
History

[It] was Justice Bennet of Derby who first called us Quakers because we bid them tremble at the word of God, and that was in the year 1650.

George Fox, 1675

[The Pacific Coast Association of Friends] is not a movement, a new denomination, nor another Yearly Meeting. It is not an official spokesman for the Society of Friends nor any branch of the Society on the Pacific Coast. It is a banding together through mutual interest and concern of all Friends and others in sympathy with Friends' principles. Each person may become a member upon his [or her] own affirmation, and each meeting or group may affiliate with the association or not as they may elect. The association does not seek to commit its members nor the affiliated groups to any set of stated principles or creeds. Each member is free to make his or her own testimony, and without the stigma of vacillation, to grow in grace according to his [or her] own inner light.

William Lawrence, 1934

The movement that became the Religious Society of Friends arose in seventeenth-century England after the height of the Puritan revolution. This was a period of great religious ferment and seeking. Old church forms were being questioned, and many people were reading the Bible for the first time. Quakers sought through direct experience with the Divine to rediscover the intensity, life, and power of the early Christians.

George Fox, a founder of the Quaker movement, was born in 1624 in Leicestershire in the heart of the Midlands in England. His parents were both Puritans of humble origins. George was early apprenticed to a shoemaker who also dealt in sheep and cattle. In his boyhood, George resolved to be honest in all things. He went on to reject all double standards of living. After much Bible study and travel about the country seeking help and comfort from ministers and members of established religious sects, he had an experience at the age of 23 that he later described in his journal:

And when all my hopes in [priests and preachers] and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, O then, I heard a voice which said, "There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition," and, when I heard it my heart did leap for joy.

During the next five years, Fox traveled throughout England gathering small groups of like-minded people. These early Quakers had a remarkable sense of mission: having had a personal encounter with Christ, they felt compelled to share it with all who would listen. George Fox and his followers, known now as the Valiant Sixty, traveled all over England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. Friends visited Holland, Germany, and France, and Mary Fisher visited the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire (1658). During this period, thousands of Friends were imprisoned and hundreds died for their beliefs.

As the movement grew, the basic structure of the Religious Society of Friends took shape, with groups of worshippers organized into monthly meetings, quarterly meetings, and yearly meetings—so named according to how often they met to conduct their community business.

Beginning in 1655 many Quakers traveled to the English colonies in the Americas, eventually winning the struggle for religious toleration in New England and Virginia. Friends meetings were established in all the colonies. Fox and twelve other Friends visited Maryland in 1672 and traveled to all the Quaker centers there. Groups of Friends settled in New Jersey in the mid-1670s and in Pennsylvania after 1681, when King Charles II granted William Penn ownership of the colony. In Pennsylvania Penn governed based on a “holy experiment”—a union of temporal and spiritual matters.

Friends established yearly meetings in many of the colonies, but distances between them were great and Friends continued to look to London Yearly Meeting for guidance more than to neighboring colonies. Nevertheless there was much intervisitation among Friends by traveling ministers. This was supplemented by the writing of letters and epistles that were widely circulated among Friends. Although education was not as highly prized on the frontier as in urban areas, Quakers established a number of elementary schools and raised the level of literacy in the colonies.

Slavery was an issue for colonial Friends from at least 1688 when Germantown Friends, near Philadelphia, minuted an advice against the slave trade. In the 1700s, John Woolman and other concerned Friends aroused Quaker consciences on the matter. The subject continued to be raised, and by 1776 most yearly meetings had directed members neither to buy or sell slaves, nor to accept them as gifts. Many Quakers struggled with whether or not to violate laws making it illegal to assist slaves to escape, but nevertheless during the 1800s many participated in the Underground Railroad movement, assisting slaves escaped from the South to freedom in the North.

The colonies’ various yearly meetings developed informal rules of order that were eventually reduced to writing and copies made for the use of quarterly meetings. Parts of these were printed from time to time. Eventually Philadelphia Yearly Meeting prepared an official *Extracts from the Minutes and Advices* that it distributed to its constituent monthly meetings.

The withdrawal of Friends in America from government and society in general, the “Quiet Period” in the Religious Society of Friends, began during the French and Indian Wars (1754-1763). In 1756, Quakers ceded political control in Pennsylvania to secular authorities due to the increasing number of compromises with their faith required of Quakers who remained in government.

In this period many Friends came to rely more on tradition and truth as revealed to previous generations rather than remaining open to continuing revelation. Nor were American Quakers immune to the influence of the democratic ideas contained in the Declaration of Independence, the liberal religious philosophy of the French Revolution, and, conversely, the religious movement of evangelism that was spreading through the land. This combination of factors led to some divisions among Quakers—and eventually to the growth of Independent Friends and to the formation of North Pacific Yearly Meeting.

Beginning in the 1820s, the unity among North American Friends that had endured almost 200 years began to come apart. In 1827 Elias Hicks broke with new trends in Quaker belief that called for a need for personal conversion, emphasized the authority of scripture and church teaching, and believed in salvation through Jesus Christ. Hicks believed the efficacy of the Inner Light was most important, and that true Quakers elevated the Inner Light (continuing personal Divine revelation) above scripture and church teaching. Those who disagreed with “Hicksite” thinking were termed “Orthodox” Quakers. In 1845 a further separation occurred when followers of Joseph Gurney split away from Orthodox Quakers in the eastern U.S. The “Gurneyites” believed in biblical and church authority coupled with the Inner Light. Many Gurneyites moved west and formed new Quaker meetings.

An intense wave of spiritual revivalism swept the United States beginning in the 1850s. The Revival Movement affected all the Protestant denominations and had a profound influence on Quakerism as well. In 1872 Iowa Yearly Meeting (Gurneyite) granted official recognition to the underlying theology of revivalism. Over time, this led to abandoning plain dress, plain speech, and silence in worship. First Day scripture schools were established. Ministers and the authority of church teaching and scripture were emphasized even more. Altars were installed in Quaker places of worship and music was introduced into services. Individuals were required to be “converted” and then “sanctified” in order to preserve their membership. The concept of the Inner Light fell into the background.

Iowa Yearly Meeting’s official adoption of revivalism distressed many Iowa Quakers. Things came to a head in 1877 when 60 Iowa Friends called for separation. Similar events occurred in Western and Kansas Yearly Meetings. By coincidence Joel Bean became clerk of Iowa Yearly Meeting in 1877. He and his wife Hannah were already enrolled ministers in Iowa Yearly Meeting. Bean was opposed to the changes wrought by revivalism, but he did not believe in separation. Instead he wrote articles in prominent Quaker publications opposing the changes. Ultimately, rather than separate from Iowa Yearly Meeting, the Beans moved to California in 1882. There, they became involved with the San Jose Monthly Meeting which was part of Honey Creek Quarterly Meeting of Iowa Yearly Meeting.

San Jose Monthly Meeting did not escape the controversies swirling around the new revivalist practices. The meeting was divided between those who accepted revivalist changes and those, like the Beans, who did not. The meeting split. Eventually Iowa Yearly Meeting dissolved the San Jose Meeting and refused to recognize the new College Park Monthly Meeting which the Beans and others established. In the midst of this process, Iowa Yearly Meeting also withdrew its recognition of the Beans as ministers. Undaunted, the Beans inaugurated the College Park Association of Friends in 1889.

The founding premise of College Park was the ideal of radical inclusiveness—it was a loose confederation of Friends of all religious backgrounds. Its founders, including the Beans, did not come from the Liberal or Hicksite branch of Friends, often regarded as more universalist in belief with a tradition of unprogrammed, or silent, worship in meetings without pastors. Rather, as noted, the Beans came west as members of the Iowa Yearly Meeting, which identified with the Gurneyite branch of Quakerism.

The College Park Association allowed Friends to retain membership in their own meetings while attending at College Park. The goal was to be completely independent from any of the yearly meetings, each of which was identified with one faction or another within the Society. The five governing principles of the Association were:

1. *Doctrine:* Friends believe in the continuing reality of the Living Christ, available to all seeking souls.
2. *Worship:* The worship of God is held in spirit and in truth and shall be held on a basis of the leadership of the Holy Spirit.
3. *Ministry:* All members and attenders are free to participate vocally in meetings, under a sense of God’s presence.
4. *Manner of Living:* Friends are advised to conduct their private lives with simplicity and directness, ever sensitive to the world’s needs and eager to engage in service.
5. *Relation to the State:* Friends are urged to feel their responsibility to the nation, and at the same time to recognize their oneness with humanity everywhere, regardless of race or nation, abstaining from all hatred.

In 1921, Howard Brinton married Anna Cox, a granddaughter of Joel and Hannah Bean. Together, the young couple carried on the Bean tradition of active involvement in Quakerism. They urged the gathering together of independent Quaker meetings on the west coast. By 1930, 30 other independent Quaker meetings had been formed in the Pacific region. Eventually these formed the Pacific Coast Association of Friends which met annually beginning in 1931 and included meetings in Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. The principles of the Association are set forth in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter. The groups engaged in cooperative projects and supported the relatively newly formed American Friends Service Committee. Howard Brinton became the first clerk of the group and the editor of its publication, *Friends Bulletin* (now *Western Friend*).

University Friends Meeting (UFM) became a monthly meeting in 1940 as part of Puget Sound Quarterly Meeting of Indiana Yearly Meeting. It evolved from the Friends Center near the University of Washington, founded in 1937 by Friends from Friends Memorial Church (now North Seattle Friends Church), to provide outreach to young people and with a concern about the war on the horizon. UFM remained a member of Indiana Yearly Meeting until 1946, when University Friends joined others in proposing to establish a new yearly meeting consisting of west coast Quakers from the Pacific Coast Association of Friends. Pacific Yearly Meeting, as the new organization was known, was Christ-centered and God-centered in orientation. Friends also noted its universalist character and confirmed the practice of unprogrammed worship with no recorded ministers. The standard for membership was readiness and desire to join in the common effort to seek and follow the Inner Light. There was less emphasis on theology and greater emphasis on peace and social concerns, such as race relations, arising out of the testimonies.

As Pacific Yearly Meeting grew, it became apparent that the northern part of its area would be better served by an additional yearly meeting. By 1970, the Pacific Northwest and Willamette Quarterly Meetings began to explore whether to hold an annual meeting of friends in the Pacific Northwest. At a 1971 gathering at University Friends Meetinghouse, the two quarterly meetings scheduled a North Pacific Gathering of Friends for the following year. Of the nine monthly meetings consulted at the Gathering (Corvallis, Eastside, Eugene, Multnomah, Salem, Tacoma, University, Vancouver, and Victoria), only Victoria did not agree to the formation of North Pacific Yearly Meeting. Victoria, and two years later, Vancouver, left North Pacific Friends to unite with Canadian Yearly Meeting. The remaining monthly meetings approved the following minute: “This North Pacific Gathering of Friends forms the North Pacific Yearly Meeting as of this date, July 17, 1972.” They also agreed that other meetings could join with NPYM as they were led. All the meetings in the Willamette Quarterly Meeting and Pacific Northwest Quarterly Meeting joined. University Friends Meeting kept dual membership with Pacific and North Pacific Yearly Meetings for the time being.

In spite of small numbers and long distances, Quakers in Montana have met together regularly for mutual support and spiritual growth since the 1960s. Montana meetings and worship groups—Billings, Great Falls, Heartland (made up of several worship groups), Missoula—formed the Montana Gathering of Friends (MGOF), which joined North Pacific Yearly Meeting as a quarterly meeting in 1988.

Friends of North Pacific Yearly Meeting expressed an early desire to devote their annual session to the goals of spiritual growth, fellowship, and “preparing witness”—discernment of the yearly meeting’s corporate voice for the concerns of Friends in the region and the world. To further this end, they decided to delegate administrative decision-making to a Steering Committee composed of members from constituent monthly meetings. Friends emphasized a desire to keep the structure of the yearly meeting simple and not to establish any other standing committees. Over the years, Friends addressed several major areas of concern at their Annual Sessions: corporate witness, gay and lesbian rights, affiliation with other Quaker organizations, and, in more recent years, changing the structure of the yearly meeting.

Corporate Witness. NPYM Friends have shown the depth of their commitment to Quaker testimonies through their discernment of corporate witness during Annual Sessions. NPYM approved its very first minute of corporate witness to express concern over the condition of young men who were exiles (“young men estranged from their homes”) and prisoners of war in Southeast Asia. As time went on, the Annual Session saw approval of an impressive array of minutes, including:

- Opposing the Trident submarine and missile project (1974);
- Supporting New Zealand Friends for a nuclear-free South Pacific (1975);
- Opposing the death penalty (1978, 1985);
- Encouraging the US and the USSR to stop the arms race (1980);
- Urging understanding and redress for the injustice done to Japanese-Americans during World War II (1981);
- Expressing concern for Friends in Great Britain and Argentina during the Falklands war (1982);
- Supporting refusal to pay for militarism with tax dollars (1983);
- Urging Friends to inform themselves about Indian treaty rights (1984);
- Encouraging meetings to consider offering sanctuary to Central American refugees (1984);
- Endorsing peace tax fund legislation (1985);
- Acknowledging the environmental crisis as a moral and spiritual crisis (1985);
- Opposing military and other aid to the Contras in Nicaragua (1986);
- Expressing solidarity with native peoples of this hemisphere (1991);
- Accepting a challenge to examine ourselves on the issue of racism (1991);
- Supporting gay and lesbian civil rights (1992);
- Expressing regret to the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki for the US bombing of their cities (1995);
- Speaking out against the United States Army School of the Americas and, later, urging that it be closed down (1995, 2001);
- Expressing concern about the burning of African American churches in the South (1996);
- Supporting legal recognition of same-sex marriage (1997);
- Opposing a march of the Aryan Nations in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho (1998);
- Confirming that we cherish living in harmony with the earth (1998);
- Opposing the bombing and planned invasion of Iraq by the United States, and later, opposing the wars in Iraq (2000, 2002);
- Recognizing global climate change as an urgent moral and spiritual issue (2008);
- Calling for decriminalization of drug use and creating a public health model to achieve reduction of drug abuse (2008);
- Condemning the use of torture by the United States government (2009);
- Urging the United States to adopt an immigration system that respects the fundamental rights and dignity of all (2010);

- Urging that authorization for US use of military force be repealed (2015);
- Declaring NPYM an open and affirming faith community, welcoming all genders (2017).

Same-Sex Relationships. An area of deep concern over the years has been same-sex relationships. The concern first arose as the yearly meeting commenced drafting its own book of *Faith and Practice*. Initially NPYM relied on Pacific Yearly Meeting's *Faith and Practice*, but in 1979 a committee was formed to revise that *Faith and Practice* to better reflect the life of Quakers in the northwest. As the drafting process began, Annual Session was held at a Baptist College where gays and lesbians were asked to remove a sign advertising their meeting. During that Annual Session, Friends affirmed that gay and lesbian Friends were an integral part of the yearly meeting and decided that NPYM could not meet at a location that restricted or rejected any of its members.

In 1986, the Committee on the Discipline presented a draft of the new NPYM *Faith and Practice* at Annual Session. Ultimately, NPYM accepted it as a "living, evolving document," but could not reach unity on the question whether marriage was defined as between two persons, or between a man and a woman. Monthly meetings throughout the yearly meeting then took up the issue, but Friends did not come to unity on appropriate language. In 1990, at the Annual Session, Friends again took up the question. This time, Friends directed the Committee on the Discipline to change the language that had defined marriage as between a man and a woman and to otherwise revise the chapter to reflect the discernment of Friends at Annual Session.

Separate from the yearly meeting's revision of *Faith and Practice*, an NPYM minute in 1992 affirmed Friends belief that "the Spirit of God is present in all loving relationships regardless of the genders of those involved" and "endorsed efforts to protect the civil rights of all persons regardless of their sexual orientation."

Then, in 1993, the Steering Committee approved the revised *Faith and Practice* definition of a committed relationship or marriage as between a "couple," while noting that some monthly meetings only "find clearness to oversee heterosexual relationships."

NPYM continued the work of understanding the lives of gay and lesbian Friends. In 1997, NPYM approved a minute supporting the legal recognition of same-sex marriages, noting that "most of the meetings in NPYM have felt called to take the marriages of gay couples and lesbian couples under their care." In 2004, NPYM approved a further minute opposing "all attempts to deny legal recognition of marriage of same sex couples."

Structural Change. In 1992, NPYM, out of a sense of frustration with the organization's current operation, formed a Mulling Committee to answer the query, "What is the role and function of yearly meeting?" The following year, Annual Session devoted time to hearing from Friends answering this query. From this, NPYM approved several proposals: to amend *Faith and Practice* to show that the yearly meeting's central concern would now be the support and encouragement of monthly meetings, worship groups, and individual Friends; to relieve the Steering Committee of the task of planning and carrying out Annual Session and to assign to the planning committee the task of deepening fellowship and a sense of spirit at the Annual Session; and to fund a part-time, paid secretary to the yearly meeting.

NPYM continued the process of discerning its proper structure, especially as it related to the role of the Steering Committee. NPYM had initially established the Steering Committee to conduct the business of NPYM, leaving Annual Session free for discernment on matters of corporate witness and for spiritual renewal. Since its formation NPYM had grown to include over 50 monthly meetings, preparative meetings, and worship groups. In 2003, the presiding clerk called attention to the growing complexity of yearly meeting responsibilities, finances, and affiliations. He pointed out the growing difficulty of filling the positions required to carry out the work of NPYM, as well as the lack of interest among monthly meetings in the issues taken up by the Steering Committee.

Over the next several years, NPYM's Vision and Structure Committee worked to develop a way forward for the yearly meeting. In 2007, Annual Session approved the committee's proposal that most of the yearly meeting's business be conducted during the Annual Session, rather than in Steering Committee meetings. The Steering Committee would now become a Coordinating Committee composed of members appointed by the monthly meetings. There would be three new standing committees: Ministry & Oversight, Peace & Social Concerns, and Youth. NPYM gradually implemented these changes. The Coordinating Committee started its work in 2009.

Affiliation with Other Quaker Organizations. As NPYM began life as a yearly meeting, it caringly threshed through many issues and affiliated with Friends World Committee for Consultation and the American Friends Service Committee in 1974. NPYM formally affiliated with Friends Committee on National Legislation in 1978 and with Quaker Earthcare Witness in 2011. NPYM also has maintained consistent support for Friends Peace Teams and with Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns. Partnership with these larger organizations has remained important for our yearly meeting. NPYM designates and provides travel support for our representatives to these organizations, and hears reports from them at Annual Sessions.

Over the years since its inception, NPYM has recurrently engaged in discernment over whether to affiliate with Friends General Conference. FGC is a Quaker organization, regarded as originating from the Hicksite, or Liberal, branch of Quakers. FGC is affiliated with 12 yearly meetings, some of which are pastoral. However, FGC provides services to all yearly and monthly meetings (whether or not formally affiliated) on request, including traveling ministry, educational materials, and spiritual nurturing programs. FGC also hosts an annual Gathering which rotates to different parts of the country from year to year.

FGC first invited NPYM to affiliate in 1981. After considering the invitation, NPYM found there was little interest in affiliating. In 1995, representatives of FGC visited the NPYM Annual Session. Two years later, Bruce Birchard, Executive Secretary of FGC, made a brief presentation at Annual Session. NPYM again studied the question of affiliation. In 1997, the Steering Committee concluded that no formal relationship was possible at the time, but that the seasoning process should continue:

We have learned that some Friends among us have attended FGC gatherings or have other FGC experience which makes them treasure the organization and gives them a strong incentive to have North Pacific Yearly Meeting join. Others cherish our yearly meeting's independent, non-aligned status and wish to maintain it. Some Friends hope to move towards a more inclusive Society of Friends and do not wish to affiliate with a liberal Friends organization such as Friends General Conference unless we are also willing to affiliate with Friends United Meeting. Still others are concerned about the practical reasons to join or not join FGC. Steering Committee feels led to continue the seasoning process, hoping that, no matter what the outcome we will all learn more about each other and about other Friends' organizations as we seek Divine guidance for us in this matter.

In 2006, FGC held its Annual Gathering at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington. Many NPYM Quakers attended and helped put on the Gathering. Subsequent to the Gathering, NPYM again attempted to discern whether to affiliate with FGC. The Coordinating Committee formed an ad hoc committee to study the issue further. Over the next several Annual Sessions, NPYM addressed the ad hoc committee's recommendation to affiliate with FGC. Friends could not come to unity on affiliation, stating some of the same reasons that existed in 1997. At the Annual Session in 2012, Friends decided to re-examine the nature of affiliation and all ties with other Quaker organizations. The committee was to consider whether closer ties could be established between FGC and NPYM.

Looking Forward. The history of the Religious Society of Friends and of North Pacific Yearly Meeting shows Truth moving among us. Our history gives Friends assurance that the Spirit of God will inspire and guide us in our faith and our witness to the world, today and into the future.