

1 Foreword

2

3 All who use this *Faith and Practice* are encouraged to follow the admonition from the Meeting
4 of Elders held at Balby, England, in 1656:

5

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

10

Elders of Balby, 1656

11

12 This edition of *Faith and Practice* of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of
13 Friends is thus intended to be a guide, and not a rule, for our members, attenders and others who
14 seek to understand how Friends in our yearly meeting express our faith in our lives, our
15 communities and our organizations. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting approved this edition of *Faith*
16 *and Practice* at its annual sessions in 20_.

17

18 Like early Friends, we proclaim that every person has been endowed with the capacity to enter
19 directly, without mediation, into an empowering relationship with God. Also like those Friends,
20 we gather in expectant silence with other seekers, open to the movement of the Spirit in
21 ourselves individually and in our worshipping community. Friends seek to experience the
22 presence of the living God in individual religious practice and in meetings for worship and for
23 business. To be in the presence of God inspires awe, provides healing and comfort, and is a
24 source of guidance for conduct. Out of this experience, we proclaim the intimate connection
25 between religious faith and social justice and seek to express this understanding in our daily lives
26 and actions.

27

28 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting affirms that transformation comes when we, in daily life and in our
29 meeting communities, trust in the Light that gives life and empowers everyone who comes into
30 the world.

31

1 Preface

2

3 This revised edition of *Faith and Practice* embodies the labor and insight of a revision group
4 appointed for this service by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Throughout the editing process, many
5 individual Friends and monthly meetings have improved the drafts considerably through their
6 close attention to both individual sections and to the whole text. The revision group is also
7 grateful for the time and attention that Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in session, on several
8 occasions, has devoted to this work.

9

10 The text reflects a commitment to recognize the diversity that exists within our yearly meeting
11 and honor this rich variety of experience. Those who become members of Friends meetings
12 within Philadelphia Yearly Meeting have followed very different paths. We each bring distinct
13 religious vocabularies, images and metaphors to express our spiritual experience. Readers are
14 encouraged to engage the book with an open mind and heart and, where necessary, to ‘translate’
15 the text into the wording that speaks to them. All Friends can recognize that those sitting next to
16 them on meetinghouse benches may have a different way of expressing their understanding and
17 experience—and that new insights can occur as we speak with and listen to one another.

18

19 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting is also diverse in the size and composition of its constituent
20 monthly meetings. The revision group hopes that the suggestions contained herein can be
21 tailored to meet the needs of all Friends meetings whether they are large or small, and speak both
22 to those who are quite familiar with the procedures outlined and to those who are new to
23 Quakerism and are eager to understand the ways of Friends. Throughout the text, the revision
24 group has attempted to describe current practice and to avoid prescription.

25

26 When the Faith and Practice Revision Group was appointed by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in
27 2009, it was charged to describe the structure and organization of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting
28 and to bring *Faith and Practice* up to date. This group substantially reorganized the book for
29 greater clarity and usefulness. It also incorporated commitments made by Philadelphia Yearly
30 Meeting since the 2002 edition of *Faith and Practice* was published regarding both the integrity
31 of the earth and the need to address racism within and beyond Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

32

33 During the drafting process, the yearly meeting undertook a long range planning process which
34 was presented in the publication, “Re-Kindling Our Fire: A 5-Year Plan for Philadelphia Yearly
35 Meeting, 2015-2020.” The resulting structure of the yearly meeting, approved in 2014, is
36 referenced in this edition of *Faith and Practice* but not described in detail. Readers are invited to
37 visit the yearly meeting website (pym.org) for up-to-date descriptions of the groups and
38 individuals serving the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting community. The websites of other Friends
39 organizations are included for complementary information and materials. (See Sections V. and
40 VIII.) This edition of *Faith and Practice* is available online as well as in print.

41

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40

I. Experience and Faith

The following Advice, paraphrased from epistles of the yearly meeting in the late 17th century, expresses the challenge and promise of the spiritual journey of Friends.

Friends are advised to place God, not ourselves, in the center of the universe and, in all aspects of inward life and outward activity, to keep themselves open to the healing power of the Spirit of Christ.

Advices, I

For many Friends, heeding this advice is a lifelong pursuit marked by faithful searching, creative and energizing doubt, as well as the possibility of new awareness and transformation. The centrality of God, the inward experience of the power of the Light, and the integration of inward life and outward activity together define essential aspects of Quakerism.

Active engagement in the process of placing God at the center begins with a deeply felt understanding of the Light Within.

A. The Light Within

The essential experience of Friends is that of a direct, unmediated relationship with the Divine. Friends have used many terms or phrases to refer to the inner certainty of our faith: the Light Within, the Inner Light, the Christ Within, the Inward Teacher, the Divine Presence, Spirit, the Great Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, that of God in every person, and the Seed. In his journal, George Fox referred to “that Inward Light, Spirit, and Grace by which all might know their salvation” and to “that Divine Spirit which would lead them into all truth.” Today Friends continue to use these terms and have added others out of a sense of ongoing revelation. For some Friends, “spiritual energy” best describes their personal experience of that which enlivens and empowers them in seeking truth for themselves and in community. In contrast with early Friends, not all Friends today consider themselves to be Christians or even theists. Friends come from very diverse religious backgrounds and experiences and apply their different perspectives as they encounter the Light Within. Regardless of the journey that brings individuals to explore the Quaker way, the invitation to enter into an unmediated, inward relationship with the Divine continues to be at the heart of Quaker experience.

Through this relationship, each person encounters the Spirit, active in the world, and providing guidance for everyday living. The reality of this spiritual relationship within each worshipper brings the Friends meeting together as a community of faith. Friends understand that faithfulness to Spirit can produce a spiritual energy within their faith community that encourages them to support each other within that community, and most of all, to live in harmony with the Divine.

1 Friends also understand that the experience of God continues to unfold and that the record of
2 God's presence in human lives continues to be written.

3 Friends find that the Light Within:

- 4 • Accompanies, comforts and loves us as we seek Divine truth;
- 5 • Reveals who we are, including what we would prefer not to see about ourselves, and
6 leads us out of spiritual darkness or dryness;
- 7 • Illuminates, inspires and transforms us;
- 8 • Shows us how to live with love, compassion and justice towards others;
- 9 • Gives us energy and power to change ourselves and the world in small ways and large;
- 10 • Leads us to the right decisions in our meetings for worship with attention to business;
- 11 • Provides ongoing revelation of God's truth.

12 The Light Within is not the same as the conscience or moral faculty. Conscience is conditioned
13 by education, personal experience, and the cultural and social environment. Only when the
14 conscience is illuminated by the Light of Christ can it serve as a dependable guide to a Spirit-led
15 life.

16 Recognition that God's Light is in every person helps us to overcome our apparent separation
17 and differences from others; it leads to a sympathetic awareness of their needs and a sense of
18 responsibility towards them. Friends believe that the more widely and clearly the Light is
19 recognized and followed, the more the human family will come into harmony and peace.
20 "Therefore," wrote George Fox, "in the Light wait, where unity is."

21 B. Meeting for Worship

22

23 Meeting for worship is the primary setting for the fundamental experience of the Divine
24 Presence. Early Friends took literally the recorded words of Jesus: "For where two or three are
25 gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). They understood that
26 the Light Within could be experienced without the help of trained clergy and liturgy by all who
27 seek it. God spoke to them and through them in the silence. Any— and all— of them were
28 ministers of the Word of God, spoken and unspoken. They chose a form of worship that nurtures
29 the direct encounter with the Divine. Such worship centered in stillness has endured for over 350
30 years.

31

32 Each experience of worship is unique, and each worshipper approaches worship in a personal
33 way. Friends understand that worship is continuous and each person who enters the meeting
34 room joins in quietly, settling into the silence. In the deepening stillness, worshippers let go of
35 thoughts and distractions, open their hearts to the Light Within and listen for what truth God
36 might give them. Sitting together in silence has been called "expectant waiting" by Friends. Even

1 in times of spiritual emptiness when unity and fulfillment seem distant, Friends find it necessary
2 to be present with others in worship. Vital worship depends on a deeply felt longing for God.

3 Friends find that meeting for worship:

- 4 • Draws the community together out of our shared hunger to know the Christ Within and to
5 care for one another;
- 6 • Clears a space in our lives for God to enter, speak, heal, teach and lead;
- 7 • Enfolds us in God’s infinite love and everlasting peace;
- 8 • Gives us grateful awareness of our profound connectedness to one another and the natural
9 world;
- 10 • Opens us to repentance, forgiveness and guidance;
- 11 • Renews us and prepares us for service;
- 12 • Sends us forth with inspired vision and commitment.

13 As Robert Barclay observed:

14 *And as many candles lighted, and put in one place, do greatly augment the light*
15 *and make it more to shine forth; so when many are gathered into the same life,*
16 *there is more to the glory of God, and his power appears, to the refreshment of*
17 *each individual, for that he partakes not only of the light and life raised in*
18 *himself, but in all the rest.*

19 Robert Barclay, 1678

20 There is no guarantee, however, that the movement of the Spirit during worship will proceed
21 smoothly and without difficulty. Each Friends meeting is encouraged to examine its spiritual
22 condition periodically in order to reveal any obstructions to which the meeting is prone. (See
23 Section VII for General Queries and Spiritual Self-Assessment.)

24
25 At the close of the meeting for worship, we shake hands in acknowledgment of our commitment
26 to one another and to the Light Within; and we go forth with renewed trust in the power and
27 reality of God's grace and love and of God’s presence in the world.

28
29 Some meetings complement meeting for worship with a variety of practices before or after
30 worship. Such activities include singing hymns, reading one of the General Queries,
31 “afterthoughts,” news from the children’s program, sharing joys and concerns, welcome and
32 introductions, and announcements.

33
34 1. Preparing for Worship

35

1 The worship experience is enriched when individuals come to meeting with hearts and minds
2 prepared for worship through thoughtful reflection and listening to the Inward Teacher in the
3 course of daily life. In support of their worship experience, Friends use a variety of personal
4 spiritual practices such as daily prayer, meditation, Bible study, journaling, and gaining
5 familiarity with the spiritual journeys of others. Additional practices include: mindfulness
6 meditation; breathing and/or walking meditation; yoga and other forms of movement and sacred
7 dance; contemplation of art, music and literature; and immersion in the natural world. These
8 preparatory experiences, beneficial in their own right, often produce a quieting and a dropping
9 away of concerns of the ego and prepare Friends for the living stillness that is meeting for
10 worship.

11
12 *Such is the evident certainty of that divine strength that is communicated by thus meeting*
13 *together, and waiting in silence upon God, that sometimes when one hath come in that*
14 *hath been unwatchful and wandering in his mind, or suddenly out of the hurry of outward*
15 *business, and so not inwardly gathered with the rest, so soon as he retires himself*
16 *inwardly, this power being in a good measure raised in the whole meeting, will suddenly*
17 *lay hold upon his spirit, and wonderfully help to raise up the good in him, and beget him*
18 *into the sense of the same power, to the melting and warming of his heart; even as the*
19 *warmth would take hold upon a man that is cold coming in to a stove, or as a flame will*
20 *lay hold upon some little combustible matter being near unto it.*

21 Robert Barclay, 1678

23 2. Vocal Ministry

24
25 Direct communion with God constitutes the essential experience of meeting for worship. Fresh
26 insights may come to anyone out of the living stillness. Some insights are purely personal,
27 providing guidance and inspiration to that individual. Other insights seem meant for the meeting
28 as a whole.

29
30 Friends find that vocal ministry:

- 31 • Can arise in anyone who is present at meeting for worship;
- 32 • Manifests itself in the individual as a “call”, described as an uncomfortable quickening or
- 33 a profound silence before speaking and a sense of relief or release afterward;
- 34 • Arises from the heart rather than the head;
- 35 • Impels the worshipper to rise and share the message received from Spirit;
- 36 • Does not break the silence but adds to it;
- 37 • Takes many different forms, including prayer, song, story, testimonial or dance;
- 38 • Cannot be readily reconstructed afterward by the one who responds to the call;
- 39 • Is a conduit for God’s love and work in the world;

- 1 • Is an instrument of God’s truth and love for and through us;
- 2 • Enables us to listen deeply for truth, to be healed and become whole;
- 3 • Helps us to wait for guidance from the Inward Teacher;
- 4 • Expresses to Spirit our gratitude, desire, love, joy, and thanksgiving; pours forth our
- 5 sorrow, anger, struggle, and confession;
- 6 • Unites us with those of other faiths;
- 7 • Leads us to transformation, faithfulness, and service.

8 Friends are aware that praying by “holding in the Light” can contribute to healing for those who
9 suffer. Holding a person in the Light is a way of focusing love, without any expectation other
10 than that the recipient becomes whole in the moment and experiences the Spirit deeply. In this
11 form of prayer a specific outcome is not the intention, though comfort and a sense of spiritual
12 well-being may often result.

13 D. Friends, Scripture, and Our Living Faith

14
15 George Fox was involved in the religious movement of 17th century England that found radical
16 differences between the Christianity of the established church and the Christianity of the first
17 century as portrayed in the Bible. Fox abandoned the church—but not the scriptures—as he
18 searched for a direct relationship to God. He ultimately experienced that relationship in silent
19 waiting, alone and in assemblies with other seekers. He received insights, or “openings” as he
20 called them, first by God’s “immediate spirit and power,” and only later found them to be
21 “agreeable to Holy Scriptures.” Fox realized that scriptures must be read in the same spirit that
22 inspired those who wrote them. The Christ Within speaks in all ages in ways that people can
23 understand in their situation and time.

24
25 The concept of the Inward Light, the testimonies, and other ideas and practices that distinguished
26 the early Quaker movement and have remained essential to Friends through 350 years are all
27 rooted in the gospels. As Friends seek to know and live in the Light that is alive in them, they
28 can benefit from studying and knowing the biblical texts that were important to shaping and
29 nurturing the early Quaker movement.

30
31 Friends may deepen their understanding of the historical Jesus and the universal Christ by
32 engaging in group study and discussion of the Bible and the works of contemporary Quaker
33 writers and biblical scholars. Maturing insight and experience often lead us to discover that
34 passages once thought irrelevant and lifeless acquire power and meaning.

35
36 Friends know that their shared knowledge of the Bible deepens both spoken ministry and inward
37 listening. And Friends continue to find the Bible to be an important touchstone against which to
38 test their leadings.

39

1 *Quaker faith and practice can be compared and combined with a wide variety of other*
2 *traditions: such as Buddhism, or ethical humanism. But we will find our deepest and*
3 *fullest resonances with the biblical Christian traditions that nurtured early Friends and*
4 *with the Jewish traditions that nurtured Jesus.*

5 Douglas Gwyn, 2013

6
7 Friends do not consider any scriptures, including the Bible, to be the final Word of God. Robert
8 Barclay cautioned that the scriptures are only a declaration of the source and not the source itself.
9 Friends believe in “continuing revelation” arising from ongoing communion with the Living
10 God. This expands our sensitivity in relationships with one another and likewise our knowledge
11 of the universe.

12 13 E. Discernment of the Guidance of the Spirit

14
15 As Friends seek to live faithfully as individuals and as meeting communities, they return often to
16 seek direct communion with the Divine. They find guidance through reading the Bible and other
17 sources of wisdom. And they clarify and focus their concerns and test their “leadings” by
18 responding to “queries”—open-ended questions based on Friends practices and testimonies.
19 These processes give the meeting and individuals a sense of clearness and confidence that they
20 are moving forward in harmony with the Divine.

21
22 At times an individual Friend may seek a more structured clearness process within the meeting.
23 These occasions might include application for membership, marriage under the care of the
24 meeting, decisions on an important life course, and to test a leading. For Friends, a leading is a
25 persistent thought or idea, believed to be a call from the Spirit that compels one to action. In each
26 of these situations, the meeting and the individual can draw on well-established practices that
27 enable Friends to understand the call and to act on the promptings of love and truth in their
28 hearts.

29
30 The meeting community itself uses defined processes to reach clearness in decisions and to guide
31 the actions of the meeting. “Spirit-led” decision making is central to the life and health of the
32 meeting.

33
34 The desire of Friends as individuals and as meeting communities is to live with greater
35 awareness of and faithfulness to the Light Within. Friends strive to integrate their inward life and
36 outward activity. In the sections that follow, we return often to discernment and clearness as
37 practices that lead us to greater harmony with the Light Within.

38
39 *Dear Friends, keep all your meetings in the authority, wisdom and power of Truth and*
40 *the unity of the blessed Spirit. Let your conduct and conversation be such as become the*

1
2
3
4
5

Gospel of Christ. Exercise yourselves to have a conscience void of offense toward God and toward all people. Be steadfast and faithful in your allegiance and service to your Lord, and the God of peace be with you.

Elders of Balby, 1656