

Concerns, Leadings, & Testimonies

Friends are sometimes called “practical mystics” because Quaker worship has been the wellspring for service in the community and world. An old story relates the whispered question asked by someone attending meeting for worship for the first time and puzzled by the absence of overt activity: “When does the service begin?” The response: “When the meeting for worship ends.”

CONCERNS AND LEADINGS

The impetus for service is often a concern, which, as Friends use the word, is a quickening sense of the need to do something or to demonstrate sympathetic interest in an individual or group, as a result of what is felt to be a direct intimation of God's will. A concern as an impetus to action arises out of Friends' belief that the realm of God can be realized here and now, not just in another place or time. A concern may emerge as an unexpected insight from prayerful study of a problem or situation, such as a concern to support national policies which promote international peace. It may also grow from an anxious interest in the welfare of a person or group that may result in inquiries or practical support.

When it initially arises, a concern may not yet be linked to a proposed course of action, but may simply be a troubled sense that something is awry. Action, when it follows, is often the result of a leading, a sense of being drawn or called by God in a particular direction or toward a particular course of action. Friends speak of “feeling led” or “being called.” The leading may be short-term and specific in its fulfillment, or it may involve transformation of one's life and the life of the Meeting.

Friends have long believed it important that leadings be tested before action is taken. The process of testing is a form of spiritual discipline for Friends. A Friend's concern and consequent leading may be an individual matter—something which one person is called to attend to without requiring assistance. In many cases, however, a Friend may receive guidance, aid, and encouragement from other members of the Meeting. Therefore it has long been the practice of Friends to inform their Meeting when they feel major concerns laid upon them.

Meeting Response

The Meeting should give serious consideration to requests from those seeking unity for a proposed course of action—and may not always approve. It may appoint a clearness committee (see p. 29) to help such persons gain clarity on seeking release to act upon a concern. Such a committee may also provide longer-term support, including ongoing testing and re-evaluation. In cases where Meeting approval is given to a proposed course of action, which may result in allowing Friends to be released to follow such leadings, the Meeting often takes responsibility for providing financial assistance and family support, and continues to give oversight until the leading is fulfilled or laid down.

When a Meeting fails to unite with a member's concern, the member generally reconsiders it very carefully. Sometimes the individual and Meeting agree that the concern should be dropped, and the member feels released from responsibility for action since the concern has been laid on the Meeting. At other times a person may continue to feel led to pursue the matter. Where action by the Meeting is not required, the Meeting may be able to encourage the member to go forward even when the Meeting is unable to reach unity.

Where the concern cannot be furthered without Meeting unity, and a member does not feel right about dropping it, the process of discernment continues. Often this process involves the formation of a small group, which includes Friends who have expressed a diversity of perspectives. The concern, generally with a modified proposal for action, may be brought to the Meeting many times before either unity is reached in support of the concern or a decision is made to lay it down.

Submitting the concern to the judgment of the Meeting is of value. The Meeting may be enlightened by the insights of those who bring concerns, and these Friends may be helped, through the sympathetic consideration of the Meeting, to clarify their leadings. The Meeting's care for its members should cause it to take interest in all concerns felt by its members, even when it cannot unite with them or may feel obliged to admonish members against "running ahead of their Guide."

Depending on the nature and scope of the concern, the monthly meeting may wish to lay it before the regional gathering or quarterly meeting by minute accompanied by personal presentation where possible. In like manner, the regional gathering may lay the concern before Interim Meeting or the yearly meeting. A Meeting may also request that a concern,

brought by a member and judged significant by the Meeting, be considered at a threshing session during annual sessions of the yearly meeting.

Individuals also frequently bring concerns to yearly meeting committees. After testing such a concern, a committee may or may not include such concerns in its reports to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, either through Interim Meeting or at yearly meeting sessions.

When a concern is thus presented, the yearly meeting may reach a decision or may provide for further consideration of the matter. Deep sensitivity to divine leading and to the insights of others is required on the part of both individuals and Meetings when controversial concerns are considered. Concerns involving intensely personal witness or public policy demand a special degree of forbearance, and unity may not always be reached.

TESTIMONIES

For more than three hundred years, Friends have acted upon shared concerns through practices which historically have been distinctive and definitive. While the specifics of Friends' practice have varied as times have changed, Friends today continue to have concerns and underlying beliefs similar to those of past generations. The word testimonies is used to refer to this common set of deeply held, historically rooted attitudes and modes of living in the world.

Testimonies bear witness to the truth as Friends in community perceive it—truth known through relationship with God. The testimonies are expressions of lives turned toward the Light, outward expressions reflective of the inward experience of divine leading, differently described by various Friends and in changing eras. Often in the past they were defined specifically, such as the testimony against taking oaths; recently it has become customary to speak of them more generally, as in the testimony of simplicity. Through the testimonies, with that measure of the Light that is granted, Friends strive for unity and integrity of inner and outer life, both in living with ourselves and others and in living in the world.

The advices that follow concerning how we live our lives seek to avoid rigid definitions of these evolving testimonies. Rather, these testimonies are presented within the areas of our lives where they are likely to emerge, as a reference to actions Friends may be called to take. It is just as likely, however, that we will be challenged in different ways to live out such key Quaker testimonies as equality, peace, simplicity, stewardship, and integrity.

Living with Ourselves and Others:

Personal Relationships

OUR MEETING COMMUNITY

Meeting communities are enhanced and enlivened by sharing with those closest to us our relationships and spiritual journeys. Here we have the opportunity to demonstrate our personal commitment to our testimonies. Our private lives and personal relationships can be nurtured and enriched by a shared experience of reliance upon God. Such relationships, both positive and negative, are often intense, and we may have difficulty in finding the way forward as individuals and as a community.

Personal relationships are nurtured through our involvement in meetings for worship and business, worship sharing, retreats, workshops, study groups, reading groups, and social and recreational gatherings. Within most Meetings there are gifted individuals and established procedures that can offer discreet, confidential, loving support to those who may need it. When difficulties arise, shared, prayerful, and determined efforts to seek God's will can help us to gain better understanding. It is important for the Meeting to recognize its limitations and to decide when it is appropriate to seek help and support elsewhere.

It is not easy to live as Friends in today's world—to remain true to our heritage and still be sensitive to new situations. It has never been so. Each generation of Friends has been faced with challenges to our ideas about marriage, family life, the education and discipline of children, and social practices. Living our testimonies helps us confront these challenges.

MARRIAGE

From the beginning, Friends have emphasized the equality of marriage partners. George Fox admonished that Friends should be married “as though they were not, both husband and wife free to do God's work and not possessive of one another.” Later, Lucretia Mott wrote that “in the marriage union, the independence of the husband and wife will be equal, their dependence mutual, and their obligations reciprocal.” Many modern Friends would add, “and some of their roles interchangeable.”

Formal declaration of commitment in the presence of God and Friends under the care of the Meeting sets a foundation for a shared life of spiritual wholeness. Such a religious commitment liberates rather than constricts the couple's natural impulses toward passion and spontaneity

and becomes a source of joy, not only for the couple but also for the Meeting and all others in the couple's life. A Meeting's commitment to nurture a marriage continues whether or not that marriage began under its care.

Relationships which were clearly entered into under the covering of the Spirit may nevertheless experience severe strains and difficulties. The Meeting needs to recognize such situations early and be prepared to help with tender understanding and sensitivity. The offering of the services of a clearness committee (see p. 29), which may include members of the couple's own choosing, may be helpful. The Meeting may also help by assisting the couple in finding and paying for professional counseling services such as those associated with the yearly meeting. The couple and those counseling with them may wish to consider together such questions as:

- Have you sought divine guidance for the situation in which you now find yourselves?
- Do commitments to equality, peace, and integrity continue to guide your relationship?
- Have you found it possible to acknowledge that of God in each other as you work through this difficulty?

The Meeting community may not be able to help a couple ameliorate their difficulties. The relationship may have deteriorated beyond the point of reconciliation. Strong feelings may challenge the Meeting community, but should not prevent it from continuing to offer prayerful, sensitive support to all concerned, especially the children, helping them to feel not so much failure as a change in their situation. Among other responses, the Meeting could again offer the services of a clearness committee, to help the couple consider the questions just noted and also such additional ones as:

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

Divorce or the dissolution of any committed relationship is an intimate matter accompanied by strong feelings. The Meeting role is difficult; it should not become intrusive. The need is to be careful and even-handed, keeping in contact with all family members and all parties to the divorce. All concerned need to be encouraged to continue their lives as Friends.

FAMILY LIFE AND THE HOME

Home and family are both a refuge from the hazards of the world and a path to a better world. In the loving home and family, young and old learn about equality and its limitations, simple forms of stewardship, integrity in its many guises, simplicity in all its complexities, and how hard but how satisfying it is to be peaceable. Family members learn that an enduring spirit of equality underlies apparent differences.

Traditional families once constituted the great majority of a Meeting community. Today's membership reflects societal changes resulting in nontraditional families: single parent households, same gender commitments, blended families. Not all Meetings have accepted new family forms, yet they continue to seek understanding of these situations, extending welcome and loving care to all members. Families remain an inspiring and vital ingredient of our Meeting communities.

As a participant in a Quaker family, a child first becomes aware of the presence of God in our lives. Friends are encouraged to worship as a family. Silent grace at meals, and family and bedtime prayers help children develop a sense of God's presence.

A Quaker home seeks to bind its family members together. Such a home cultivates recognition of authority while at the same time allowing each member appropriate freedom to develop fully. Conflict in a family is natural; when lovingly and constructively dealt with, it is an opportunity for growth and sometimes also an affirmation of individual leadings. The natural give-and-take with one's peers begins at home. Learning to handle disagreements in a calm and fair manner prepares the way for solving differences in school, the neighborhood, and the larger society.

It is within the family that we initially seek to live our testimonies. Two of these, simplicity and stewardship, are especially important. A family that strives to practice simplicity will exercise stewardship in the use of its social and material resources. Considerations of stewardship should include decisions regarding the family's financial commitments to its monthly and quarterly or regional meetings and to the yearly meeting. The importance of other questions such as family witness, service to others, the many ramifications of the peace testimony and equality also need to be recognized. Participation of all family members in discussions and decisions regarding joint family possessions and activities helps children develop judgment not only in their personal decisions and the decision-making process, but also with respect to time values and the worth of the activities themselves. These decisions can be the beginning of

one's realization of just how, as a Quaker, one chooses to live out one's life.

Family recreation should promote restoration, solidarity, and spiritual well-being; it should bring balance into life and contribute to wholeness of personality. Such recreation includes reading aloud, gardening, music, and arts and crafts as well as games and sports. All such activities develop fellowship within the family. Both competitive and non-competitive games can teach lessons of fairness, sportsmanship, and self-esteem. Recreational activities should stress cooperation and inclusiveness, and should resist the materialism of our culture.

Fair, loving, and just discipline practiced among all family members brings a sense of security to the children and a sense of order to the adults. The best discipline parents can offer is their own example of conscientious, consistent, Spirit-led conduct day in and day out. Parents have an obligation to be guided by the Inward Teacher in the exercise of their authority. Ideally, the family will unite in seeking such guidance. Assistance in helping each child develop self-discipline is one of a parent's most valuable gifts to children.

The relationship between inward discipline and rules of behavior needs to be continually reviewed with children. Children need to understand that rules are not for them only but that parents too are committed to a disciplined life consistent with the life of the Spirit. Open discussion and the creation of a loving, patient atmosphere in developing rules of behavior is basic to building a Quaker family. If a family has continual problems with rules, a family meeting for clearness may help resolve difficulties. A family should never be embarrassed to seek help from outside the family unit.

SEX AND SEXUALITY

In our personal lives, Friends seek to acknowledge and nurture sexuality as a gift from God for celebrating human love with joy and intimacy. In defining healthy sexuality, Friends are led in part by our testimonies: that sexual relations be equal, not exploitative; that sexual behavior be marked by integrity; and that sex be an act of love, not of aggression. Sexuality is at once an integral and an intricate part of personality. Our understanding of our own sexuality is an essential aspect of our journey toward wholeness. Learning to incorporate sexuality in our lives responsibly, joyfully, and with integrity should be a lifelong process beginning in childhood.

Friends are wary of a preset moral code to govern sexual activity. The unity of the sacred and the secular implies that the sacramental quality of a sexual relationship depends upon the Spirit as well as the intentions of the persons concerned. Our faith can help us to examine relationships honestly, with the strength to reconcile the often conflicting demands of the body, heart, and spirit. Even with its respect for individual leadings, Quakerism does not sanction license in sexual behavior. Precisely because our sexuality is so powerful, seeking the divine will becomes all important. The obedience thus called for is more personal, perhaps more difficult than adherence to an external code. For many Friends, "celibate in singleness, faithful in marriage" has proven consonant with the divine will. Sexual activity, whether or not it includes intercourse, is never without consequence.

Current global population trends and concern for the equitable distribution of resources require us to ask what good stewardship of the earth entails for our decisions about sex and childbearing. Friends approve the concept of family planning and endorse efforts to make pertinent education and services widely available. We are in unity about the value of human life, but not about abortion. We are urged to seek the guidance of the Spirit, to support one another regarding how to end the situations contributing to abortion, and to discern how to act as individuals, family members, and Meetings.

SEX EDUCATION

A Quaker home demands an atmosphere where openness and honesty prevail. It is within the intimate family circle that children establish their identities as persons; an atmosphere which supports their feelings of confidence encourages this development. Children at a very early age develop a sense of their own gender identity and are curious about gender differences. Within a loving and secure family, young children are enabled to ask questions about gender and sex, and parents acquire the confidence to answer these questions.

Sex education needs to begin early with the use of appropriate terms that children understand. The level of understanding is not uniform, and wise parents will judge each child's capacity to absorb answers to questions. Simple, direct answers need be no threat to a child's innocence, and parents do the child no favors by surrounding the subject with fables and mystery. Undramatic introduction of the basic physiological facts of human sexuality is the best preparation for the more sophisticated

education needed during the years of puberty and adolescence.

Sex education for children who have come of age sexually should be provided with sympathy and patience. Such education should include clear, direct information regarding sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS. Parents need to remember their own reactions during this confusing and volatile age. Whatever the sexual mores of the time may be, and whatever adolescent peers may do or say, it is important for parents to help their children look past peer pressure toward what contributes to loving, responsible relationships.

In this, as in all facets of education, adults need to remain teachable. Sex education is not necessarily a one-way street. Parents may learn from their children about societal problems of which they have never been aware. Sensitive listening between parents and children will go a long way in establishing mutual understanding.

ADDICTIVE BEHAVIORS:

DRUGS, ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, AND GAMBLING

George Fox and other early Friends contended that drunkenness was incompatible with a life in the Spirit. William Penn wrote in 1678:

Drunkenness, or excess in drinking, is not only a violation of God's law, but of our own natures... it fits men for that which they would abhor, if sober.... It renders men unfit for trust or business, it tells secrets, betrays friendship, disposes men to be tricked and cheated; finally it spoils health, weakens the human race, and above all provokes the just God to anger.

William Penn, Address to Protestants

Many other mind-affecting drugs have come to be widely used. Like alcohol, they separate the user from God, family, and friends. Drugs and alcohol easily become the controlling factor of the user's life. Individuals and families are shattered. With the proliferation of some drugs, whole communities have broken down.

The use of tobacco can cause serious illness in both the user and those regularly exposed to second-hand smoke. Smoking deadens the senses; it can come between the user and the Spirit.

Gambling, even in the forms of sweepstakes and lotteries, poses dangers to the individual and the community. It often becomes addictive, bringing ruin to the gambler's family. Gambling harms the community by

fostering a get-rich-quick and something-for-nothing attitude that contributes to an unwholesome materialism. Habitual gambling makes undue demands on the gambler's time and attention, leading to a life inconsistent with our testimonies on simplicity and integrity.

Friends should be clear about the negative personal and social effects of gambling, alcohol, drugs, and tobacco. We should also seek to ensure that the children in our meetings and schools are taught about these effects and the relationship of addictive behavior to issues of social justice such as: the marketing of addictive substances; the violence associated with drugs and alcohol; the root causes of some homelessness; and the negative repercussions of gambling and state supported lotteries.

Addictive behavior, whether manifested in gambling or in the use of drugs, tobacco or alcohol, is a symptom of a disease which cannot be controlled by reason or an act of will. It is a terrible, life-destroying trap from which the addict is not easily extricated. Friends urge their members to manifest intelligent compassion toward victims of addiction, to aid and encourage them in seeking appropriate treatment.

Contemporary Friends acknowledge the wisdom of the Advices of our forebears, to:

Shun the use of mind-changing drugs and intoxicants, of gambling, and of other detrimental practices that interpose themselves against the Inward Light. It is the experience of Friends that these drugs, intoxicants, and practices lead to a personal willfulness and inability to listen for the will of God.... Keep your recreations from becoming occasions for self-intoxication and avoid those conventional amusements which debase the emotions

Advices, see p. 83

Living in the world

Throughout our history Friends have testified that our lives are not meant to conform to the ways of the world, but that we are meant to live in obedience to the Light of Truth within, and through this witness to contribute to the transformation of the world through the Light of Truth.

Let all nations hear the sound by word or writing. Spare no place, spare no tongue nor pen, but be obedient to the Lord God; go through the world and be valiant for the truth upon earth; tread and trample

all that is contrary under... Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them. Then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone; whereby in them you may be a blessing, and make the witness of God in them to bless you.

George Fox, 1656

Our testimonies are our guides as we seek to apply George Fox's advice in a world that is beyond his imagining, yet offers myriad opportunities to be valiant for the truth.

Equality

We believe there is that of God in every person, and thus we believe in human equality 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 in general, and have often been guilty of sharing the prejudices of the broader society. In recent years, Friends have discovered and taken stands against other forms of discrimination and oppression to which they had earlier been insensitive. An element of that insensitivity for some has been a failure to recognize the privileged status many American Friends enjoy. As we continue to seek the Light, ingrained habits and attitudes are subject to searching reexamination.

Social Justice

Enunciation of the principle of equality among human beings in the sight of God is important and necessary, but it is not sufficient. Realization of equality involves such matters as independence and control of one's own life. Therefore Friends aid the nonviolent efforts of the exploited to attain self-determination and social, political, and economic justice, and to change attitudes and practices formerly taken for granted. Friends seek to bring to light structures, institutions, language, and thought processes which subtly support discrimination and exploitation. Beyond their own Society, Friends promote Spirit-led, sense of the meeting decision-making as an instrument of equality. And Friends continue to examine their own attitudes and practices to test whether they contribute as much as they might to social, political, and economic justice.

Friends work with groups that have been victimized by prejudice and exploitation. Too often this work has been difficult because of resistance by the prejudiced and by the exploiters, even within the membership of the Religious Society of Friends. The problem of prejudice is complicated by advantages that have come to some at the expense of others. Exploitation impairs the human quality of the exploiter as well as of the exploited.

Criminal Justice

Many early Friends were victims of an arbitrary and unreasonable criminal justice system. Knowledge of that experience has opened many later Friends to that of God in convicted persons. Friends continue to undertake work in prisons, ministering to the spiritual and material needs of inmates. Believing that the penal system often reflects structural and systemic injustice in our society, Friends seek alternatives. Friends have acted out of the conviction that redemption and restorative justice, not retribution, are the right tasks of the criminal justice system. We strongly oppose capital punishment.

Seeking to heal the wounds of criminal actions, Friends are called to many different kinds of service in the criminal justice system. Prison visiting, victim support services, conflict resolution training for staff of correctional institutions and offenders, and work to abolish the penalty of death are typical of these services. Such service is undertaken in order to restore the victim, the offender, and the community to the greatest extent possible. The healing love, and the trust in divine leading that such disciplined service requires, can greatly assist the rebuilding of broken lives.

Peace

Since all human beings are children of God, Friends are called to love and respect all persons and to overcome evil with good. Friends' peace testimony arises from the power of Christ working in our hearts. Our words and lives should testify to this power and should stand as a positive witness in a world still torn by strife and violence.

The Society of Friends has consistently held that war is contrary to the Spirit of Christ. It stated its position clearly in the Declaration to Charles II in 1660:

We utterly deny all outward wars and strife, and fightings with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretense whatsoever; this is our testimony to the whole world.... The Spirit of Christ, by which we

are guided, is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing as evil, and again to move us unto it; and we certainly know, and testify to the world, that the Spirit of Christ, which leads us into all truth, will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the Kingdom of Christ nor for the Kingdoms of this world.... Therefore, we cannot learn war any more.”

Our historic peace testimony must be also a living testimony, as we work to give concrete expression to our ideals, often in opposition to prevailing opinion. We recognize that the peace testimony requires us to honor that of God in every person, and therefore to avoid not only physical violence but also more subtle forms—psychological, economic, or systemic.

In explaining his unwillingness to serve in the army, George Fox records that “I told them...that I lived in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars.” When we find that life and power within ourselves, we are strengthened to be valiant for God’s truth, to endure the suffering that may befall our lot.

The Individual and the Peace Testimony

In our individual lives, the peace testimony leads us to accept conflict as an opportunity for loving engagement with those with whom we disagree. That love can often be expressed in creative, nonviolent resolution of the disagreement. When we encounter people of sincere religious conviction whose views are profoundly different from our own, that love can also be manifested by acknowledging the sincerity of the other, while forthrightly expressing our own convictions.

The peace testimony also leads us as individuals to consider seriously our employment, our investments, our purchases, our payment of taxes, and our manner of living as they relate to violence. We must become sensitive to the covert as well as the overt violence inherent in some of our long-established social practices and institutions. We need to avoid, for example, benefiting not only from the manufacture of arms, but also from company practices that do violence to employees, consumers, or the natural world.

Friends and Military Activity

We support those who resist cooperation with conscription and those who oppose war by performing work as conscientious objectors. While

counseling against military service, we hold in love our members who feel they must undertake it.

We work as we are able to alleviate the suffering caused by war. We acknowledge the contribution that military forces have in some situations made to the relief of suffering, but we are troubled by the use of agents of destruction for such purposes, and by the failure of nations to support the creation of nonviolent legions to undertake humanitarian missions.

Alternatives to War

The almost unimaginable devastation that results from modern war makes ever more urgent its total elimination. We would refrain from participating in all forms of violence and repression. We would make strenuous efforts to secure international agreements for the elimination of armaments and to remove the domination of militarism in our society. We would work for greater understanding at all levels, from the kindergarten to the United Nations, of proven techniques for the nonviolent resolution of conflict. And we would promote and assist programs of conversion to peaceful uses of facilities built for war.

World Order

Friends since William Penn have sought to promote institutions of peace. In this era we promote a vision of a new world order that recognizes the essential unity of a human family sharing a fragile planet.

We prefer governing institutions that work face-to-face, within small communities. But we acknowledge the need for governing institutions at all levels, both as supportive, coordinating bodies, and as courts of appeal from the arbitrary actions of lesser jurisdictions.

We are deeply distressed by a world order dominated by heavily armed nation-states. We apply our gifts—of spirit, of intellect, of time and energy—to work for a new international order under God, within which our communities will be able to redirect their resources from overdependence on the manufacture of arms to human needs and the preservation of the earth.

The Individual and the State

The State, Supportive and Coercive

The attitude of Friends toward the state is conditioned by the fact that the state has many facets. As a necessary instrument for meeting human needs and for maintaining an orderly society with justice under law for all, the

state commands respect and cooperation. But when the state acts as a coercive agency resorting to violence, it acts contrary to Quaker principles.

Friends are not opposed to all forms of physical constraint. It is sometimes necessary and proper for peace officers to use minimal forms of physical constraints in dealing with persons who do injury to others or who will not cooperate with just law. But Friends must be watchful for the use of either physical or psychological violence in maintaining public order.

Civic Duties

As a part of their witness to what society may become, Friends are called to participate in public life as voters, public officials, or participants in community groups or professional societies.

As private citizens in the public arena, Friends bear witness by demonstrating respect for others, flexibility, reconciliation, and forgiveness in difficulties, as well as faithful persistence in pursuit of their leadings.

In public office, Friends have an opportunity to bear witness to the power which integrity, courage, respect for others, and careful attention to different points of view can exert in creating a just community. Where there is a conflict between loyalty to God and a seeming necessity for action as a public official, a prayerful search for divine guidance may lead to a suitable resolution of the conflict or to a decision to resign.

Civil Disobedience

From their earliest days Friends have counseled obedience to the state except when the law or ruling involved has appeared to be contrary to divine leading. The state has no claim to moral infallibility. Primary allegiance is to God.

If the state's commands appear to be contrary to divine leading, Friends take prayerful counsel before responding. This usually involves testing one's proposed action by the judgment of the Meeting. When the decision is to refuse obedience to the law or order of the state, in accordance with the dictates of conscience, it is proper for Friends to act openly and to make clear the grounds of their action.

If the decision involves incurring legal penalties, Friends generally have suffered willingly for the sake of their convictions. Friends not personally involved in such actions can strengthen the Meeting community by supporting their fellow members with spiritual encouragement and, when necessary, with material aid.

expenditures are essential and what are discretionary, and about the values that will underlie discretionary expenditures.

Walking Gently on the Earth

We recognize that the well-being of the earth is a fundamental spiritual concern. From the beginning, it was through the wonders of nature that people saw God. How we treat the earth and its creatures is a basic part of our relationship with God. Our planet as a whole, not just the small parts of it in our immediate custody, requires our responsible attention.

As Friends become aware of the interconnectedness of all life on this planet and the devastation caused by neglect of any part of it, we have become more willing to extend our sense of community to encompass all living things. We must now consider whether we should lay aside the belief that we humans are acting as stewards of the natural world, and instead view human actions as the major threat to the ecosystem.

Friends are indeed called to walk gently on the earth. Wasteful and extravagant consumption is a major cause of destruction of the environment. The right sharing of the world's remaining resources requires that developed nations reduce their present levels of consumption so that people in underdeveloped nations can have more, and the earth's life-sustaining systems can be restored. The world cannot tolerate indefinitely the present rate of consumption by technologically developed nations.

Friends are called to become models and patterns of simple living and concern for the earth. Some may find it difficult to change their accustomed lifestyle; others recognize the need and have begun to adopt ways of life which put the least strain on the world's resources of clean air, water, soil, and energy.

A serious threat to the planet is the population explosion and consequent famine, war and devastation. Called on to make decisions to simplify our lives, we may find that the most difficult to accept will be limiting the number of children we have.

Voluntary simplicity in living and restraint in procreation hold the promise of ecological redemption and spiritual renewal.

Stewardship

Stewardship of Economic Resources

All that we have, in our selves and our possessions, are gifts from God, entrusted to us for our responsible use. Jesus reminds us that we must not lay up earthly treasures for ourselves, for where our treasures are, there will our hearts be also. We cannot serve both God and Mammon.

Stewardship is a coming together of our major testimonies. To be good stewards in God's world calls on us to examine and consider the ways in which our testimonies for peace, equality, and simplicity interact to guide our relationships with all life.

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

John Woolman, c. 1770

In a world of economic interactions far more complex than John Woolman could have imagined, Friends need to examine their decisions about obtaining, holding, and using money and other assets, to see whether they find in them the seeds, not only of war, but also of self-indulgence, injustice, and ecological disaster. Good stewardship of economic resources consists both in avoidance of those evils and in actions that advance peace, simple living, justice, and a healthy ecosystem. Good stewardship also requires attention to the economic needs of Quaker and other organizations that advance Friends' testimonies.

Right Sharing

Friends worldwide have accepted the idea that the testimony of equality in the economic realm implies a commitment to the right sharing of the world's resources. Friends in comfortable circumstances need to find practical expression of the testimony of simplicity in their earning and spending. They must consider the meaning for their own lives of economic equality and simplicity, and what level of income is consonant with their conclusions. They should consider likewise what portion of that income should be shared beyond the immediate family. That decision entails balancing the social value of self-sufficiency against the social value of greater help for those more needy. It also requires judgments about what

Advices

The principal purpose of a book of discipline is to promote discipleship by giving advice on a broad range of aspects of the life of the Society of Friends. In that sense the entire volume, save the quotations from the writings of Friends, is advices, addressed by the yearly meeting to its many individual members and its many constituent bodies.

With that in mind, we have chosen to abandon the practice of recasting to suit our times a set of highly compact advices received from the earlier generations. But rather than drop the compact version entirely, we have, in support of those who cherish them, reprinted the 1972 version. We trust that doing so will not encourage Friends to rely unduly on the compact advices to the neglect of the volume as a whole.

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These advices were paraphrased from materials contained in the Epistles of the Yearly Meeting of Pennsylvania and the Jerseys, 1694 and 1695.

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Friends are reminded that our Religious Society took form in times of disturbance, and that its continuing testimony has been the power of God to lead men and women out of the confusions of outward violence, inward sickness, and all other forms of self-will, however upheld by social convention. As death comes to our willfulness, a new life is formed in us, so that we are liberated from distractions and frustrations, from fears, angers, and guilts. Thus we are enabled to sense the Inward Light and to follow its leadings. Friends are advised to place God, not themselves, 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.

Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Seek to live in affection as true Friends in your Meetings, in your families, in all your dealings with others, and in your relationship with outward society. The power of God is not used to compel us to Truth; therefore, let us renounce for ourselves the power of any person over any

other and, compelling no one, seek to lead others to Truth through love. Let us teach by being ourselves teachable.

Keep to the simplicity of Truth. Seek for its manifestations in prayer, in reading matter, in the arts, and in all experiences of daily life. Shun the use of mind-changing drugs and intoxicants, of gambling, and of other detrimental practices that interpose themselves against the Inward Light. It is the experience of Friends that these drugs, intoxicants, and practices lead to a personal willfulness and inability to listen for the will of God. Avoid in daily work those involvements and entanglements that separate us from each other and from God. Keep your recreations from becoming occasions for self-intoxication and avoid those conventional amusements which debase the emotions by playing upon them. These, too, lead to self-absorption and to forgetfulness that each person's humanity is shared by all persons. Live and work in the plainness and simplicity of a true follower of Christ.

II

Our Religious Society endures as a community of friends who take thought for outward society by first taking care of one another. Friends are advised to maintain love and unity, to avoid tale-bearing and detraction, and to settle differences promptly and in a manner free from resentment and all forms of inward violence. Live affectionately as friends, entering with sympathy into the joys and sorrows of one another's daily lives. Visit one another. Be alert to give help and ready to receive it. Bear the burdens of one another's failings; share the buoyancy of one another's strengths.

Remember that to everyone is given a share of responsibility for the meeting for worship, whether through silence or through the spoken word. Be diligent in attendance at meetings and in inward preparation for them. Be ready to speak under the leadings of the Light. Receive the ministry of others in a tender spirit and avoid hurtful criticism. In meetings for business, and in all duties connected with them, seek again the leadings of the Light, keeping from obstinacy and from harshness of tone or manner; admit the possibility of being in error. In all the affairs of the Meeting community, proceed in the peaceable spirit of Pure Wisdom, with forbearance and warm affection for each other.

Use your capabilities and your possessions not as ends in themselves but as God's gifts entrusted to you. Share them with others; use them with humility, courtesy and affection. Guard against contentiousness and love of power; be alert to the personalities and the needs of others. Show

loving consideration for all creatures, and cherish the beauty and wonder of God's creation. Attend to Pure Wisdom and be teachable.

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Friends are reminded that it is the experience and testimony of our Society that there is one teacher, namely Christ; and that in that Spirit there are no distinctions between persons, nor any reason of age, sex, or race that elects some to domination. Live in love and learn from one another. Combativeness in family life, whereby one strives to assert a supremacy of will over another, is not compatible with the conviction that there is that of God in everyone. Amid the growing distempers of social existence, Friends are urged to maintain our witness of Truth, simplicity, and nonviolence, and to test our personal lives by them.

The union of two in marriage having a religious basis, any who contemplate it should seek divine guidance, and any who enter into marriage should seek this guidance without ceasing. Within the family, adults and youth, whether formally in membership or not, should instruct one another by example in the way of life which our Religious Society has professed, seeking in all things the Inward Light as the only certain alternative to an unfriendly struggle of wills. Friends are advised to maintain closeness in their family life and, avoiding distractions and contentions, to make their homes places of peace.

The Spirit of Christ can lead parents to wise counsel for their children in education, reading, recreation, and social relationships, while it can also lead children to wise counsel for their parents in these and other aspects of life. If counsel is unwelcome and if difficulties arise, persevere both in prayer and in a sense of humor. Friends are advised in all things to trust in the Light and to witness to it in daily living.

Accept with serenity the approach of each new stage of life. Welcome the approach of old age, both for oneself and for others, as an opportunity for wisdom, for detachment from turmoils, and for greater attachment to the Light. Make provisions for the settlement of all outward affairs while in health, so that others may not be burdened and so that one may be freed to live more fully in the Truth that shall stand against all the entanglements, distractions, and confusions of our times.

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Bring the whole of your life under the healing and ordering of the Holy Spirit, remembering that there is no time but this present. Friends are

reminded that we are called, as followers of Christ, to help establish the Kingdom of God on earth. In witnessing to the Inward Light, guard against religious intolerance. Strengthen a sense of kinship with everyone and make service, not self-promotion, the chief aim of our outward lives as Friends, as employees or as supervisors, and as citizens.

Let the sense of kinship inspire us to unceasing efforts toward a social order free of violence and oppression, in which no one's development is hindered by meager income, insufficient education, or too little freedom in directing his or her own affairs. Friends are advised not only to minister to those in need, but also to seek to know the facts of social and economic ills so as to work for the removal of those ills. Let the Friendly testimony that there is that of God in everyone lead us to cherish every human being regardless of race or class, and to encourage efforts to overcome prejudices and antagonisms. Friends are advised to cleanse themselves of all prejudice.

Be faithful in maintaining our testimony against all war as contrary to the spirit and teaching of Christ. Every human being is a child of God with a measure of God's Light. War and other instruments of violence and oppression ignore this reality and violate our relation with God. Keep primary our Friends' concern for the elimination of combat in the outward world as in our personal lives. Friends are advised to live in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars. Friends are further advised to aid in all ways possible the development of international order and understanding.

Dear Friends, keep all your meetings in the authority, wisdom and power of Truth and the unity of the blessed Spirit. Let your conduct and conversation be such as become the 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, Yorkshire, 1656