

**A Study Guide  
for  
Faith and Practice  
of  
Western Yearly Meeting  
of Friends Church  
(2005 edition)**

Board of Christian Ministry and Evangelism

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Plainfield, Indiana

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## Introduction

*Faith and Practice* holds an important position in Quakerism. Since its beginning as *Christian Brotherly Advices* in 1738, *Faith and Practice* has not been something decided easily or arbitrarily. Each volume comes about only after much work and preparation—both by the committee appointed to work on it and members of local meetings who discuss and approve its final version.

What goes into *Faith and Practice* is central to a yearly meeting because it covers two areas important to all Friends—faith and practice. The faith part presents our Quaker beliefs about Christian faith. The practice part deals with how the things we believe are acted out in the world. One section of London Yearly Meeting's *Faith and Practice* calls this “Friends and the Art of Living.” This is appropriate because living the Christian life is an art, not a science with all the rules set once and forever. Just as faith without works is dead, so too works without faith are dead. *Faith and Practice* shows that what we believe should influence and inform how we behave.

This study guide for the 2005 edition of Western Yearly Meeting's *Faith and Practice* has been based largely on the study guide for the 1986 edition. *Faith and Practice* should be a part in the life of every Western Friend. It our hope that this study guide will open *Faith and Practice* to you. It is not intended to answer all questions raised by *Faith and Practice*. This guide is designed to be used by groups or individuals as a resource for deepening spiritual understanding and experience through examining, reflecting upon and discussing those things that are important to our lives as Quakers and Christians.

Board of Christian Ministry and Evangelism, Western Yearly Meeting

## Initial Reflections

1. What role or function do you see *Faith and Practice* playing in your own personal spiritual development and life? And in the spiritual life and development of your monthly meeting? And yearly meeting?
  
2. Look through the table of contents (pp. iii-ix) and take note of the major divisions. Why do you think *Faith and Practice* has been divided up this way? What parts do you think are most important? And why? Why do you think parts that you view as not as important are included?
  
3. Read the “Western Yearly Meeting Purpose Statement” (p. 1).
  - a. What does it mean to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit? How do you do it?
  
  - b. How does the gospel of Jesus Christ relate to exercising mutual care and extending cooperative ministries?
  
  - c. What are the various expressions of Christian faith through which ministry and leadership are encouraged?

## **Background (Part I)**

### **Origin and Development of the Discipline (*Faith and Practice*), p. 2**

1. From your own understanding, what do you see as the purpose or function of a *Faith and Practice*? And how does your own understanding relate to what is written in this section?
2. Read the Balby quote. Which words or phrases stand out for you? In what ways do you agree or disagree with how this quote characterizes *Faith and Practice*?

### **Brief History**

3. Read “George Fox and the Rise of Quakerism in England” and “American Beginnings and Growth” (pp. 2-5).
  - a. What was the religious context and life in which Quakerism began and George Fox lived his early life?
  - b. Where did the name Friends come from? And the name Quakers?
  - c. How would you characterize the early years and development of Quakerism?
6. Read “Branches of Friends” and “Evangelical Movements of the Nineteenth Century” (pp. 5-6). What were issues of concern and people who played a role in the development of Quakerism in the Nineteenth Century?

7. Read “Development of Pastoral Ministry” (pp 6-7). When did Friends first begin having pastors? What was the reason for this break from 200 years of Friendly tradition?

8. What period of Quakerism is most exciting to you? Why? What do you hope historians could write about the next 50 years of Quakerism?

9. “Essential Truths” was written in 1900, after the Richmond Declaration of 1887. Read through “Essential Truths,” “Expanding Appreciation of Truth,” and “Value of Historical Approach” (pp. 7-9).

a. Which parts of the “Essential Truths” speak to you the most? Which parts raise issues of concern?

b. To you, what does it mean to “strive constantly for a clear comprehension of divine truth?” How might this process relate to the parts of the “Essential Truths” that speak most to you and the ones that raise issues of concern?

c. What value might you find in studying the writings of early Quakers (before the Orthodox-Hicksite separation)? How do you relate their presentation of Quaker faith and practice to your Quaker faith and practice (including such issues as programmed worship, marrying out of meeting, separate meetings for men and women, and sacraments)?

## Faith and Thought (Part II)

1. Read through "Basic Principles," "Worship," "Testimony on Outward Rites and Ceremonies," "The Scriptures," and "Spiritual Gifts" (pp. 12-14). Write your own paragraph paraphrase on each of the following:

a. Salvation

b. The Light of Christ

c. Meaning of Worship

d. The Quaker Testimony on Baptism and Communion

e. Scripture

f. If you are studying in a group, share and discuss the similarities and differences in your paraphrases.

2. The remainder of the "Faith and Thought" section covers a wide range of subjects (evangelism, education, social concerns, government, equality and justice). Friends have long held "testimonies" or beliefs on how members should deal with what goes on in the world around us. We have based that largely on Jesus' admonition to be "in the world but not of the world." This portion of *Faith and Practice* covers the "being in" without "being of" modern life.

a. Read through sections from "Life and Action" to "Justice in International Relations" (pp. 14-25). What do you think about the sections on evangelism, missionary work, education, social concerns, government, equality and international relations? How do the written statements correspond to your understanding of how to live out your faith?

b. Read through “Living Out the Testimonies” (25-28). Write a short summary of each of these issues. Compare your summaries with each other. What are the similarities? The differences?

3. Queries are something unique in their development among Friends. Since early in Friends history, Quakers have been asking and answering Queries. Queries were originally answered by the monthly meeting as a sort of "State of the Society" report to be sent on to Quarterly Meeting, and then to the Yearly Meeting. They were not taken lightly, but were occasion for much thought and reflection. At times, agreement could not be reached and the Queries went unanswered for that month. This was considered indicative of potential problems in the monthly meeting. Today, queries are mostly used for individual reflection and annual reports for monthly meetings are developed in relation to another set of questions.

a. Use the Queries (p. 28-29) as a part of your daily private devotions over the next few weeks, focusing on one a day. Answer them yourself after much prayerful meditation. In what ways did or did not the use of Queries aid or enrich your spiritual life?

b. How do Queries function in the life of your monthly meeting? If they are not used as part of your business meetings, try incorporating time for a query in the agenda. Did attenders find this process helpful and productive in assessing the spiritual life of the meeting?

## **Organization (Part III)**

Part III of *Faith and Practice* concerns itself with Friends business procedure, organizational structure, and how monthly, area and yearly meetings conduct business and relate to each other. It also covers such operations of the monthly meeting as recognizing ministry, marriage and membership. This part also includes information on Affiliated Bodies.

1. Read “The Church as a Society” (p. 31). How would you describe the relationship between God, the individual member and the local congregation? What challenges do you see in how the relationship is described in this section?
  
2. Read sections “Waiting for Guidance” through “Clearness Committees” (pp. 31-32).
  - a. Why are all these components necessary for the life of the local meeting?
  
  - b. Which of these does your monthly meeting do well? How might your monthly meeting improve each of these?

## **Monthly Meeting**

1. Read through “Monthly Meeting Organization and Function” to the section on marriage (pp. 32-38).
  - a. What are the responsibilities of the monthly meeting? How do the responsibilities of the monthly meeting as described in this section relate to how your monthly meeting carries out its operations?
  
  - b. What roles do officers, committees, boards and pastors play in helping to carry out the responsibilities of the monthly meeting?
  
  - c. What are the committees in your monthly meeting? How do these committees help develop and carry out the spiritual life of the monthly meeting?

**Marriage**, pp. 38-40

1. What are the steps in arranging for a traditional Friends wedding?
2. What responsibilities does a monthly meeting take on in the oversight of a wedding/marriage?
3. What are the differences between a wedding with a minister officiating and the traditional form?

**Membership**, pp. 40-44

1. What are the ways in which a person can become a member of a local meeting?
2. What types of members are there?

**Area Meetings**, pp. 44-46.

1. What are the stated purposes of area meetings? In what ways does your area meeting fulfill these purposes?
2. What types of all-area gatherings would you find beneficial to the spiritual life and development of the monthly meetings in your area?

## Yearly Meeting, pp. 46-55, 59

A yearly meeting is comprised of affiliated monthly meetings within its confines. There are a number of yearly meetings around the world. The oldest is London Yearly Meeting in England (now called Britain Yearly Meeting). The oldest in North America is New England, set off in 1661. Western Yearly Meeting was set off by Indiana Yearly Meeting in 1858 and has operated under its own *Faith and Practice* since that time.

1. What are the major functions of the yearly meeting? What officers does it have? What types of trustees? Treasurers?

2. What is Administrative Council? What are its main duties?

3. What is the Executive Committee? What is its purpose?

4. List the responsibilities of the following yearly meeting boards:

Finance

Christian Ministries and Evangelism

Christian Education

Christian Outreach

Peace and Christian Social Concerns

Meeting Development and Nurture

How are they similar to the monthly meeting boards of the same name?

5. What is the procedure for establishing new monthly meetings?

6. What is the procedure for amending *Faith and Practice*?

### **Ministries, pp. 55-59**

Since our early days, even though being against a paid ministry in the beginning, Friends have recognized that there are those among us who have gifts of ministry. These gifts can take any number of forms, from preaching and teaching to calling on the sick. This section of *Faith and Practice* takes a look at the procedure for formally recognizing such Friends as ministers.

1. How is ministry defined?
2. What does “recording” mean? How does it related to “ordination”?
3. What qualities should a person who is to be recorded exhibit?
4. What are the steps of the recording process? Why do you think these are necessary?

### **Affiliated Bodies, pp. 59-63**

1. Identify the following acronyms and the major purpose of each body:

ACFIA

AFSC

FCNL

FDS

FWCC

IFCL

IPCUM

QM

RSWR

USFW

## **Friends United Meeting (Part IV), p. 64-66**

1. How would you describe the function and purpose of FUM?
2. What are the program emphases of FUM? How do your monthly meeting and yearly meeting participate in these programs?

## **Historical Documents (Part VI)**

### **Letter to the Governor of Barbados, pp. 73-76**

The “Letter to the Governor of Barbados” has been attributed to George Fox and other Quakers. The letter refutes charges that Quakers denied God, Jesus Christ and Scriptures and that they were stirring up the slaves to revolt.

1. Summarize the contents of the letter in a short paragraph.
2. What are the similarities and differences between the statements made in this letter and “The Essential Truths” (pp. 7-8)?
3. Why do you think both the “Letter to the Governor of Barbados” and “The Essential Truths” have been incorporated into Orthodox Quaker books of *Faith and Practice* and not just one or the other?
4. The “Letter to the Governor of Barbados” was written to non-Quakers to explain Quaker faith to them. “The Essential Truths” was written as a statement that reflected Quaker faith for Quakers. If you were to write an explanation of Orthodox Quaker faith for non-Quakers and a statement that reflected Orthodox Quaker faith for Quakers, how would these two writings be the same? How would they be different?

**A Declaration of Some of the Fundamental Principles of Christian Truth  
as Held by the Religious Society of Friends, pp. 76-90**

This declaration is also known as “The Richmond Declaration” and was composed at the first conference of Orthodox Yearly Meetings in 1887 at Richmond, Indiana. This conference began with the question: "Is it desirable that all the Yearly Meetings of Friends in the world should adopt one declaration of Christian doctrine?" While other issues were discussed during the conference, this declaration was a step toward answering that initial question. The declaration was composed between the end of one day's business session and the beginning of the next day's business session by compiling parts of the *Disciplines (Faith and Practice)* and approved minutes that contained faith statements of attending yearly meetings. Joseph Bevan Braithwaite from London Yearly Meeting served as the primary compiler. An early Western Yearly Meeting Friend, Allen Jay, also helped with the Richmond Declaration. At the business session where the Declaration was presented, the conference accepted a revised version for being submitted to yearly meetings for their adoption.

1. Read though the Declaration in one sitting.

a. Do you think the Declaration covers its subjects adequately? Are its concerns up to date enough to speak to people today?

b. Do you think it would be desirable for all Orthodox yearly meetings of Friends in the world to adopt one declaration of Christian doctrine? If yes, how would you go about compiling such a declaration and then bring about its adoption by all Orthodox yearly meetings in a spirit of unity and fellowship? If no, how would you go about bringing together a spirit of unity and fellowship between Orthodox yearly meetings?

2. Which sections of the Declaration speak most to your current spiritual life? Have there been times in your life that other sections spoke to you more?

3. The Declaration begins with the statement:

"It is under a deep sense of what we owe to Him who has loved us that we feel called upon to offer a declaration of those fundamental doctrines of Christian truth that have always been professed by our branch of the Church of Christ."

If the Declaration is considered an offering in response to the love of Christ we have experienced, how may we make use of the Declaration to spread the love of Christ?

4. The Declaration ends with the statement:

"In presenting this declaration of our Christian faith, we desire that all our members may be afresh encouraged, in humility and devotedness, to renewed faithfulness in fulfilling their part in the great mission of the Church, and through the Church to the world around us, in the name of our Crucified Redeemer. Life *from* Christ, life *in* Christ, must ever be the basis of life *for* Christ. For this we have been created and redeemed, and, by this alone, can the longings of our immortal souls be satisfied."

- a. How would you define/describe a "life *from* Christ" and/or "life *in* Christ"?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. How do these relate to or form a basis of a "life *for* Christ"?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c. What are the longings of your immortal soul? How does Orthodox Quaker faith and practice respond to and satisfy those longings? How do those longings relate to the mission of the Church?

## Resources for Further Study

- Daniels, Brian, ed. *Declaring Our Faith: A Study of Friends' Beliefs and Doctrine as Affirmed by the Richmond Declaration of Faith*. Friends United Press, Richmond, Ind., 1992.
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- Mekeel, Arthur J. *Quakerism and a Creed*. Friends Bookstore: Philadelphia, 1936.
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