowledge of God and of Christ alone, without the help of any man, book, or writing. . . . And then the Lord did gently lead me along, and did let me see his love, which was endless and eternal . . . and that love let me see myself as I was without him. . . . (*Journal, 1647*)

Yet I was under great temptations sometimes, and my inward sufferings were heavy; but I could find none to open my condition to but the Lord alone, unto whom I cried night and day. I went back into Nottinghamshire, and there the Lord showed me that the natures of those things, which were hurtful without, were within, in the hearts and minds of wicked men. . . . I cried to the Lord, saying, "Why should I be thus, seeing I was never addicted to commit those evils?" and the Lord answered, "That it was needful I should have a sense of all conditions, how else should I speak to all conditions!" and in this I saw the infinite love of God.

I saw, also, that there was an ocean of darkness and death; but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. In that also I saw the infinite love of God, and I had great openings. (*Journal, 1647*)

So the keeper of the House of Correction [at Derby] was commanded to bring me up before the Commissioners and soldiers in the marketplace ... and there they ... asked me if I would not take up arms for the Commonwealth against the King. But I told them I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars, and I knew from whence all wars did arise, from the lust according to James's doctrine. Still they courted me to accept of their offer and thought that I did but compliment with them. But I told them I was come into the covenant of peace which was before wars and strifes were. (*Journal*, 1651)

Sarah Blackborow (England, flor. 1650s – 1660s)

Wisdom hath uttered forth her voice to you, but the eye and ear which is abroad, waiting upon the sound of words without you, is that which keeps you from your Teacher within you; and this is the reason that in all your seeking you have found nothing; such as your seeking is, such is your finding. . . . Therefore. . . come out of the many things; there's but one thing needful [see Luke 10:40-42], keep to it. . . that into my Mother's house you may come, and into the chamber of her that conceived me, where you may embrace, and be embraced, of my dearly beloved one [see Song of Sol. 3:1-4]. Love is his name, Love is his nature, Love is his life. (quoted in *Hidden in Plain Sight*, p. 52)

Isaac Penington (England, 1616–1679)

Be no more than God hath made thee. Give over thine own willing; give over thine own running; give over thine own desiring to know or to be any thing, and sink down to the seed which God sows in the heart, and let that grow in thee, and be in thee, and breathe in thee, and act in thee, and thou shalt find by sweet experience that the Lord knows that, and loves and owns that, and will lead it to the inheritance of life, which is his portion. And as thou takest up the cross to thyself, and sufferest that to overspread and become a yoke over thee, thou shalt become renewed, and enjoy life, and the everlasting inheritance in that. (*Some Directions to the Panting Soul*, 1661)

The end of words (even of Christ's own directions in the days of His flesh) is to turn men to the holy life and power from whence the words came. (*Works*, 1784, Vol. 3, p. 378)

But some may desire to know what I have at last met with. I answer, "I have met with the Seed." Understand that word, and thou wilt be satisfied and inquire no further. I have met with my God, I have met with my Saviour, and he hast not been present with me without his salvation, but I have felt the healings dropped upon my soul from under his wings. I have met with the true knowledge, the knowledge of life ... I have met with the Seed's Father, and in the Seed I have felt him my Father ... I have met with the Seed's faith, which hath done and doth that which the faith of man can never do. I have met with the true birth, with the birth which is heir of the

Kingdom ... I have met with the true peace, the true righteousness, the true holiness, the true rest of the soul, the everlasting habitation which the redeemed dwell in; and I know all these to be true, ... and am capable of no doubt, dispute, or reasoning in my mind about them. (*An account of his Spiritual Travel*, 1667. quoted in *Friends Intelligencer and Journal*, v. 57, p.22, 1/13/1900)

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 for one another, and helping one another up with a tender hand. (*Letters*, Letter LII, 1667)

Francis Howgill (England, 1618-1669)

The Lord of Heaven and earth we found to be near at hand, and, as we waited upon him in pure silence, our minds out of all things, his heavenly presence appeared in our assemblies, when there was no language, tongue or speech from any creature. The Kingdom of Heaven did gather us and catch us all, as in a net, and His heavenly power at one time drew many hundreds to land. We came to know a place to stand in and what to wait in; and the Lord appeared daily to us, to our astonishment, amazement and great admiration, insomuch that we often said one unto another with great joy of heart: ‘What, is the Kingdom of God come to be with men?’ . . . And from that day forward, our hearts were knit unto the Lord and one unto another in true and fervent love, in the covenant of Life with God. (1663, quoted in *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 1908. Francis Howgill’s *Testimony*, in the preface to Edward Burrough’s *Works*, 1672)

Mary Penington (England, 1623–1682)

Oh! The joy that filled my soul in the first meeting ever held in our house at Chalfont. To this day I have a fresh remembrance of it. It was then the Lord enabled me to worship him in that which was undoubtedly his own, and give up my whole strength, yea, to swim in the life which overcame me that day. . . for I could say, ‘This is it which I have longed and waited for, and feared I never should have experienced.’ (*Experiences in the Life of Mary Penington*, p. 45)

Elizabeth Bathurst (England, c. 1655-1685)

The Seed, or Grace of God, is small in its first Appearance, even as the Morning Light; but as it is given Heed to, and obeyed, it will increase in Brightness, till it shine in the Soul, like the Sun in the Firmament at its Noon-day Height. *Truth’s Vindication*,
<https://books.google.com/books/reader?id=ZOReAAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&pg=GBS.PR11>

Robert Barclay (Scotland, 1648-1690)

Not by strength of arguments or by a particular disquisition of each doctrine, and convincement of my understanding thereby, came [I] to receive and bear witness of the Truth, but by being secretly reached by [the] Life. 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; and indeed this is the surest way to become a Christian; to whom afterwards the knowledge and understanding of principles will not be wanting, but will grow up so much as is needful as the natural fruit of this good root, and such a knowledge will not be barren nor unfruitful. (*Quaker Faith and Practice*, 19:21)

Margaret Fell (England, 1614-1702)

And so [George Fox] went on, and said, "That Christ was the Light of the world, and lighteth every man that cometh into the world; and that by this light they might be gathered to God," &c. I stood up in my pew, and wondered at his doctrine, for I had never heard such before. And then he went on, and opened the scriptures, and said, "The scriptures were the prophets' words, and Christ's and the apostles' words, and what, as they spoke, they enjoyed and possessed, and had it from the Lord": and said, "Then what had any to do with the scriptures, but as they came to the Spirit that gave them forth? You will say, 'Christ saith this, and the apostles say this;' but what canst thou say? Art thou a child of the Light, and hast thou walked in the Light, and what thou speakest, is it inwardly from God?" &c. This opened me so, that it cut me to the heart; and then I saw clearly we were all wrong. So I sat down in my pew again, and cried bitterly: and I cried in my spirit to the Lord, "We are all thieves; we are all thieves; we have taken the scriptures in words, and know nothing of them in ourselves." ("The testimony of Margaret Fox concerning her late husband," from *The Journal of George Fox*, 1694.)

We are a people that follow after those things that make for peace, love and unity; it is our desire that others' feet may walk in the same, and do deny and bear our testimony against all strife and wars and contentions ("A Declaration and an Information from Us, the People Called Quakers ...," 1660, reprinted in Wallace, T.H.S., *A Sincere and constant Love: An Introduction to the work of Margaret Fell*, Friends United Press, 1992, p. 54. Also accessible at <http://www.qhpress.org/quakerpages/qwhp/mf2king.htm>

Mary Dyer (England, 1611-1660)

[Boston Common, 1660:] Then Mary Dyer was brought forth, and with a band of soldiers led through the town, the drums being beaten before and behind her, and so continued that none

might hear her speak all the way to the place of execution, which was about a mile. Thus guarded, she came to the gallows, and being gone up the ladder, some said to her, that, if she would return [home] she might come down and save her life. To which she replied, “Nay, I cannot, for in obedience to the will of the Lord I came, and in His will I abide faithful to death.” ... Then one mentioned she should have said, she had been in Paradise. To which she answered, “Yea, I have been in Paradise these several days.” Thus Mary Dyer departed this life, a constant and faithful martyr of Christ, having been twice led to death, which the first time she expected with an entire resignation of mind to the will of God, and now suffered with Christian fortitude, being raised above the fear of death through a blessed hope and glorious assurance of eternal life and immortality. (Besse, Joseph, *A Collection of the sufferings of the people called Quakers*, 1753, vol. 2, pp. 206-207)

William Penn (England, 1644-1718)

True godliness don't turn men out of the world, but enables them to live better in it, and excites their endeavours to mend it; not hide their candle under a bushel, but set it upon a table in a candlestick. (*No Cross, No Crown*, ch. 5, section 12, 1682)

Historical Sketch of NCYM-C

Colonial Period

The first Friends in North Carolina of whom there is a record are Henry and Hannah Phillips, who were convinced of the Truth in New England and subsequently moved to the Albemarle Sound region of the Carolinas in 1665. When William Edmundson visited them in 1672, Henry Phillips reported he had not seen any other Friends for seven years. A few months later George Fox also visited the Phillips family. Edmundson wrote in his journal that in several meetings for worship he and George Fox held for inhabitants of that area several hearts were reached and tendered by the Lord's testimony. By 1680 there were several monthly meetings and a quarterly meeting active in the area north of Albemarle Sound. North Carolina Yearly Meeting was established on Fourth Month 4, 1698, and has met annually since that date. Within 50 years of the beginning of the "Quaker movement" in England, the movement had spread to the colony of the Carolinas and grown into an organized yearly meeting in North Carolina.

Though Friends were never a large portion of the total population of the colony, they did wield political influence; Quaker John Archdale was governor of the colony in 1695 and 1696. During the period beginning with his governorship, a number of Friends were elected to the assembly; and Quakers were the most influential political power in the Carolinas in the last decade of that century.⁴

The number of North Carolina Friends grew steadily throughout the 1700s through immigration and convincement. Around the middle of that century a large number of Friends from other colonies began moving into the Piedmont area of North Carolina. The Friends community was nurtured and knit together during this period by numerous Friends traveling in the gospel ministry for extended periods of time, often in the most difficult of situations.

It is notable that many of these travelers were women.⁵ Women ministers were unacceptable in other Christian denominations at this time and it was extremely uncommon for women to travel alone without a male companion. These women Quaker traveling ministers regularly scandalized people outside the Religious Society of Friends, which made it more difficult for them to travel.

⁴ http://www.carolana.com/NC/Royal_Colony/nc_royal_colony_quakers.html, accessed 1/12/16.

⁵ In fact, as many as a thousand women ministers traveled amongst the colonies and the British Isles during the 18th century (cf Larsen, Rebecca, *Daughters of Light*). These women ministers had a significant influence on Quaker religion and culture. Their religious service often extended into writing pamphlets that spread widely among Friends and public speaking beyond the Quaker meetinghouse. Friends in North Carolina welcomed traveling women ministers such as their own Charity Cook, a frequent traveler as well as the mother of 14 children.

Quaker Separations in the 1800s

Friends in North Carolina avoided the major schisms that divided the Quaker world in the 1800s. Consistently, Friends in North Carolina chose to value living in unity over disputing fine points of doctrine or Quaker tradition and practice. The teachings ascribed to Elias Hicks in the 1820s did not gain much traction in North Carolina, and the yearly meeting remained a solid part of what would be known as the Orthodox branch of Friends. The Wilburite-Gurneyite split in 1845 posed a greater danger to the yearly meeting's unity. At the moment it appeared that Thomas Hunt, Yearly Meeting clerk, would recommend receiving the epistle⁶ from the Wilburite yearly meeting in New England, his father Nathan Hunt rose to give such powerful testimony to the value of remaining unified that the moment passed without action and the Yearly Meeting did not divide.⁷ By the beginning of the 20th century North Carolina Yearly Meeting was the only existing yearly meeting established before the separations began that had not itself separated.

Slavery⁸

Outside pressures on North Carolina Friends may have contributed to their desire to maintain unity among themselves. Beginning in 1688, Friends began to realize the immorality of slavery, which some Friends had been practicing alongside their non-Quaker neighbors. Over several decades the need to separate themselves from this practice grew in importance for Friends. As chattel slavery came to permeate all aspects of life in the South, it became more and more difficult for Friends to live in keeping with their beliefs. The combination of economic opportunity, the general “westward movement”, and escape from a slave-owning society was a strong attraction to many North Carolina Friends. In the years leading up to the Civil War, as many as 10,000 Friends are reported to have emigrated from North Carolina to free territories and states. Some monthly meetings moved as a group; their minutes report a meeting for business in North Carolina one month, and the next meeting in Indiana or some other free region. (During this period so many Quakers left Virginia that the yearly meeting was laid down in 1844, and the remaining meetings attached to Baltimore Yearly Meeting (Orthodox) as “Virginia Half-yearly Meeting.”)

[Friends anticipate inserting a paragraph concerning Friends and slavery here.]

Strains on the Yearly Meeting (1861-1902)

⁶ In the nineteenth and early 20th century, the exchange of epistles was highly symbolic: a yearly meeting corresponded only with those other yearly meetings it considered “correct” in theology and practice. To receive an epistle from one part of a yearly meeting that had already separated was to take a side in the issues of the division.

⁷ Jay, Allen, *Autobiography of Allen Jay*, “Chapter 14: How Nathan Hunt Delayed Separation in North Carolina”, Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 2010. Jay’s account is paraphrased at length in Anscombe, Francis Charles, *I Have Called You Friends: The Story of Quakerism in North Carolina*, Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1959.

⁸ For additional information and insight on this subject, see Hiram Hilty’s *By Land and Sea: Quakers confront Slavery and its Aftermath in North Carolina*, North Carolina yearly Meeting (FUM), 1993.

The sufferings of North Carolina Friends for conscience's sake during the Civil War included fines, imprisonment, seizure and destruction of property, forced labor, and in a few cases sentences of death by firing squad or bayonet. Many of these incidents are uniquely recorded in Fernando Cartland's "*Southern Heroes: Friends in War Time*."

By the end of the war and during the Reconstruction period the circumstances of Friends in North Carolina were so difficult, physically and spiritually, that a group of Northern Friends banded together in the Baltimore Association to provide material, educational, and spiritual assistance. These efforts were by and large a great blessing, but they also introduced new ideas and practices to North Carolina Friends that would prove to be both controversial and disruptive.

In the years between the end of the Civil War and 1900, Friends from the Baltimore Association encouraged North Carolina Friends to adopt some of the techniques and practices employed by the evangelical Christian movement that was sweeping much of the nation. Friends began holding what would today be called revival meetings under the auspices of the yearly meeting, including mourner's benches, altar calls, and much greater emotionalism than was common in Friends meetings of the day. While these innovations were successful in many ways, some North Carolina Friends, particularly in the northeastern portion of the state (Eastern Quarter), felt they were not in keeping with Friends historic faith and practice. In keeping with the desire to maintain unity, the yearly meeting agreed that those meetings which did not approve of the new evangelical work did not have to participate or pay for it in their yearly meeting apportionments.

The Richmond Conference of 1887 and the subsequent *Richmond Declaration* were additional sources of strained relationships in North Carolina Yearly Meeting.⁹ Some North Carolina observers were concerned that such a conference was being held, pointing out that previous conferences had played a role in Hicksite and Wilburite separations in Ohio. While the *Declaration* issued by the conference did seem to discourage the excesses of revivalism, it also left the way open for programmed worship (including congregational singing and altar calls), and above all a professional ministry. There was also an implied shift in the understanding of salvation from the historic view of a lifelong work ("taking up the daily cross") to a single and swift conversion experience accomplished in a moment.

Matters came to a head when the majority of North Carolina Yearly Meeting adopted the *Uniform Discipline* over the expressed opposition of Friends in Eastern Quarter. The *Uniform Discipline* was the organizing document of a new central organization of Friends (Five Years Meeting), to which it was hoped all yearly meetings would belong. It increased the authority of yearly meetings in an attempt to increase the uniformity of Friends faith and practice in the wake

⁹ For more information about these events, see Minear, Mark, *Richmond 1887*, and Hamm, Thomas, *The Transformation of American Quakerism: Orthodox Friends, 1800-1907*.

of the separations of the 1800s. An example which bore heavily on Friends in Eastern Quarter was the new authority of the yearly meeting to prevent individuals from being recorded in the ministry or appointed as elders, or to dismiss those already recorded, if they did not hold and teach doctrines approved by the yearly meeting. This seemed an unacceptable infringement on the responsibility of local monthly meetings to discern spiritual gifts among their own membership.

Separation of North Carolina Yearly Meeting

On Ninth Month 5, 1903, the traditionalist Friends in Eastern Quarter, believing that the *Uniform Discipline* had not been properly adopted, “reassembled” as Eastern Quarterly Meeting in Rich Square to meet under the 1893 *Discipline*. The motive of this step, the minutes of that meeting show, was

not merely to transact the business, ...but also to inform the monthly meetings in a clear but loving manner, that we believe the time has fully come, when we must cease to go on as we have in the past To every member of Eastern Quarterly meeting, who favors the adoption of the Uniform Discipline, we would say in tender love, that while it is in a sense of inexpressible sadness to us, that we cannot walk together and be agreed, yet we desire that every one may be fully persuaded in his own mind, may seek diligently to know the will of our Heavenly Father, and be faithful to his leadings. We crave this for our entire membership.

From this meeting in 1903 the separation of North Carolina Yearly Meeting into two continuing bodies may be dated. In 1904 the North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends held at Cedar Grove in Woodland, N.C. met as a separate body for the first time. In 1907 this body approved a minute “embracing some of the reasons for our existence as a separate body”:

Dear Friends: We are now assembled in this place the fourth time in the capacity of a Yearly Meeting. A concern has spread over us to briefly set forth by way of explanation some of the reasons for our existence as a separate body. We had borne with the spirit that had been at work for many years among us, introducing subversive changes, especially in our manner of worship, until the Uniform Discipline had been prepared and offered for our acceptance. This Discipline was adopted by the body assembled at High Point, North Carolina, in a Yearly Meeting capacity, and was sent down, requiring all subordinate meetings to put it into practice. It would have been a severe trial of submission to have adopted the minor changes, but there were changes involved, the importance of which were fundamental. Among these was the submission of qualification for the ministry to a body over which the particular monthly meeting had no control.

Although this Uniform Discipline does not require of all those accepting it that our ancient manner of worship shall at once be abandoned; it opens a way for it and offers encouragement for the introduction of a new order of things as soon as it can be effected without apparent violence. It offers no protest against the pastoral system which it is well known is rapidly gaining favor among those claiming to be Friends.

With the remnant of like faith from various parts of our State, and the body of Friends in this locality which included the larger part of the members of the original Rich Square Monthly Meeting, we are now holding North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends at Cedar Grove in Woodland, N. C.

Beginning in 1908 and in successive revisions of the *Discipline*, the yearly meeting has summarized these matters into the following commitments of faith and practice:

About this time, those members of the Yearly Meeting who felt that it was right for them to maintain the doctrines of the immediate and perceptible guidance of the Holy Spirit, of the headship of Christ over all things to His Church, and of the waiting worship and inspirational ministry which are, and must ever be, the outgrowth of these doctrines, believed it would be right for them to hold a separate Yearly Meeting. Accordingly they met in the capacity of North Carolina Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, at Cedar Grove, in the town of Woodland, Northampton County, North Carolina, in the year of 1904.

Relations with other Friends

North Carolina Yearly Meeting at Cedar Grove immediately initiated correspondence with six other yearly meetings with which they felt they had most in common. These six yearly meetings had also separated from their fellow Friends over theological issues, though at different times and under different circumstances. With varying degrees of alacrity each of these six yearly meetings accepted North Carolina Yearly Meeting at Cedar Grove as one of them. For convenience, these seven yearly meetings came to be called Conservative Friends. This yearly meeting was distinct from other Conservative yearly meetings in attaching less importance to maintaining plain dress and plain speech; more importance to higher education; and in giving greater weight to the immediate, perceptible guidance of the Holy Spirit than to Friends tradition or Scripture.

An immediate result of the separation was a large influx of Friends transferring their membership from other monthly meetings to the Conservative Rich Square meeting in Woodland (formerly

Cedar Grove Preparative meeting, part of Rich Square Monthly Meeting in the town of Rich Square, five miles to the south). In a civil negotiation immediately following the separation, Friends on both sides agreed that the Conservative body would hold title to Cedar Grove Meeting House in Woodland, and the Five Years Meeting Friends would retain title to the Rich Square Meeting House in Rich Square. Both groups called themselves Rich Square Monthly Meeting.

Over the next several years, as monthly meetings were established and new meeting houses built in several areas across the state, the Friends who had transferred their membership to Rich Square transferred them once again, to the new (Conservative) monthly meetings. In each case, the founding members of these new meetings were primarily members of one or two extended families, and these families sustained leadership at the monthly and yearly meeting levels for over half a century. The Yearly Meeting was organized into Eastern and Southern Quarterly Meetings, following the pattern of the yearly meeting before the separation.

Friends in North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends (Cedar Grove) maintained civil relationships with their Five Years Meeting counterparts over the years. They also kept up a steady stream of correspondence, intervisitation, and transfers of membership with other conservative yearly meetings, particularly Ohio Yearly Meeting. A noteworthy traveling minister of this period was Anna E. C. Fisher.

In 1935 the yearly meeting was moved to approve a *Brief Statement of the Doctrines and Principles as ever believed by Friends*.¹⁰ While closely parallel to the *Brief Synopsis of the Principles and Testimonies of the Religious Society of Friends* adopted by all seven Conservative yearly meetings in 1912, the *Brief Statement* is the expression of our yearly meeting only, and therefore more illuminating as to the beliefs and practices of North Carolina Conservatives in particular.

The establishment of the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) in 1937 occasioned serious debate inside our yearly meeting: to what extent should Conservative Friends associate with those who had different beliefs? The arguments offered against participation by some Friends in the yearly meeting were articulate, extensive, and published outside the yearly meeting, but the sense of Representative Body was that Friends who felt led to participate should be free to do so, and that Representative Body would provide them with the proper credentials. Since that time the yearly meeting has been quite active in various FWCC programs and activities, sending representatives to FWCC gatherings and conferences and serving in leadership roles particularly in the Section of the Americas.

¹⁰ Both the *Brief Synopsis* and the *Brief Statement* are available on the links page of the yearly meeting web site (<http://ncymc.org/ymlinks.html>).

Recent History

As one's focus moves nearer to the present day, it becomes more difficult to tell what events and developments are truly important. The full import of some events has not yet unfolded in their entirety; the contemporary observer may be blind to developments that will prove to be quite significant. Recognizing these limitations, there are points in the recent history of the yearly meeting that appear notable. Beginning with Virginia Beach Friends in 1954, a series of new, urban monthly meetings have been accepted into yearly meeting membership. Some had members with family ties to the yearly meeting, while others did not. At the same time, several of the monthly meetings established a half-century earlier, mostly in rural settings, were declining in membership or laid down altogether. Only two of the six original monthly meetings survived into the 21st century; they are currently joined by seven new monthly meetings, all in urban settings. The shift in membership from a body primarily composed of families whose members were born and raised among Conservative Friends to a group made up largely of unrelated individuals who became convinced Friends as adults has had several outcomes, including the following:

- The Truth underlying doctrines and practices that were at one time simply 'received' as "the way Friends are" is now being articulated in new ways that are accessible and convincing to newcomers.
- Adult religious education is seen as more important than before.
- The yearly meeting and its members have been drawn to more engagement with the wider world of Friends in recent decades. This activity has included publications that articulate the nature of conservative Quakerism as well as participation and leadership in various Quaker programs of study and retreat. The yearly meeting's commitment to Friends education includes involvement with several Quaker affiliated schools. Louise B. Wilson, a recorded minister and founder of Virginia Beach Friends Meeting and Friends School in Virginia Beach, exemplified this involvement, leadership and commitment.
- Meetings are involved in a wide number of activities with Friends and other groups around common issues, including the environment, justice, peace and other social concerns. One important commitment has been our support of and involvement with the peace work of Quaker House of Fayetteville.
- The yearly meeting membership has become much more diverse in many ways. We have been especially enriched as a faith community by the full participation of Friends of various sexual orientations and gender identities.

The confluence of old and new seems to have been spiritually productive for all involved, as the Yearly Meeting has consistently sought out the immediate, perceptible guidance of the Holy Spirit in each situation.

Note on the use of the term Conservative
[Future Section]

Part Two

Doctrines and Testimony
[Future Section]

Worship and the Spiritual Life

[To be considered at a later date, if consistent with divine will]

Recognition of Spiritual Gifts

[To be considered at a later date, if consistent with divine will]

Queries and Advices

[Future Section]

Part Three

ORGANIZATION AND PROCEDURES

Our Quaker faith is grounded in the direct, immediate and perceptible guidance of the Holy Spirit in all things. We believe that God is always available to us through the presence of the Spirit. We believe and know by experience that the Spirit can show us things we have not seen before and can give us clear direction as to the course of action we should take in our daily lives.

The experience of Friends since the very early days has been that this guidance is available corporately as well as individually. When we are gathered as a body, we find our ability both to perceive and to follow God's guidance greatly strengthened. Our organization and procedures are accordingly arranged to provide regular opportunity for the Spirit of Christ, the Inward Teacher, to become manifest in the activities and actions of our gathered community life.

The use of the term "meeting" may not always be clear in describing our organization and procedures because it is used in a variety of ways and contexts. "Meeting" may refer to both the actual places and times when we gather together for worship and business, and also to our organization as a gathered community in a continuing body.

The Yearly Meeting as an organization is composed of monthly meetings as organizations. Yearly Meeting and monthly meetings as organizations hold various "meetings" at set times and places for individuals to gather for worship and business. The individual members of the monthly meetings are, by virtue of their monthly meeting membership, also members of the Yearly Meeting. Individual members participate in the meetings of both their monthly meeting and the Yearly Meeting. Those who are not members of a monthly meeting, but who also participate in our meetings, are referred to as "attenders."

I. Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business

At the heart of our organization and procedures lies the "meeting for worship with attention to business", or "meeting for business", as it has been called historically. Meeting for business is the opportunity for the meeting community to gather at a regularly appointed time and place to do its formal business. Meeting for business is an experience of our ever available relationship with God. Its procedures are grounded in this relationship.

Like all the corporate practices of our Yearly Meeting, the meeting for business is designed to guide and support members and attenders to grow in their relationship with God. Each individual practices listening for the Spirit, so that they can authentically offer their unique perspectives and judgments to the rest of the meeting during times of corporate decision-making. At the same time, individuals are challenged to release their unique contributions and trust the community to receive all these individual contributions within the wider process of yielding to

the fresh reality of the Holy Spirit.

Meeting for business is just as much a way of worship and spiritual practice as meeting for worship or times of daily retirement or outward acts of discipleship. The exercise that is meeting for business enables us to carry an expansive experience of the Spirit into all of our activities in our meeting community as well as into our secular commitments.

Our faith requires us to be equally committed to contemplation and action. Meeting for business provides the ground to bring the insights of meeting for worship to bear on the circumstances of the world, acting to bring God's desires for all of creation into greater reality.

Importance of Participation

Members are reminded of their responsibility to attend business meetings. Spiritual nurture, fellowship, and sense of community may best be maintained by common efforts through the business meeting and the loving concern expressed through whatever action may be taken. Attenders also are welcome at business meetings.

Decisions

Decisions are based on the understanding that the gathered group may receive a shared sense of divine guidance, known as a "sense of the meeting," sometimes described as Friends "being in unity". Decisions are based on a shared spiritual sense of the rightly led action for the meeting at that particular time. This is different from the concepts of consensus and unanimity, often used in secular meetings. Voting is not used to reach decisions.

It is the responsibility of all present to discern carefully if they are led to speak on the matter at hand. It is the responsibility of the clerk to call on individuals to speak, attending to pacing and order so as to sustain the sense of worship. The final discernment, or "sense of the meeting," is recorded as a "minute" expressing the unity that has been reached.

If a sense of the meeting does not become evident, no decision is made. The matter may be "laid over" for further seasoning to be considered at a subsequent meeting for business. Often when disagreements arise, if all present are open to the leading of the Holy Spirit and to one another, a way forward may be found better than any course originally proposed. In this way, the meetings for business will more nearly follow the will of God.

Record of Proceedings

Permanent records shall be kept of the proceedings of all meetings for business. When such records are no longer needed by the respective meeting for current use, they shall be deposited in some suitable and safe place designated by the Yearly Meeting. The Yearly Meeting has designated the Friends Historical Collection at Guilford College as a suitable depository.

Monthly, Quarterly, and Yearly Meetings

The local Quaker congregation is called “the monthly meeting” since it holds a meeting for business each month. The monthly meeting appoints regular meetings for worship for its community. It may also “allow” or sanction other meetings for worship that are under its care at times and places it feels appropriate. These may include worship groups and/or preparative meetings. Worship groups typically gather only for meeting for worship, while preparative meetings often also gather for meeting for business. In either case, individual membership resides with the monthly meeting.

Two or more monthly meetings in a region may form a “quarterly meeting,” so called because appointed representatives and other members of each of these monthly meetings assemble during the year at designated times for spiritual fellowship, to conduct necessary business and other matters of concern.

North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) is made up of its member monthly meetings in a covenantal relationship. If a monthly meeting feels led to also consider a similar membership in or affiliation with another body of Friends, it is essential that time and attention be given for seasoned consideration through a Spirit-led discernment process that involves both the monthly meeting and Yearly Meeting. A monthly meeting may maintain full membership in Yearly Meeting if, in accountability to this unfolding mutual process of open and transparent seeking after Truth, the monthly meeting and the yearly meeting are in unity that it can remain in good relationship with both Yearly Meeting and the other body.

The Yearly Meeting gathers annually to conduct business, at a time and place approved the previous year. All members of the Yearly Meeting are encouraged to attend the annual sessions. Each monthly meeting appoints specific individual Friends to represent it at the annual sessions.

New Meetings

If a monthly meeting applies for membership in the Yearly Meeting, a committee shall be appointed by the Yearly Meeting to meet with the members of the monthly meeting to determine if said meeting and the Yearly Meeting are in accord concerning membership. If after hearing the report of the committee, the Yearly Meeting in session is in unity with the application, the monthly meeting shall be accepted as a member of the Yearly Meeting.

A group desiring to start a new meeting for worship within the Yearly Meeting may first be established as a preparative meeting by application to a neighboring monthly meeting. After a

suitable time of careful consideration, if a preparative meeting wishes to become an independent monthly meeting, it may do so by applying to the monthly meeting of which it is a part. After receiving that approval, the new monthly meeting will become a member of the Yearly Meeting upon expressing its desire for membership to the Yearly Meeting in session. Participants in the new group have membership in the Yearly Meeting according to the procedure set forth elsewhere in this book.

Meetings Discontinued

No member meeting may be laid down except by mutual consent of that meeting and the Yearly Meeting. If a meeting is to be laid down, disposal of its assets shall be left under the care of the meeting's members.

Officials

The Yearly Meeting annually appoints from its membership Friends to serve as Clerk, Assistant Clerk, Recording Clerk, Treasurer, and Trustees. The Yearly Meeting also appoints Friends to serve on various committees. All these may be reappointed at the discretion of the Yearly Meeting. In some cases where specific representation from each monthly meeting is desirable the Yearly Meeting may ask that each monthly meeting nominate a Friend to serve as its representative on the yearly meeting committee.

Clerks and convenors of Yearly Meeting committees, and representatives to outside organizations, must be members of a monthly meeting in the Yearly Meeting. Non-members may be appointed as members of a committee with the approval of the Yearly Meeting. The committee may co-opt other persons with relevant gifts for service on that committee. Monthly Meetings are encouraged to follow a similar policy in their own appointments whenever possible.

Monthly meetings should at a minimum name a clerk and a treasurer. These may be reappointed at the discretion of the monthly meeting. Additional appointments, such as recording clerk, trustee(s), and committees, may be made as the monthly meeting feels is appropriate.

Duties of Monthly Meeting Clerks

A clerk for meeting for business should be appointed by each monthly meeting for a specific term of office. An assistant or recording clerk may be similarly appointed where it is felt that this will assist in attending to and finishing all business with care and dispatch, so that nothing may suffer through delay. The clerks should prepare an agenda, preside at all meetings for business, keep and preserve accurate records of the proceedings, and handle all correspondence of the meeting. The clerks may delegate these tasks when appropriate. It is the clerks'

responsibility to weigh and judge the import of each issue and to present a minute to the meeting for consideration. The clerks should give attention to the Advices and Queries and to any directives from the Yearly and Quarterly Meetings.

Representatives to Annual Sessions

Each year preceding annual sessions all monthly meetings should appoint Friends to serve as representatives at the sessions of the Yearly Meeting and to report back to the monthly meeting.

The Interim Body of Yearly Meeting

The Interim Body of Yearly Meeting is empowered to carry on any yearly meeting business, new or continuing, that may arise during the time when Yearly Meeting is not in session. The Yearly Meeting clerks serve as clerks of the Interim Body and are *members ex officio*.

Each monthly meeting shall appoint from one to five of its members to serve on the Interim Body. The term of service of Friends appointed shall be at the discretion of each monthly meeting. Changes in the membership of the Interim Body shall take effect at the meeting at which they are reported by the monthly meeting to Interim Body or to the Yearly Meeting in session.

Interim Body shall convene at least twice annually to consider any business which may arise. If felt necessary, the Yearly Meeting clerk may call a special meeting at any time.

All members of the Yearly Meeting are encouraged to participate in meetings of the Interim Body. Attenders and visitors are welcome to participate.

The specific responsibilities of the Interim Body are:

- In general to represent the Yearly Meeting and act on its behalf in cases where a delay until next annual sessions would be inadvisable.
- To have the oversight and inspection of manuscripts prepared to be printed relating to NCYM(C) Friends faith or testimonies, and to encourage or discourage the publication of such at their discretion.
- To receive from monthly or quarterly meetings proposed memorials concerning deceased Friends as shall be forwarded, so that after consideration and any needed revision, they may be presented to the annual sessions for a decision concerning publication.
- To undertake needed planning and preparations for the upcoming annual sessions of the yearly meeting.

- To correspond with individual Friends and meetings as deemed appropriate.
- To report all its actions to the Yearly Meeting in session.

Policies and Procedures Manual

The Yearly Meeting maintains a Policies and Procedures Manual consisting of selected minutes of the Yearly Meeting and/or Interim Body that set Yearly Meeting policy or establish procedures for carrying out Yearly Meeting business in future years. This Manual may be amended or revised at any time by the Yearly Meeting or Interim Body in session.

The Yearly Meeting of Ministry and Oversight
[To be considered at a later date, if consistent with divine will]

Membership

Membership as an Intentional, Living Relationship

It is our experience as a Yearly Meeting that membership in the Religious Society of Friends signifies an intentional, living relationship between the individual, the monthly meeting, and God, rather than a status granted to the individual. Membership is an indication of this relationship rather than of correct beliefs or a correct lifestyle.

The membership relationship arises from the continuing experience of God's love gathering us as a community during regular times of collective worship, business, and our life together. It is a covenant for mutual nurture, support and guidance as we seek a more perfect harmony with the desires and intent of God. The individuals and meeting who have made this commitment are members one of another.

Our desire in matters of membership is to be inclusive of all who are drawn to this relationship and who are willing to make the personal commitments that are inherent in this relationship. Members are people who go beyond regular active participation in that they feel called to commit to the long-term care of and responsibility for the meeting by entering into this formal relationship.

As a practice of hospitality, the Yearly Meeting welcomes all persons who are nurtured by participation in the activities of monthly meetings at any level of involvement. Many long-term attenders have become valued parts of our common life without ever seeking membership.

When an attender decides to seek membership will vary. Some individuals do relatively early because they know they are ready for this kind of relationship. They may still be in the process of learning the faith and practices of Friends. Others may seek membership only after years of active and committed service to the meeting. What is most important is the deeper and inward forming of relationship that occurs naturally. Some Friends only see afterward that they became inward members long before seeking membership.

After years of service to the meeting, many members have come to trust in an unfolding and transforming corporate life of the Spirit that has included all those who have come before as well as all those who will come after.

Participating as a Member of the Meeting

Members are both invited and expected to participate fully in the life of the meeting including meetings for worship, meetings for business, and other activities and events of the monthly

meeting. It is important to attend meeting for worship, where we are comforted and taught as a corporate body by the Holy Spirit. The insights of meeting for worship find outward expression in our attendance at the meeting for business, where the meeting seeks to discern what work God intends for it and how that work should be accomplished.

The life blood of the meeting is the loving intent of its members offered in activities such as committee work, care of the building and grounds, and mutual religious education. Each member is encouraged to discern an appropriate way to serve the meeting. Friends should take care so to live that a portion of their time, talents and possessions may be dedicated to the work of the Meeting. Friends are expected to support their Monthly Meeting financially as they are able by direct giving through the treasurer since the taking of a collection during meeting for worship is not practiced.

Membership nearly always involves disappointments and frustrations from time to time, as we rub our rough edges up against the rough edges of others. These challenges are opportunities to learn more about ourselves and to grow in our ability to forgive the imperfections that are part of life in community. When differences arise, it is important to address them promptly in a spirit of love, honesty, and humility. The commitment of membership involves a willingness to stay in the community and seek the guidance of the Spirit in these difficulties, as well as in times of blessing.

Discernment of Readiness for Membership

Persons may be accepted into membership who are willing to listen for and give expression in their lives to the promptings of the Inner Spirit in all areas of personal discipline and service to others. Some individuals may not claim all Friends teachings and testimonies as their own at the time they become members. What is vital is a readiness and commitment to wait upon God and seek Divine Guidance in all areas of life and to remain open and teachable to the understandings and witness of one's Quaker community both past and present.

We live in a culture that is very individualistic and constantly undermines our desire to follow God's will. Therefore members of the Meeting should work diligently against dilution of the Quaker message. All members are encouraged to strive to live by the principles set forth in this book, and to work toward attainment of the truths implicit in the Queries and Advices for individuals and Meetings.

Becoming a Member

Each monthly meeting develops its own policies and procedures for membership decisions. The following practices are recommended for consideration by monthly meetings.

By Request

Individuals wishing to become members by request make their desire known to the clerk of the monthly meeting, so that an announcement can be made at a meeting for business and a committee can be named by the monthly meeting to visit with the individual. This *clearness committee* and the individual explore together the individual's desire for membership and the mutual responsibilities and expectations of the membership relationship. If after hearing the report of the clearness committee the monthly meeting is satisfied that there is full realization of the implications of membership and wishes to approve the request, the individual should be welcomed without delay. A decision on membership may be deferred if either the individual or the meeting feel any hesitation as to the rightness of the step.

Transfer of Membership

When a person desires to transfer to a monthly meeting in this Yearly Meeting from another meeting in the Religious Society of Friends, a letter approving the transfer and stating that the individual is a member of the Society in good standing is forwarded from the other meeting. Upon the receipt of this letter, the monthly meeting appoints a clearness committee to explore the nature of the mutual responsibilities and expectations of membership in that meeting and the distinctive characteristics of this Yearly Meeting. On hearing the report of the clearness committee, the monthly meeting may take final action on the transfer request without delay. The individual should then be welcomed appropriately.

Non-resident members

Monthly meetings should communicate with their non-resident members at least once a year. In turn, non-resident members should keep the Monthly Meeting advised of their address and of such vital statistics as births, marriages, and deaths. Non-resident members are encouraged to transfer to a Monthly Meeting in the area of their residence, if their move is relatively permanent, and if a suitable Meeting is located near the new home.

Sojourning members

Friends participating in the life of a monthly meeting who wish to retain their membership in another meeting may request sojourning membership during their stay in the community. Sojourning membership is often the choice of a Friend who is moving into the area for an extended but temporary period of time, such as a university student entering a graduate program in a distant city or an adult child "coming home" for an indefinite period to be the caregiver for an aging parent.

A person may be accepted as a sojourning member when a letter is received from the home meeting verifying that the person is a member of the Religious Society of Friends in good standing. The monthly meeting may appoint a clearness committee in this situation. A

sojourning member shall have the privileges and obligations of other members of the Meeting where they are sojourning, including the right to join in decisions of the monthly meeting, to head committees or serve on such, and to serve in any capacity on monthly, quarterly, or yearly meeting levels as a representative of the monthly meeting.

Membership for Children and Young Friends

We acknowledge the children and Young Friends of our meetings as a precious part of their monthly meeting and of our yearly meeting. We seek to nurture their spiritual growth in the ways we can, and we encourage the monthly meetings to take seriously the spiritual nurture and involvement of their young people.

We stress that monthly meetings should welcome all children and Young Friends as an indispensable part of their community, regardless of whether their parents have chosen to seek membership. In a special way, all children who participate in the life of the meeting belong to the meeting.

We understand children's and Young Friends' sense of belonging to the meeting as an evolving experience. This experience is shaped by their spiritual, psychological, and social development as well as by the various shifting commitments they make as they are exploring their expanding world. We recognize that families and meetings, trying to find how best to extend a sense of belonging to the children and Young Friends of the meeting, have different experiences and understandings about membership for children and youth.

Some monthly meetings feel that no distinction is needed between child members and adult members. The experience of these meetings is that sense of belonging is best maintained through continuity of membership through various stages of life and relationship. These meetings have birthright membership for children born of parents who are members of the meeting. When parents are not members when their children are born, children may become members by request of their parents. All members remain members except as provided under *Termination of Membership* (below).

Some meetings in this yearly meeting see it as helpful and important to require young adult Friends to make a personal decision to be a member. One approach is to welcome children as family members by request of their parents. At some age that family membership ends. Young adults are encouraged to request adult membership when they are ready and at some point before family membership ends.

Monthly meetings are encouraged to think deeply about different approaches and to learn from each other what specific practices have been found helpful to strengthen the sense of belonging among children, young Friends, and young adult Friends.

Termination of Membership

Membership in the monthly meeting may be terminated under the following circumstances:

1. At the request of the member. The monthly meeting may wish to appoint a clearness committee to inquire into the reasons for resignation before acting on this request.
2. When a monthly meeting approves a member's request to transfer to another monthly meeting or to become a member of another religious body.
3. At the discretion of a monthly meeting when no communication has been received from the member for a period of years.
4. When in the judgment of the monthly meeting further affiliation of a member is hurtful to the spiritual life of the meeting. Such *disownment* is a most grave step and shall be taken only after prolonged prayer and loving attempts to remedy the situation.

Membership in the Yearly Meeting

Individuals are members in good standing of the Religious Society of Friends in this Yearly Meeting if their names are recorded in the minutes of a member monthly meeting as accepted into membership, and if there has been no circumstance or action to terminate such recorded membership.

Historically, individual Friends in this Yearly Meeting have not been assessed for financial support of the Yearly Meeting. Support of the Yearly Meeting (and Quarterly Meetings, should they exist) comes primarily from the Monthly Meeting treasuries, although individuals may also give directly to the larger bodies.

Part Four

SPECIAL OCCASIONS

I. Marriages

Friends Understanding of Marriage and Family Life

We earnestly advise and encourage Friends to wait upon the Lord for counsel and guidance before starting any procedure for marriage, for it is a union not to be undertaken lightly. True happiness and joy in marriage depend first on the presence of devoted love, a love which is not merely of a passing attraction, but which includes a genuine respect for the individuality, personality, and spirituality of the other.

Marriage is a religious commitment by two people before God to be undertaken in God's Light and with reverent attention to God's counsel and guidance. Of utmost importance is a spiritual union where there is a mutual desire to open heart and home to the Spirit of God. Friends regard marriage as a continuing religious commitment and more than a simple contract.

A well-founded marriage is a source of strength, security, and joy, not only to the couple and their families, but also to the meeting and community, and to all with whom they share their lives. Parents should be concerned to provide such an atmosphere of loving care that all in the family are encouraged to grow in religious faith and practice. We counsel all family members to seek to live in such a spirit of openness and humility among themselves that barriers may not arise to good communication and to growth in love.

Great care needs to be exercised that the union be established and continued on the foundation of true love and respect. Even when the marriage relationship may fail to achieve its highest possibilities and unhappiness develops, we believe that by patient and prayerful determination, these obstacles in many cases can be overcome. The Meeting, through the original clearness committee or a new committee, can often provide support for the couple at these times. Professional counseling may also be of assistance.

The Friends wedding ceremony reflects our understanding that marriage is a covenant made by the couple themselves, and completed and blessed by God. The simple Friends wedding ceremony, where the two concerned make their promises within the framework of a meeting for worship without the need for a third person to officiate, is the natural expression of our way of

life in the Spirit. In the presence of God, and with the support and prayers of their family and friends, they take each other as life partners, asking God's blessing in this new life of theirs.

To be married "under the care" (see Glossary) of a meeting implies a continuing relationship among the couple, the meeting and God to nurture and sustain the marriage. The procedures of a Quaker wedding embody understandings of this relationship that developed early in our history and continue to be relevant in the present day. The steps leading up to the wedding day itself are an example of the corporate discernment that is central to the faith and practice of Friends. The elements of the wedding ceremony give testimony to Quaker understandings of our relationship to God and each other, especially that a marriage is a divine work, not an outward form or human declaration.

Marriage Procedure

In order to do all that it can to assure the stability and happiness of couples who are married under the care of its member monthly meetings, the Yearly Meeting outlines the following recommended procedure preliminary to a wedding:

The couple desiring to marry presents a letter, signed by both of them, to the monthly meeting under whose care they wish to be married, stating that they intend marriage with each other. This letter is read in the face of the meeting for business, and a "clearness committee" is appointed.

The original purpose of clearness committees, from which their name is derived, was to ascertain whether the applicants were free of conflicting marriage engagements. Today, in addition to these responsibilities, such committees should be concerned to do what they can to help the couple achieve a stable and happy marriage. Between the committee and the couple there will be a shared, felt sense of clarity of the rightness of the proposed marriage. The committee should endeavor to give any assistance or counsel which the couple may need. It is also recommended that the meeting maintain a small up-to-date and accessible collection of resources on marriage to be made available to the couple contemplating marriage.

If the couple belong to different monthly meetings, primary responsibility for the clearness process for the couple rests with the meeting where the wedding will take place. A second letter, also signed by the couple, is in that case sent to the other monthly meeting, requesting that a report on their member's clearness for marriage be forwarded to the meeting that will have care of the wedding. If only one of the couple belongs to a monthly meeting, that meeting undertakes the clearness process for each individual and the couple.

In the course of the clearness process, it may become clear that marriage “under the care of the meeting” is not right for this couple. It may be that a wedding “after the manner of Friends” (see Glossary) but not actually “under the care of the meeting” would be appropriate. In this case, the monthly meeting should appoint a committee to work with the couple to make appropriate arrangements.

When the clearness committee reports to the monthly meeting that everything is in order, the monthly meeting selects an oversight committee (see Glossary) which will have oversight of the wedding and at the request of the couple will appoint a time and place for the meeting for worship at which the wedding will take place. (This may be at a regular worship or at a special time and place.) This committee should meet with the couple to discuss plans for the wedding (and reception, if on meeting premises) which should be carried out with dignity, reverence, and simplicity.

The oversight committee, in conjunction with the monthly meeting clerk, also has the responsibility of informing themselves as to the legal requirements for marriage, and of seeing to it that the couple is aware of them and that they are carried out in adequate time. After the wedding, the committee sees that the legal report is sent to the appropriate government office and reports to the monthly meeting when the wedding has been accomplished, whether it proceeded according to Friends’ practices, and the correct full names of the newly married couple.

The Wedding

The wedding itself, as stated before, takes place in a meeting for worship. It is the custom that all members of a meeting are invited to attend a wedding held under the care of that meeting. After the meeting is settled the couple rise, take each other by the hand, and repeat to each other their promises. These may be specially approved by the monthly meeting, or they may be the traditional Quaker promise: “In the presence of God, and before these our friends, I take thee, _____, to be my spouse, promising with Divine assistance to be unto thee a loving and faithful spouse so long as we both shall live.”

The marriage certificate is then signed by the couple and is read aloud by a person selected beforehand. At the close of the meeting, all persons present are invited to sign the certificate as witnesses.

The form of the certificate in essence is as follows. Specific changes may be approved by the monthly meeting.

Whereas, A. B. of _____, in the County/City of _____ in _____, child of C. B. and H., of _____; and D. E., of _____, in the County/City of _____ in

_____, child of F. E. and N., of _____ ; having declared their intentions of marriage with each other to _____ Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends held at _____, according to the good order used among them, their proposed marriage was allowed by that Meeting. These are to certify to whom it may concern, that for the accomplishment of their intention, this _____ day of the _____ month, in the year _____, they, A. B. and D. E. appearing in a public meeting for worship of the Religious Society of Friends, held at _____, and taking one another by the hand, did on this solemn occasion, each declare and promise with Divine assistance, to be unto the other a loving and faithful spouse so long as they both shall live [or words to that effect]. Moreover, they, A. B. and D. E. did, as a further confirmation thereof, then and there to these presents, set their hands.
A.B.

D.B. (or D. E.)

We, having been present at the marriage, have as witnesses set our hands the day and year above written.

Summary of Responsibilities for weddings under the care of the monthly meeting

The Persons to be Married

- To write a letter to their monthly meeting(s) stating their intention to marry and asking that the wedding be under the care of the monthly meeting. Both persons should sign the letter(s).
- To meet with the appointed clearness committee(s) to seek together the right ordering (see Glossary) of the proposed marriage.
- To inform the monthly meeting of the desired date and place for the wedding and of suggestions for persons to serve on the oversight committee for the wedding.
- To refrain from sending wedding invitations until the monthly meeting minutes its approval of the proposed wedding and appoints a meeting for worship for that purpose.
- To meet with the oversight committee to discuss plans for the wedding, including any departures from usual Friends procedures or practices. If there is to be a reception on meeting premises following the meeting for worship, those plans should be discussed as well.
- To have a Friends wedding certificate prepared well in advance of the appointed day, and to see that it and appropriate pens for signing are present at the wedding itself.
- To inform themselves of the legal requirements for marriage in the state where the wedding will take place, and take appropriate steps to comply with them (if the wedding is to be a legal ceremony in addition to a religious one).

- To commit to memory the promises to be made to each other at the wedding.
- To sign the wedding certificate after their promises have been made.

Clerk of Meeting

- To see that the letter from the couple and the report of the clearness committee(s) are promptly brought to the meeting for business.
- To see that an oversight committee is appointed when a favorable clearness report has been received and accepted, and that the request for a meeting for worship to accomplish the wedding is approved.
- To inform the couple when their request for a meeting for worship has been granted and they may proceed with their plans.
- To see that the marriage license is properly signed (if the wedding is to be a legal ceremony in addition to a religious one).

Clearness Committee

- To meet with the couple intending to marry and satisfy itself that there is nothing to interfere with the prospect of a rightly ordered marriage. This usually involves meeting with each person separately as well as with the couple together.
- To report its findings to the meeting for business in a timely fashion.
- To be informed of the legal requirements for marriage, and if the wedding is intended to be a legal as well as religious ceremony, to be prepared to discuss these requirements with the couple.
- To ensure that the rights and welfare of any minor children of either person have been considered and protected.
- To be available to help the couple in other ways, as the need appears.

Oversight Committee

- To see that the wedding is accomplished in accordance with a meeting for worship and in keeping with Friends practices and principles generally.
- To meet with the couple in advance to discuss plans for the wedding, including any changes in wording of the vows and selecting persons to read the certificate and to bring the meeting to a close at the appropriate time.
- To see that all legal requirements are met, if the wedding is to be a legal ceremony as well as a religious one.
- To care for the Friends wedding certificate after the rise of worship, including seeing that everyone present has an opportunity to sign it.
- To see that the wedding is recorded in the permanent records of the monthly meeting, and to see that the certificate is returned to the couple at an appropriate time.
- To report to the monthly meeting when the wedding has been accomplished, whether it

proceeded according to Friends practices, and the correct full names of the newly married couple.

- To see that the reception, if held on meeting premises, is conducted in a manner appropriate to the occasion which it celebrates.

II. Deaths

Health Care Decisions and Final Affairs

Friends are advised to be careful to make or revise their wills and settle their outward affairs while in health. It is also advised that Friends consider executing an Advanced Health Care Directive or similar legal document covering end-of-life health care decisions.

Assisting the Family

The local meeting can assist the family that has suffered a loss by death in a wide variety of ways, including: providing child care, preparing meals, doing house and yard work, and offering overnight hospitality to out-of-town visitors. At times simply accompanying the bereaved in accomplishing necessary decisions and activities may be very helpful. Remember that pain and loss do not end with the interment or memorial meeting; regular visitation during the weeks and months following can be greatly appreciated.

Interments

An interment in Friends practice, whether of body or ashes, may be either private or public. In either event, a brief meeting for worship after the manner of Friends is held. The monthly meeting can usefully appoint one or more seasoned Friends to have oversight of this meeting and its closing.

Memorial Meetings

A memorial meeting for worship, celebrating the life and service of the deceased Friend, is appointed by the monthly meeting (unless the deceased had previously expressed otherwise). This should be an occasion when temporal things are secondary, when the reality and mystery of eternal life is deeply felt, and when the presence of the Lord brings hope, comfort, and consolation to the bereaved. This meeting may be held at any time from the date of death to a date several weeks following, depending on the wishes of the family and the number of out-of-town F/friends and family who might wish to attend.

The memorial meeting may be held in the meeting house, or at some other facility if the meeting space is unavailable or unable to hold the number of persons anticipated to be present. The

monthly meeting should also appoint greeters and if needed persons to help with parking and seating. The monthly meeting should ensure that house-sitting is in place during the memorial meeting, particularly if the time and date of the meeting have been publicly announced.

Memorial meetings are held under the care of Ministry and Oversight Committee. Because some of the attenders are likely to be unfamiliar with the practices of Friends, a seasoned Friend should be designated to offer a brief explanation of Friends worship at the beginning of the meeting, with an invitation for any to speak if so led, whether a Friend or not. The Friend responsible for closing the meeting should be sensitive both to allowing opportunity for all to speak who are so led and to avoid allowing the memorial meeting to extend too long after that point.

Friends are urged to conform to true simplicity in all funeral arrangements, avoiding expensive and elaborate caskets and floral or other decorations. Ordinarily, the casket or container of ashes is not part of a memorial meeting for worship.

It is hospitable to offer refreshments after the memorial meeting. The monthly meeting should take the lead in providing these, within the limits of its ability.

Recording the Death of Members

It is the responsibility of each monthly meeting to see that the death of any member is recorded in its minutes or other suitable permanent record. This minute may also outline the life and service of the deceased Friend.

Memorials

There are particular Friends whose faithfulness to God's call in their lives inspires others. On occasion, a monthly meeting feels led to recognize and record the life of these Friends in order to help others serve God better. If the deceased Friend's life has been exemplary in service to the meeting or to the community, or as a vessel of mercy, compassion and grace, the monthly meeting may decide to publish a memorial in leaflet or pamphlet form. Collections of memorials from previous years may be seen in the Friends Historical Collection at Guilford College or at the Rich Square Monthly Meeting library.

The monthly meeting may forward the proposed memorial to the Interim Body for review and approval when the deceased Friend's life and service has been of outstanding note to the yearly meeting or to the Religious Society of Friends at large. At its discretion, the Interim Body may in turn forward the memorial, along with any suggested amendments, to the Yearly Meeting in session. If it is approved there, it may be printed for distribution. It has been the practice of the Yearly Meeting to underwrite a portion of the expense of printing memorials approved in this

way.

III. Other Special Occasions

In addition to marriages and deaths, there may be other special occasions we recognize as significant for the meeting community and feel appropriate to acknowledge. Such special occasions are those which may arise in the life events of the members or for the meeting community as a whole -- births, life transitions, thanksgivings and reconciliations, times of apprehension, celebrations of solidarity with one another, our neighbors, and creation, etc. When a meeting discerns such special occasions in its life, a called meeting for worship may be appointed.

Glossary

[*Future Section*]

Bibliography

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