

1 II. Faith Reflected in Practice and Daily Life

2 *Bring the whole of your life under the healing and ordering of the Holy Spirit,*
3 *remembering that there is no time but this present. Friends are reminded that we are*
4 *called, as followers of Christ, to help establish the Kingdom of God on earth.*

5 Advices, IV

6 It is not easy to live faithfully as Friends in today’s world, to remain true to our heritage and
7 principles while trying to live fully in that world. But it has always been so. Each generation of
8 Friends has faced challenges involving the use of time and resources for education, work,
9 marriage and family life, personal relationships, and civic and social commitments.

10 Friends understand that our lives are nurtured and enriched as we move into a deeper relationship
11 with our Friends meeting community. The meeting community can help us meet the challenges
12 that we inevitably must face as individuals. Active participation in the life of the meeting—in
13 meetings for worship and business, and in social, educational and other meeting activities—
14 enables us to belong to a caring and supportive spiritual community.

15 A. Community Life

16 From the beginning, Friends have recognized the importance of being in community. As early
17 Friends struggled to follow God’s will, the Friends community provided spiritual support for
18 their discernment of that will and material support for their families when they were imprisoned
19 for their faith. Today, Friends continue to seek to be faithful, and their community continues to
20 provide discernment and care.

21 Though Friends meetings vary in the range and nature of their activities, all meetings strive to
22 offer a sympathetic and welcoming community in which people can share the joys and
23 challenges of daily life. Friends meetings also offer discreet, confidential and loving support
24 when needed, such as when a member feels a call to service or faces a life transition. In
25 particular, the meeting may form a clearness committee to assist the individual in sorting out
26 what to do. The meeting may also refer the individual to other resources when support beyond
27 what it can offer might be beneficial.

28 1. Concerns, Leadings and Testimonies

29 Throughout our history Friends have understood that we are not meant to conform to the ways of
30 the world, but to live in obedience to the Light Within and through this witness to transform the
31 world. An individual or group may feel a direct intimation of God’s will, a tender sense of a need
32 or difficulty either within the meeting or in the larger community. Initially, such a concern may
33 not be linked to any specific action, but may simply be a troubled sense that something is awry.
34 When the concern gains clarity and focus, Friends refer to it as a “leading,” a sense of being
35 called by God to undertake a particular course of action. The leading may be short-term or it may
36 involve an ongoing transformation of the person’s life, the community, and even the world.

37 When a leading to act in a public way arises, the Friend may seek to initiate a process of
38 discernment and testing within the meeting. This testing process is a form of spiritual discipline
39 for both the Friend with a leading and for the meeting community. It is intended to result in
40 clearness for both regarding what is to be done.

41 For more than 350 years, Friends have adopted practices that reflect deeply held, historically
42 rooted attitudes towards living in the world. The collective experience of “concerns” and

1 “leadings” over time has led to what Friends refer to as “testimonies.” The testimonies are
2 outward expressions that reflect the inward experience of transformation through divine leading.
3 Contemporary Friends may identify our testimonies as simplicity, peace, integrity, community,
4 equality, and stewardship using the acronym SPICES. However, in the past, the testimonies
5 referenced specific acts of Friends responding to truth as they understood it. For instance, the
6 testimony against taking oaths grew out of the intention to speak truth always and not only when
7 one’s hand was on the Bible. Even today we say that our “testimony” is a demonstration in our
8 outward lives of Spirit’s movement within us.

9 2. Discernment, Clearness and Decision-Making

10 Friends use discernment processes to gain clarity and support for personal leadings, to test a
11 corporate leading to act as a community, and to seek unity in meeting matters. For Friends,
12 discernment is the act of searching for truth, remaining open to the Light beyond the self. Friends
13 have faith that, for those who question and seek, there is always a way forward.

14 a. Individual Discernment

15 Friends practice discernment in their individual lives, prayerfully seeking divine guidance in
16 daily activities. They may also seek the meeting’s support in finding clearness when considering
17 a change in life direction or proposing an action to follow a leading. The act of seeking God’s
18 guidance is assisted by the meeting to assure that what is sensed by one is tested and affirmed by
19 the worshipping community.

20 A small group of Friends may serve as a “clearness committee” that meets in worship, listens
21 deeply to the person seeking clearness, and assists that person in exploring the issues and
22 discovering a way forward. The clearness process may be initiated informally by the individual
23 inviting a few trusted Friends to participate. Alternatively, the appointment of a clearness
24 committee may be entrusted to the meeting, often to its pastoral care committee. (See Section VII
25 for Guidelines for Care Committees.)

26 When an individual requests membership in the meeting or marriage under the care of the
27 meeting, the meeting then must discern whether to approve the request. Specifically, it assumes
28 the dual responsibilities to learn if there are other commitments or possible difficulties involved
29 for the individual making the request and to discern whether the meeting can fulfill the request.
30 Such clearness is specific to the needs of a marriage or membership. (See Section VII for
31 Guidelines for the Marriage Procedure and for Application for Membership.)

32 b. Corporate Discernment and Decision-making

33 Just as it is paramount for Friends to have clearness in their personal lives, so it is important for
34 Friends to have clearness regarding issues or concerns brought to the meeting for consideration.
35 Friends undertake corporate discernment and decision-making in the same expectant waiting for the guidance of
36 the Spirit as meeting for worship. With this in mind, some Friends call the occasion for conducting business
37 “meeting for worship with attention to business.” Others call it simply “meeting for business.” It is also known as
38 “monthly meeting” because it is usually held once a month. Regardless of the name used for the occasion, the
39 basis for Friends method of reaching decisions is a spiritual one.

40 In accordance with our understanding that there is that of God in each of us and that Truth is continually revealed,
41 all those attending the meeting for business seek to release whatever preferences or opinions they
42 may have about an issue before it is considered and become open to the leading of the Spirit as
43 they would in a meeting for worship. The goal of this decision-making process, then, is to discern

1 God's will for the meeting as a whole regarding the issue under consideration.

2 An important part of the process of corporate discernment takes place in the committees of the meeting, one or
3 more of which often is charged to season an issue before it is brought to the meeting as a whole for consideration.
4 Seasoning an issue might include gathering background information, drawing together those affected, or drafting
5 a proposal. The work of the meeting committee is conducted with much the same process and goal as a meeting
6 for worship with attention to business.

7 1) Sense of the Meeting and Unity

8 "Sense of the meeting" and "unity" are two important concepts of our Spirit-led method of reaching decisions.
9 Friends use "sense of the meeting" in two ways. The sense of the meeting may mean the *decision*
10 *reached by the meeting* on some issue or concern. Or it may be a *statement of how the meeting*
11 *processed* a matter, framed by the clerk or some other person. In the latter case, the sense of the
12 meeting may reflect that there is unity on the issue, whether to act or to refrain from acting, or it may reflect that
13 the meeting is not in unity and that no decision has been reached at this point.

14 "Unity" for Friends is spiritual oneness and harmony sought by the group. The unity that Friends
15 seek in meetings for business is thus the sense of being led together by God. Sometimes unity is
16 reached easily; sometimes it requires a lengthy process over a number of business meetings; and sometimes it is
17 not yet available to the meeting community.

18 In recording a decision, one meeting may say they "reached unity" on the matter, while another
19 may report that they arrived at a "sense of the meeting," and they may mean the same thing.
20 While there are subtle differences in the language and approach used among Friends, at the heart
21 of Friends discernment process is a discipline of deep listening that supports the unfolding of a
22 sense of Truth among the members of the community as facts and feelings are sorted through.
23 Being attentive to the Light Within grounds discernment beyond those facts and feelings so that
24 members grow in unity with Spirit. Our search is for unity, not unanimity. We consider ourselves
25 to be in unity when we share in the search for Truth, when we listen faithfully for God, when we
26 submit our wills to the guidance of Spirit, and when our love for one another is constant.

27 Friends differentiate between sense-of-the-meeting decision-making and consensus. Consensus is
28 the outcome of a widely used and valuable secular process characterized by a search for general
29 agreement largely through rational discussion and compromise. A sense of the meeting is the
30 outcome of a spiritual process characterized by deep listening to each other and trusting in God's
31 guidance. While ideally both processes result in a course of action to which all participants can
32 agree, reaching the sense of the meeting relies consciously on the Spirit. Reasoned argument and
33 lively debate are secondary to spiritual insight and divine leading.

34 Seeking the sense of the meeting is democratic in that all Friends present are encouraged to
35 participate. However, it goes beyond democracy in its expectation that participants set aside their
36 personal convictions in order to be led by a Guide beyond the self. It can be deeply satisfying for
37 those participating in Friends decision-making when the needs and aspirations of the meeting
38 take precedence over individual preferences. When everyone listens with an open heart and
39 remains teachable, the meeting has the opportunity to come to decisions in harmony with the
40 Spirit.

41 2) Preparation for Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business

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1 Thoughtful preparation enables the meeting for business to follow the leadings of the Spirit.
2 Meetings may find it helpful to consider the following suggestions.

3 The clerks or other designated persons prepare and distribute the agenda and other essential
4 information in advance. In creating the agenda, care is taken to assess whether an item is ready
5 for consideration by the group, what items should receive the most attention, and, if necessary,
6 what items might be held over to a future session.

7 Individuals and committees expected to bring matters before the meeting are asked to prepare
8 and share their material in advance whenever possible.

9 Also, individuals presenting an issue for consideration meet first with an appropriate meeting
10 committee or clearness committee to explore and test both the concern and a proposed course of
11 action. It is helpful for issues to be well seasoned before bringing them to the meeting. Items of
12 business benefit from research, background information, and review by a committee within the
13 meeting.

14 Friends and attenders prepare themselves for the meeting for business by reading the advance
15 material and preparing their hearts and minds for Spirit-led decision-making. Friends can help
16 deepen the meeting for business by holding the session itself in worship.

17 Members arrive promptly and settle into worship. This contributes much to the depth and power
18 of the meeting.

19 The clerk arranges the time and place of gathering and other organizational details in order to
20 encourage as many as possible to attend and to provide ample opportunity for the unhurried
21 conduct of business.

22 If a presiding or recording clerk has not already been appointed or is unable to serve, the meeting
23 agrees how to proceed, often by naming someone to serve for that meeting for business.

24 The promptings of the Inward Teacher may come with power to anyone present, without respect
25 to age or experience. Friends know both the value of those whose experience and advice in
26 similar matters have been helpful in the past and that sensitive and powerful insights can come
27 through newer and younger participants.

28 3) Conducting the Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business

29 Although an individual Friend is designated clerk to facilitate the meeting for business, all
30 members share responsibility for maintaining a Spirit-led meeting, for the wise use of time, and
31 for a steadfast search for Truth. All are expected to be attentive and to offer insights that arise
32 from reflective worship. When a matter for discernment comes before the meeting for business,
33 Friends who feel led to speak to it ask to be recognized by the clerk. The clerk listens for the
34 sense of the meeting in the insights Friends offer and determines when to propose it to the group.
35 After the sense of the meeting is proposed, members may offer suggestions for its improvement.
36 The clerk then tests the sense of the meeting by asking whether the group can unite with it. If so,
37 the meeting records the sense of the meeting—the decision—in a minute that is read back to and
38 approved by the meeting. The clerk is responsible for seeing that any follow-up action is carried
39 out, often by others, and is reported back to the meeting.

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41 When the clerk proposes the sense of the meeting, several outcomes are possible. Members who

1 feel it has been accurately stated say, “I approve.” When members have genuine reservations or
2 objections to a proposed action or decision and are unable to approve—or unite with—the sense
3 of the meeting, there are several options for the clerk, the individual and the meeting to consider.
4 These options are explained in the next part of this section. It is also possible that the sense of the
5 meeting may or may not include a decision to take action. We may wrestle with an issue or may
6 realize we need more time or information and determine we are not ready to make a decision at
7 the time. The sense of the meeting will state that and whether the meeting will come back to the
8 subject at another time.

9 Friends come to meeting for business with an openness to the Spirit that inspires careful
10 speaking and listening, trust, humility, compassion and courage. Worship also enhances respect
11 for others, as participants seek the Light revealed through others. An openness of spirit enables
12 Friends to hear and incorporate differing, even contradictory, views.

13 Friends generally welcome the participation in meeting for business of serious and consistent
14 attenders (that is, persons who are not formally members but are active in the life of the
15 meeting). At times, meetings may advise non-members to show sensitive restraint when
16 addressing particular meeting affairs. In rare circumstances it may be necessary for a decision to
17 be reached by the members only. In this case, non-members may be asked to hold the meeting in
18 the Light during that time.

19 4) When Friends Disagree

20 Friends often find themselves most challenged when, during meeting for business, members
21 offer firmly held but incompatible responses to an issue. When a member feels strongly about
22 that issue and even seeks to prevent the meeting from reaching a decision, it is important that the
23 meeting test this person’s conviction in a loving spirit, and examine responsibly the
24 consequences of acting or not acting on the issue.

25 The search for unity rests with all in the meeting, including those who oppose the proposed
26 course of action. The following lists include questions, practical steps and choices that may be
27 helpful to consider when Friends disagree.

28 (a) Questions that may be helpful for all to consider when disagreement threatens to divide a
29 meeting:

- 30 • Have all Friends taken care to discern, in a loving and prayerful spirit, that of God in the
31 perspective of those with whom they disagree?
- 32 • Have all Friends tried to set aside their personal desires and preferences in order to be led
33 by the Spirit?
- 34 • Have Friends considered whether God’s will for them as individuals may differ from
35 God’s will for the meeting?
- 36 • Do those in conflict regularly reaffirm, in voice and attitude, the love they feel for one
37 another?
- 38 • If Friends have not yet done the work to listen to and affirm those with whom they
39 disagree, what will support them to do this?

40 (b) Practical steps that may be helpful in enabling the meeting to move toward unity:

41 The clerk, or another member, may ask the meeting to move into silence in order to settle
42 Friends’ energy and deepen the spiritual search.

1 The clerk may ask Friends to examine each position in the Light in order to discern the work of
2 the Spirit or to allow another possibility—a third or new way— to emerge.

3 The meeting may reschedule the matter, encouraging members to continue their search for right
4 action in solitary prayer and meditation.

5 When there is much disagreement, uncertainty or discomfort within the community about an
6 issue, the clerk may suggest holding a threshing session. The special role of a threshing session is
7 that it provides ample time for questions and discussion and allows all differences of viewpoints
8 and feelings to be expressed. It is not a time for decision-making.

9 The clerk may ask a small group to withdraw and draft a minute with the hope and expectation
10 that the resulting minute will lead to unity. The rest of the meeting may proceed with other
11 business or wait in worship.

12 After patient searching over a considerable period, the meeting may conclude that the sense of
13 the meeting is clear and unity in the Spirit has been reached, acknowledging that some Friends
14 continue to have reservations about the decision.

15 Alternatively, the clerk may indicate that the sense of the meeting is not clear and that no
16 decision can be made nor action taken until unity in the Spirit is reached.

17 (c) Options for when an individual cannot unite with the sense of the meeting:

18 When a Friend has genuine reservations or objections to a proposed action or decision and feels
19 unable to approve—or unite with—the sense of the meeting, there are several options for the
20 clerk, the individual and the meeting to consider.

21 The clerk ensures that those Friends who disapprove of the sense of the meeting have an
22 opportunity to state their concerns. In so doing, Friends may feel released from the burden of
23 their concern, having laid it on the conscience of the meeting, and decide to withdraw their
24 objections, thereby allowing the meeting to move forward in unity.

25 Friends may choose to “stand aside,” recognizing that while the emerging decision does not
26 reflect their personal preferences, the meeting will go forward. A person who stands aside is
27 expected to share their reason with the group. The person may choose to be named in the minutes
28 or remain anonymous. When a member of the community chooses to stand aside, the meeting
29 may be reluctant to proceed or wish to give the matter further consideration. If the meeting
30 decides to proceed with the decision, the person who stood aside is expected to support it.

31 The Friend may hold deep feelings or convictions that prevent them from being able to stand
32 aside. The meeting takes this response very seriously and may:

- 33 • Postpone making a decision to provide opportunity to further understand the individual’s
34 objections and for all to grow in the wisdom and guidance of the Spirit;
- 35 • Decide to go no further with the issue under consideration, minuting that unity of spirit
36 could not be reached or that the meeting was unwilling to proceed without it;
- 37 • Move forward with the decision, usually having labored over a protracted period with the
38 individual who continued to oppose the proposed action and was unable to unite with the
39 community.

40 Friends who do not agree with the decision should affirm their spiritual unity with the meeting.
41 That unity requires those Friends to accept with good grace the consequences of the decision for

1 the meeting and for them. That spiritual unity also requires the rest of the meeting to keep the
2 objections in mind as they proceed and to treat tenderly and lovingly those who had disagreed.
3 These expectations reflect trust in divine guidance and the commitment of all members to reach
4 unity in the Spirit.

5 3. Friends and Education

6 a. Education and Spiritual Formation

7 Since its beginnings, the Religious Society of Friends has emphasized the importance of
8 education both for its own members and for society generally. Friends believe that education is
9 especially beneficial if it instills a concern for others and strengthens a commitment to live
10 faithfully.

11 For guidance in word and deed, we look first to the Spirit, recognizing that formal education in
12 itself may not lead to a deeper spiritual sensitivity. Many who contribute significantly to the life
13 and ministry of the meeting may not have extensive formal education. We know from experience
14 that a broad education helps us to identify what is faithful to the Light in our own leadings, to
15 interpret and communicate those leadings, and to weigh the leadings of others.

16 Friends regard continual spiritual growth as essential. Such growth is nurtured by receptivity to
17 the Inward Teacher, by participation in meeting for worship, by studying the Bible, other sacred
18 texts and other literature, and by the inspiration of exemplary lives. Although Friends emphasize
19 spiritual formation, we do not neglect the acquisition of intellectual, aesthetic and practical skills
20 and understanding. Within the family, the Friends meeting, and the various levels of formal
21 education, Friends are committed to balancing heart, mind and hand in spiritual wholeness.

22 Friends who are called to careers in education of every kind and at every level, public and
23 private, see this service as an opportunity to lead themselves and others into spiritual growth.

24 b) Friends and Public Education

25 Friends have a responsibility, as do all citizens, to be informed, concerned and active supporters
26 of public education. As parents, teachers, administrators, school board members, consultants and
27 taxpayers, Friends can be important advocates for all children in the community. Friends are also
28 expected to give informed, active support to Quaker children who attend public schools and to
29 those Friends who devote themselves as teachers and administrators in the public educational
30 system at any level. Such support is of particular importance to those children and adults who,
31 through their commitment to Truth and the quality of their relationships, seek to maintain a
32 Quaker witness in situations where others might not share our testimonies such as opposition to
33 military recruitment and to the introduction of weapons in educational institutions.

34 c) Friends Educational Institutions

35 Friends have founded a substantial number of educational institutions in the Philadelphia Yearly
36 Meeting region. These include colleges, a study/retreat center, and more than 40 nursery,
37 elementary and secondary schools. Today, the colleges are independent and the schools have a
38 variety of governance arrangements. The schools now serve substantially more non-Friends than
39 Friends and are an important way that people learn about the Religious Society of Friends. The
40 schools continue to seek to provide a community life and experience guided by Friends
41 principles.

42 A meeting may be asked to assist its members and attenders who seek financial and other

1 practical support in order to attend a Friends school. It may be asked to help special needs
2 children attend a Friends school established to serve those with learning differences.
3 Occasionally, it may be asked to provide guidance for families that choose to instruct their
4 children at home. A meeting may consider the challenge of forming and sustaining its own
5 Friends school, especially when the children of its members and attenders do not have access to
6 an existing Friends school.

7 Ideally, Friends educational institutions seek to create intentional community and prepare
8 participants for engagement in the work of the world. A Friends educational institution is more
9 likely to incorporate spiritual values throughout its programs if it has a solid core of students,
10 parents and graduates who understand and actively support Quaker principles and practices. The
11 effectiveness of a Quaker witness in our schools and colleges also depends upon the spiritual
12 depth and commitment of the members of the governing body, the administrators and the staff.

13 People who have experienced Friends concerns for simplicity, equality, justice and compassion
14 in our educational institutions often have a significant, positive influence in their wider
15 communities. Because these institutions embody our ways of worship, our social testimonies and
16 our commitment to service, they are an important form of outreach to the wider world. Such
17 beneficial influences motivate Friends, as individuals and as meetings, in their ongoing support
18 of Friends educational institutions.

19 Friends schools and colleges today seek to include students and staff from widely varied
20 economic and ethnic backgrounds. Bringing together various traditions, experiences and
21 perspectives in a common search for truth requires time, thought and genuine willingness to
22 change, and offers the rewards of deeper understanding and a vital and inclusive community.

23 4. Friends Witness in the World

24 a. Friends and Peace

25 Since all human beings are children of God, Friends are called to love and respect all persons and
26 to overcome evil with good. Friends strive to have our words and lives stand as a positive
27 witness in a world torn by strife and violence.

28 The Religious Society of Friends has consistently held that war is contrary to the Spirit of Christ,
29 as stated in the Declaration to King Charles II made by English Friends in 1660:

30 *Our principle is, and our practices have always been, to seek peace, and ensue it,*
31 *and to follow after righteousness and the knowledge of God, seeking the good and*
32 *welfare, and doing that which tends to the peace of all. All bloody principles and*
33 *practices we do utterly deny, with all outward wars, and strife, and fightings (sic)*
34 *with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretence (sic) whatsoever, and*
35 *this is our testimony to the whole world. That spirit of Christ by which we are*
36 *guided is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing as evil, and*
37 *again to move unto it; and we do certainly know, and so testify to the world, that*
38 *the spirit of Christ which leads us into all Truth will never move us to fight and*
39 *war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ,*
40 *nor for the kingdoms of this world.*

41 *And as for the kingdoms of this world, we cannot covet them, much less can we*
42 *fight for them, but we do earnestly desire and wait, that by the word of God's*
43 *power and its effectual operation in the hearts of men the kingdoms of this world*

1 Friends have counseled obedience to the state except when the law or ruling involved appears
2 contrary to divine leading.

3 In that case, Friends test any proposed action by seeking clearness and support from the meeting.
4 When Friends decide to disobey the law in accordance with divine leading, it is expected that they
5 will act openly and make clear to the authorities the spiritual grounds of their action. If the
6 decision leads to legal penalties, Friends generally suffer willingly. Friends not personally
7 involved in such actions can strengthen the meeting community by supporting fellow members
8 with spiritual encouragement and, when necessary, with material aid.

9 In public office, Friends have an opportunity to bear witness to the power which integrity,
10 courage, respect for others, and careful attention to different points of view can exert in creating
11 a just community. If a Friend encounters a conflict between faithfulness to God and an apparent
12 duty as a public official, a prayerful search for divine guidance may lead either to a suitable
13 resolution of the conflict or to a decision to resign.

14 c. Sustainable Stewardship of the Earth and Resources

15 All that we have in ourselves and our possessions are gifts from God entrusted to us for our
16 responsible use. Jesus reminds us that we must not lay-up earthly treasures for ourselves, “for
17 where your treasures are, there will your hearts be also” (Matthew 6:21). We cannot serve both
18 God and material wealth. (Matthew 6:24). To be good stewards in God’s world calls us to
19 examine and consider the ways in which our testimonies for peace, equality and simplicity
20 interact to guide our relationships with all life.

21 *O that we who declare against wars, and acknowledge our trust to be in God only, may*
22 *walk in the light, and thereby examine our foundation and motives in holding great*
23 *estates! May we look upon our treasures, the furniture of our houses, and our garments*
24 *and try whether the seeds of war have nourishment in these our possessions.*

25 John Woolman, c. 1770

26 In today’s world of economic interactions that are far more complex than when John Woolman
27 lived, Friends are challenged to examine their decisions about money and other resources to see
28 whether they contain not only the seeds of war, but also of self-indulgence, injustice and
29 ecological disaster. Good stewardship of economic resources consists both in avoiding these
30 evils and acting to advance peace, simple living, justice and a healthy ecosystem. Good
31 stewardship also requires attention to the needs of organizations that advance Friends values,
32 including our own meetings.

33 1) Right Sharing

34 A life that testifies to the value of economic equality depends on a commitment to share the
35 world’s resources. Friends in comfortable circumstances are encouraged to find practical
36 applications of the testimonies of simplicity and equality in their earning and their spending, as
37 they consider for their own lives the meaning of economic equality and simplicity. As they ask
38 what level of income is sufficient for their needs, they might also ask what portion of their
39 income could be shared beyond the immediate family. That decision requires balancing the social
40 value of self- sufficiency with the social value of providing help for those in need. It also requires
41 decisions about which expenditures are essential and which are discretionary, and about the
42 values that underlie discretionary spending.

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2) Walking Gently on the Earth

The well-being of the earth is a fundamental spiritual concern. Many have linked the wonders of nature with the Divine. How we treat the earth and its creatures is a basic part of our relationship with God. Our planet as a whole requires our responsible attention.

As Friends have become aware of the interconnectedness of all life on this planet and the devastation caused by neglect or destruction of any part of it, we have become more willing to extend our sense of community to encompass all living things. Today, we see that instead of acting as good stewards of the natural world, humans have been a major threat to the ecosystem.

Friends feel deeply the call to walk gently on the earth. Living in right relationship with the natural world requires continuing attention to wasteful and extravagant consumption as a major cause of environmental destruction. The right sharing of the world's finite resources requires all nations to reduce their present levels of consumption in order that the needs of people in underdeveloped nations be met and the earth's life-sustaining systems restored. The world cannot tolerate the present rate of consumption.

As Friends pay attention to a Spirit-led, right relationship with the earth and its resources, we seek to become models and patterns of simple living and concern for our earth. Though some find it difficult to change their way of life, others make choices that avoid straining the world's resources of clean air, water, soil and energy. Simple living inspires us to choose energy options and practices that reduce our use of energy sources that damage our environment. We are called to challenge the forces driving us toward environmental destruction with the same passion and commitment that we challenge the forces of war.

3) Friends and Equality

Friends believe there is that of God in every person, and that all people are equal before God. Friends pioneered in recognizing the gifts and rights of women. Women were ministers and leaders of the early meetings. Friends came more slowly to recognize the evil of slavery and of discrimination, and have often been guilty of sharing the prejudices of the broader society. In recent years, Friends have taken stands against discrimination based on sexual orientation and other forms of oppression to which they had earlier been insensitive. An element of that insensitivity is a failure to recognize the privileged status many American Friends enjoy. As Friends examine our own attitudes and practices, we increasingly realize that the challenges of achieving equality in the Religious Society of Friends demand a commitment to overcome all remaining vestiges of inequality and injustice both in our faith community and in the larger society.

Friends affirmation of the principle of human equality in the sight of God is important and necessary, but not sufficient. Friends must seek to identify those structures, institutions, language, and thought processes that overtly and more subtly support discrimination and exploitation, and then work to overcome them. Friends often work with victimized and exploited groups, including support for the nonviolent efforts of the exploited to achieve self-determination. Friends realize that exploitation impairs the human quality of the exploiter as well as of the exploited, and must work with both groups.

4) Friends and Criminal Justice

1 Many early Friends were persecuted and even imprisoned for worshipping as Friends. That
2 experience propelled Friends to work in prisons, ministering to the spiritual and material needs
3 of inmates, as well as actively seeking ways to reform our system of criminal justice. Believing
4 that the penal system often reflects structural and systemic injustice in our society, Friends seek
5 alternatives to incarceration and work to reduce the construction and use of prisons. Friends
6 believe that redemption and restorative justice, not punishment and retribution, are the essential
7 elements of a reformed criminal justice system.

8 Seeking to heal the wounds of harmful actions, Friends are called to many different kinds of
9 service in the criminal justice system. Friends are active in prison visitation, in the campaign to
10 abolish capital punishment, and in programs that work with victims, offenders, and law
11 enforcement officers in order to restore the victim, the offender, and the community. The healing
12 love and trust in divine leading that such disciplined service requires can greatly assist the
13 rebuilding of broken lives and communities.

14 B. Personal Life

15 Friends recognize that each person is engaged in a personal and spiritual journey that is unique.
16 Through active involvement in a meeting, individuals can be supported and enriched as they live
17 and grow in a worshipping community. Openness to sharing experiences, willingness to ask for
18 assistance, and trust in the integrity of the community together create a mutually supportive and
19 accountable meeting.

20 1. Life Passages

21 a. Marriage

22 From the beginning, Friends have emphasized the equality of marriage partners. George Fox
23 admonished that Friends should be married “as though they were not, both husband and wife free
24 to do God’s work and not possessive of one another.” Later, Lucretia Mott wrote that “in the
25 marriage union, the independence of the husband and wife will be equal, their dependence
26 mutual, and their obligations reciprocal.” Friends today continue to share these commitments to
27 marriage equality, but extend this to include marriage partners without delineating the
28 individuals by gender.

29 Formal declaration of commitment in the presence of God and Friends under the care of the
30 meeting establishes a foundation for a shared life of spiritual wholeness. Such a religious
31 commitment liberates rather than constricts the couple’s natural impulses toward passion and
32 spontaneity and becomes a source of joy, not only for the couple but also for the meeting and all
33 others in the couple’s life. A meeting has a responsibility to nurture a marriage of members
34 whether or not that marriage began under its care. (See Section VII for Quaker Marriage
35 Procedure.)

36 Relationships which were formally entered into under the covering of the Spirit may nevertheless
37 experience severe challenges. The meeting needs to recognize such situations early and be
38 prepared to help with tender understanding and sensitivity. Offering the support of a clearness
39 committee may be helpful. The meeting may also help the couple secure professional counseling,
40 such as that provided by the Friends Counseling Service, which is associated with the yearly
41 meeting. The couple and those counseling with them may wish to consider together such
42 questions as:

- 1 • Have you sought divine guidance for the situation in which you now find yourselves?
- 2 • Have you been able to acknowledge that of God in each other as you work through this
- 3 difficulty?
- 4 • Do commitments to such testimonies as equality, peace and integrity consistently guide
- 5 your relationship?

6 However, the meeting community may not be able to help a couple deal with their situation. The
7 relationship may have deteriorated beyond the point of reconciliation. Children may need
8 substantial help to recognize that the separation of their parents will significantly change the
9 family situation, but not the love and commitment that each parent has for them.

10 In the event of separation, the meeting could again offer a clearness committee to help the couple
11 consider the questions just noted as well as the following:

- 12 • Have you been able to make careful, loving, and appropriate efforts to help your children
- 13 understand what brought about this situation?
- 14 • How will you continue to relate to your children to show them that you love them?
- 15 • Have you carefully considered equitable ways of handling property and financial matters?

16 Divorce or the dissolution of any committed relationship is an intimate matter accompanied by
17 strong feelings. The meeting's role is difficult. Without becoming intrusive, it seeks to be caring
18 and even-handed, keeping in contact with family member and other parties. The meeting
19 encourages all concerned to continue their lives as Friends even as the relationship dissolves.
20 (See Section VII for Guidelines for Care Committees.)

21 b. Family Formation

22 The decision to create a family either by birth or adoption is momentous. As with a marriage
23 commitment made in the presence of God, the families and the worshipping community, so it
24 can be with the decision to have children. The meeting can support the couple or single parent by
25 offering the services of a clearness committee. It can also provide support through pregnancy or
26 adoption proceedings, and as the family adjusts to the demands and joys of caring for a child.

27 Some Friends meetings have embraced the practice of inviting new parents to introduce their
28 children to the meeting to be formally welcomed into the community. In this way, parents are
29 supported as they involve their children in the life of the meeting, and develop practices to
30 support and nurture each child's life of spiritual faithfulness, joy and service.

31 c. End of Life, Death and Bereavement

32 Friends are advised to prepare for death as well as for the possibility of incompetence in their last
33 days so as to simplify the tasks others will need to undertake and to spare others unnecessary
34 pain and confusion.

35 Regardless of age, there are decisions for all Friends to consider in preparation for the end of life,
36 including when:

- 37 • Physical and mental capacities diminish but do not preclude active engagement in the
- 38 community around them;
- 39 • Activities and decisions become dependent to a significant degree on others;
- 40 • Others must act responsibly to manage what Friends leave behind.
- 41 • Friends are advised to consider their plans to:

- 1 • Provide care for dependents;
- 2 • Dispose of real property, financial assets, and personal and household goods;
- 3 • Prepare advance medical directives, or their equivalents, and durable powers of attorney;
- 4 • Record wishes relating to the body after death, whether for burial or cremation or
- 5 donation for medical or scientific purposes; and
- 6 • Identify the locations of any pertinent documents for the benefit of those persons who
- 7 will be expected to act on the information in those documents after the death (for
- 8 instance, an attorney and children or other members of the family).

9 (See Section VII for Queries and Checklist on End-of-Life Matters)

10 1) Responsibilities of the Meeting

11 The Friends meeting will regularly remind its members of their responsibilities to make suitable
12 preparations for death and for the possibility of incompetence as noted above, and will provide
13 members with helpful sources of information and assistance that can guide them in fulfilling
14 their responsibilities. It will also ask members to share their wishes relating to the body after
15 death, their instructions for a memorial meeting for worship, and anything else that could help
16 the meeting fulfill these responsibilities when they die. Where possible, the meeting may help the
17 person heal breaches with others, tend to unfinished business, and forgive oneself for failings
18 during life.

19 Upon the death of a member, of a person in a member's family, or of a person with close ties to
20 the meeting, either the meeting's pastoral care committee or another designated committee will
21 arrange for someone to visit the family to extend the meeting's sympathy, and gently to assist the
22 family as it adjusts to its loss. The visitor may also discuss plans for a memorial meeting.

23 It is expected that the meeting will be especially attentive to the needs of family members during
24 what may be an extended period of mourning. The death of a loved one may leave a survivor
25 alone and unable to cope with unfamiliar financial obligations and difficult decisions about
26 property and arrangements for the future. Emotions surrounding the loss are likely to run very
27 deep for a long time, even when death has come as release from suffering. When sudden death
28 by illness, accident or suicide strikes younger people, the emotional and financial strain upon the
29 survivors can be very heavy. In all these cases, not only the pastoral care committee but all
30 members of a meeting are expected to provide active, sensitive support that extends well beyond
31 the memorial meeting.

32 The meeting may be able to help in many practical ways including hospitality for those family
33 and friends who come from a distance to attend the memorial meeting, child care, meals and
34 housework. The meeting will need to respond with sensitivity to the family's wishes. If asked, it
35 may assist in notifying relatives, friends and the public press of the death and of plans for a
36 memorial meeting.

37 The meeting can help plan a memorial meeting under the care of the meeting so that it will be in
38 accord with the simplicity appropriate to a meeting for worship, or assist the family in arranging
39 for a private memorial gathering. Members of the meeting are encouraged to support the family
40 by attending the memorial meeting. Even if the family's plans do not include a memorial
41 meeting, the meeting may decide, with the family's concurrence, to hold one. In addition, the
42 meeting may wish to prepare a memorial minute as an expression of its appreciation of the life
43 and service of the deceased member.

1 2) Memorial Meetings for Worship

2 When Friends experience the death of a member, they gather for a memorial meeting for
3 worship. As the meeting begins, a designated person may describe the nature of the occasion and
4 invite those present to speak if led to do so. While the worshippers remember the life and service
5 of the deceased and mourn the passing, they also celebrate God's gift of life and the beauty of
6 human character. Members of the family may request that passages of Scripture, poetry, prayer
7 or music be shared during the meeting. Those present may be drawn to speak of their memories
8 of the deceased, whether poignant, loving, grateful, instructive or even humorous. A memorial
9 meeting is a time when the mystery of death is deeply felt, and when the presence of God and
10 those gathered in worship can bring comfort, hope and consolation.

11 Meetings may find it helpful to the bereaved family to hold a simple reception following the
12 memorial meeting. Such an occasion gives an opportunity for those present to express more
13 personally their grief, love and thanksgiving. It can also serve as a helpful transition to everyday
14 life.

15 If ashes are to be deposited or scattered in some cherished spot or if there is to be an interment,
16 whether done privately or at the time of the memorial meeting, the family may ask that someone
17 prepare a brief message of farewell. This can be a particularly poignant moment, and the meeting
18 needs to be sensitive to these emotions.

19 2. Personal Relationships

20 a. Family Life and the Home

21 Home and family can be both a refuge from the pressures and demands of the existing world and
22 a path to a better world. In a Quaker family, a child may first become aware of the presence of
23 God in our lives when the family incorporates spiritual practices as a regular and essential part of
24 its daily routine. Such practices can include shared worship and prayer, reading from the Bible
25 and other sacred writings, and silent or spoken grace at meals.

26 As with the Friends meeting itself, a Quaker home seeks to bring all its members into unity of
27 spirit and practice. Not least, this entails cultivating an appropriate balance between the exercise
28 of authority and the development of individual autonomy. Parents have an obligation to be
29 guided by the Inward Teacher in the exercise of their authority, though there is value in the
30 whole family seeking such guidance. Fair, loving and just expectations and behaviors practiced
31 among all family members bring a sense of security to the children and a sense of order to the
32 adults. The best gift parents can offer their children is to exemplify conscientious, consistent,
33 loving conduct day in and day out.

34 Open discussion contributes to a loving, patient atmosphere in the home, developing
35 interpersonal relationship based on mutual respect and care. It is helpful for parents to establish
36 expectations of behavior for the child, and for both parent and child to continually review and
37 adjust these expectations. Guidelines are not for children alone; parents too must be committed
38 to a disciplined, Spirit-led life. If a family has continual problems with rules, a family meeting
39 for clearness may help resolve difficulties. The meeting community can also help by offering
40 such things as Friendly parenting discussion and support groups.

41 Conflict in a family is natural; when lovingly and constructively dealt with, it is an opportunity
42 for growth and sometimes for an affirmation of individual leadings. Learning to handle
43 disagreements in a calm and fair manner prepares the way for solving differences in school, the

1 neighborhood and the larger society. Anger between family members can signal a problem that
2 requires attention if it persists. Friends families are not immune to abuse and domestic violence.
3 The meeting has a responsibility to become aware of such situations and to intervene with loving
4 support.

5 Family recreation promotes restoration, solidarity and spiritual well-being. The possibilities
6 include reading aloud, singing or playing music, gardening, taking a walk, engaging in arts and
7 crafts as well as games and sports. Both competitive and non-competitive games can teach
8 lessons of fairness, sportsmanship and self-esteem and develop fellowship within the family.

9 In the loving home and family, everyone learns about equality and its limitations, simple forms
10 of stewardship, integrity in its many forms, simplicity in all its complexities, and how difficult
11 and satisfying it is to be peaceable. Indeed, the family can be the most immediate and basic
12 context in which individuals learn to live Friends testimonies.

13 Two of our testimonies, simplicity and stewardship, may be especially important for family life.
14 A family that strives to practice simplicity is more likely to exercise stewardship in the use of its
15 social and material resources. This will include decisions about the family's financial
16 commitments to its monthly, quarterly and yearly meetings, as well as opportunities for family
17 witness and service to others. The participation of all family members in discussions and
18 decisions about possessions and activities helps children develop their capacity to make sound
19 judgments about the value of time and worth of different activities, as well as their understanding
20 of Spirit-led decision-making in which ego and personal preferences are less significant than
21 what is in the best interest of the family as a whole. Parents have an opportunity in such
22 discussions and decisions to model a process that gives priority to listening, faithfulness and
23 service.

24 "Traditional" families characterized by a husband, wife, and children once constituted the great
25 majority of the Friends meeting community. Today's membership reflects many varied forms of
26 families including single parent households, same gender spouses, blended families, and multi-
27 generational households. Whatever their composition, families remain a vital ingredient of our
28 meeting communities.

29 b. Sexuality

30 Friends seek to acknowledge and nurture sexuality as a divine gift that celebrates human love
31 with joy and intimacy. In defining healthy sexuality, Friends are guided by our testimonies: that
32 sexual relationships are equal, not exploitative; that sexual behavior be marked by integrity; and
33 that sex is an act of love, not aggression. Sexuality is at once an integral and an intricate part of
34 personality. Understanding our own sexuality is an essential aspect of our journey toward
35 wholeness. Learning to incorporate sexuality into our lives responsibly, joyfully and with
36 integrity is a lifelong process beginning in childhood.

37 Friends are wary of a fixed moral code to govern sexual activity. The sacramental quality of the
38 sexual relationship depends upon Spirit as well as on the motives of the persons concerned. With
39 guidance from the Inward Teacher, we can examine relationships honestly, with the strength to
40 reconcile often conflicting demands of body, heart and mind. Precisely because our sexuality is
41 so powerful, seeking the Divine becomes essential. The self-discipline and obedience to Spirit
42 thus called for is more personal, and perhaps more difficult, than adherence to an external code.

43 Friends approve the concept of family planning, including adoption. We are in unity about the

1 value of human life, but not about abortion. We are urged to seek the guidance of the Spirit when
2 dealing with an unintended pregnancy and to support one another in avoiding situations that
3 contribute to the need for abortion.

4 A Quaker home establishes an atmosphere where openness and honesty prevail. It is within the
5 intimate family circle that children establish their identities as persons; an atmosphere which
6 supports their feelings of confidence encourages this development. Children at a very early age
7 develop a sense of their own gender identity and are curious about gender and sexual differences.
8 Within a loving and secure family, even young children are encouraged to ask questions about
9 gender and sex, as parents acquire the confidence to respond to those questions.

10 Sex education can begin as early as seems appropriate with the use of terms that children
11 understand. The level of understanding is not uniform, and wise parents will judge each child's
12 capacity to absorb answers to their questions. Simple, direct answers need be no threat to a
13 child's innocence, and parents do the child no favors by surrounding the subject with fables and
14 mystery. Undramatic introduction of the basic physiological facts of human sexuality is the best
15 preparation for the more sophisticated education needed during the years of puberty and
16 adolescence. As children mature and come of age sexually, parents can continue to provide sex
17 education with sympathy and patience, including clear, explicit information regarding sexually
18 transmitted diseases. They may decide that the assistance of a doctor or educator in this task will
19 be helpful. Whatever the sexual mores of the time may be, and whatever adolescent peers may
20 do or say, it is important for parents to help their children look past peer pressure toward what
21 contributes to loving, responsible relationships and to a secure sense of self-worth.

22 Sex education is not necessarily a one-way street. Parents may learn from their children about
23 societal problems of which they have been unaware. Sensitive listening between parents and
24 children will go a long way in establishing mutual understanding.

25 c. Addictive Behaviors

26 Early Friends tried to avoid behaviors that were unproductive or took time away from life in the
27 Spirit. Friends today know that any addictive behavior separates the person from God and can
28 harm personal relationships. Addictive behaviors and compulsive attachments, whether
29 manifested in gambling, in the use of drugs, tobacco, or alcohol, or in the over-consumption of
30 food, are symptoms of conditions that frequently cannot be controlled by reason or an act of will.
31 These behaviors are a continuing distraction from a meaningful life and can adversely affect the
32 person and the whole family. The meeting has a responsibility to be aware of these conditions
33 among members and attenders. The meeting can provide support in the struggle and encourage
34 the persons involved to seek professional assistance.

35 The entire meeting community can learn about the relationship of addictive behavior to larger
36 issues of social justice. Marketing of addictive substances, violence associated with drugs and
37 alcohol, and bias in sentencing for illegal possession are worthy of efforts to make
38 improvements.

39