
Friends Spiritual Disciplines

Now, Friends, deal plainly with yourselves, and let the eternal Light search you, and try you, for the good of your souls. For this will deal plainly with you. It will rip you up, and lay you open, and make all manifest which lodges in you; the secret subtlety of the enemy of our souls, this eternal searcher and trier will make manifest. Therefore all to this come, and by this be searched, and judged, and led and guided.

Margaret Fell, 1656

If our concern is with the love of a creating, sustaining, sanctifying, indwelling Spirit for the life and wholeness of the world, we will be caught up and enlivened by images of the Spirit, desiring to break through in reconciling, whole-making love between all people, all beings and all things in the universe. This God is within us, empowering us, flowing out from, to, between us and all things—both immanent and transcendent. ...

To live in the Spirit will mean moving towards being open to those modes of being, thinking, deciding and acting that are empowering from within rather than controlling from without for ourselves and for our neighbors.

Margaret Bearlin, 1984

The Religious Society of Friends ... is about nothing if it's not about transformation. Helping each other open to the Living Christ among us, allowing ourselves to be searched by the Light at work within us, humbling ourselves to be taught by the Inward Teacher, trusting that surrendering to the Refiner's Fire, we can be given new hearts. And it is and always has been through these new hearts that we are made channels for the Motion of Universal Love.

Noah Baker Merrill, 2012

Through years of experience, Friends have discovered practices and disciplines that are helpful in developing and living our spirituality, both as individuals and as a spiritual community.

Friends practice a variety of spiritual disciplines. One discipline may illuminate one part of life, and another, yet another part. Altogether, they connect us to the grounding center from which we draw our strength and inspiration, and which opens us to transformation.

Friends may call this center God, Spirit, some other name, or no name at all. Some Friends understand that this center is a part of the constitution of every individual and develops there on its own; still others are not yet aware of their access to the Divine.

Advices and Queries. Advices gather the wisdom and experience of Friends; queries are used for personal or group reflection. Many meetings read and consider one or several queries, along with appropriate advices or other material, during meeting for worship, meeting for business, worship-sharing, or other gatherings. Some meetings record their responses to the queries. Meeting committees may find certain queries helpful in evaluating their activities. Meetings often publish the queries regularly in their newsletters. Queries offer a basis for a monthly meeting's annual report on the state of the Society.

In this *Faith and Practice*, many advices are phrased as descriptions of how Friends live lives centered in the Spirit. The reader will find advices and queries on specific topics throughout this chapter and the next.

See also Chapter 2, “Friends Experiential Faith.”

Expectant Worship, Vocal Ministry

Meeting for worship is the heart of the Religious Society of Friends. In meeting for worship individuals gather in prayer and silence, waiting expectantly on the Spirit. In worship we seek a union of the hearts of all present as we search for Truth. As individuals we may enter into worship with concerns about family and friends, members of our meeting community, and our local and world communities. We may also reflect on the ways we are in harmony with others and with Quaker testimonies.

When we are open to the Spirit in ourselves and in others, we may become united in our concern for each other and for our community. As this sense of unity in the Spirit grows, the meeting is gathered—there is a sense of strength and power in the presence of the Light that transcends us as individuals. Worshipping together we strengthen one another, and our bodies and minds are refreshed in the life of the Spirit.

Vocal ministry arises out of this silent worship. Vocal ministry is more than a mere urge to share a personal observation. It is a spontaneous outpouring that occurs when an individual experiences inward and outward signs prompting the sharing of a message from the Source. Some Friends report that before giving vocal ministry they experience sensations such as a rapid heartbeat, persistence of a thought or feeling, or a nudging of the Spirit.

In vocal ministry Friends strive to be clear and direct, and to speak as briefly as is needed to convey the message. Out of our own experience with the Divine, Friends share insights with fellow worshippers or offer praise or prayer or song.

After a message has been given, Friends take time to ponder its meaning before another rises to speak. We listen to ministry with respect and an open heart, seeking to appreciate both the meaning of the message and the spirit in which it is given.

Children in Meeting for Worship. Our children learn the ways of seeking Truth through expectant worship and vocal ministry. By participating in First Day School and in the adult meeting for worship as they are able, children gradually become familiar with how to open themselves to the Spirit. Meetings seek ways of engaging children from newborns to young adults. Some meetings hold intergenerational meetings for worship where adults worship with children in the children’s space. Others hold “all-together” meetings longer than the usual brief periods when children are in meeting for worship.

Quotations

God is spirit, and those who worship [God] must worship in spirit and truth.

John 4:24

...That as any are moved of the Lord to speak the word of the Lord at ... meetings, that it be done in faithfulness, without adding or diminishing.

Epistle from the Elders at Balby, 1656

[A]s many candles lighted and put in one place do greatly augment the light and make it more to shine forth, so when many are gathered together into the same life, there more of the glory of God and his powers appears, to the refreshment of each individual.

Robert Barclay, 1671

When you come to your meetings ... what do you do? Do you then gather together bodily only, and kindle a fire, compassing yourselves about with the sparks of your own kindling, and so please yourselves, and walk in the "Light of your own fire, and in the sparks which you have kindled?" ... Or rather, do you sit down in the True Silence, resting from your own Will and Workings, and waiting upon the Lord, with your minds fixed in that Light wherewith Christ has enlightened you, until the Lord breathes life into you, refresheth you, and prepares you, and your spirits and souls, to make you fit for his service, that you may offer unto him a pure and spiritual sacrifice?

William Penn, 1678

One day, being under a strong exercise of spirit, I stood up and said some words in a meeting; but not keeping close to the Divine opening, I said more than was required of me. Being soon sensible of my error, I was afflicted in mind some weeks without any light or comfort, even to that degree that I could not take satisfaction in anything. I remembered God, and was troubled, and in the depths of my distress he had pity on me, and sent the Comforter. I then felt forgiveness for my offense; my mind became calm and quiet, and I was truly thankful to my gracious Redeemer for his mercies. About six weeks after this, feeling the spring of Divine love opened, and a concern to speak, I said a few words in a meeting, in which I found peace. Being thus humbled and disciplined under the cross, my understanding became more strengthened to distinguish the pure spirit which inwardly moves upon the heart, and which taught me to wait in silence sometimes many weeks together, until I felt that rise which prepares the creature to stand like a trumpet, through which the Lord speaks to his flock.

John Woolman, 1740

It is indeed true, as Friends have been accustomed to say, that we cannot expect "to eat the bread of idleness" in our silent meetings. Every individual spirit must work out its salvation in a living exercise of heart and mind, an exercise in which "fear and trembling" must often be our portion, and which cannot possibly be fully carried out under disturbing influences from without. Silence is often a stern discipline, a laying bare of the soul before God, a listening to the "reproof of life." But the discipline has to be gone through, the reproof has to be listened to, before we can find our right place in the temple. Words may help and silence may help, but the one thing needful is that the heart should turn to its Maker as the needle turns to the pole. For this we must be still.

Caroline Stephen, 1908

Each Friend who feels called upon to rise and deliver a lengthy discourse might question himself—and herself—most searchingly, as to whether the message could not be more lastingly given in the fewest possible words, or even through his or her personality alone, in entire and trustful silence. 'Cream must always rise to the surface.' True. But other substances rise to the surface besides cream; substances that may have to be skimmed off and thrown away before bodies and souls can be duly nourished. 'Is my message cream or scum?' may be an unusual and is certainly a very homely query. Still it is one that every speaker, in a crowded gathering especially, should honestly face. Some of the dangers of silent worship can best be guarded against by its courtesies.

Violet Holdsworth, 1919

The first thing that I do is to close my eyes and then to still my body in order to get it as far out of the way as I can. Then I still my mind and let it open to God in silent prayer, for the meeting, as we understand it, is the meeting place of the worshiper with God. I thank God inwardly for this occasion, for the week's happenings, for what I have learned at his hand, for my family, for the work there is to do, for himself. And I often pause to enjoy him. Under his gaze I search the week, and feel the piercing twinge of remorse that comes at this, and this, and this, and at the absence of this, and this, and this. Under his eyes I see again—for I have often been aware of it at the time—the right way. I ask his forgiveness of my faithlessness and ask for strength to meet this matter when it arises again. There have been times when I had to reweave a part of my life under this auspice.

I hold up persons before God in intercession, loving them under his eyes—seeing them with him, longing for his healing and redeeming power to course through their lives. I hold up certain social situations, certain projects. At such a time I often see things that I may do in company with or that are related to this person or this situation. I hold up the persons in the meeting and their needs, as I know them, to God.

Douglas Steere, 1937

I come to Meeting for Worship to attend to that Presence which is always present but before which I am not always alert and listening.

I come to be disarmed by truth, a process in which I am helped to discern what I have hidden from myself in overlays of activity. ...

I come to the ministry of silence and caring to experience whatever needs to happen not only for me but for each person heart-led there.

I come not knowing what will be asked of me or given, trusting that process and that Power which directs.

Shirley Ruth Parks Tweed, 1982

One morning, as we waited on God in silence, it struck me in a fresh way how Friends' practice of open worship can, in a sense, be an amazing balance of utter discipline and total freedom. In open worship, we deliberately choose to trust the Holy Spirit in practice as well as theory; we deliberately confront any temptation we might feel to intervene and shape the worship time correctly, or fill the awkward emptiness by reaching into our storehouse of Christian clichés, or gratify our own egos. We enter into a taste of the freedom we're promised as the daughters and sons of God.

Johan Maurer, 2013

Clearly, vocal ministry that we might dismiss as "popcorn" might actually be lifesaving to someone else—even if we never know about it. Thus, we are challenged by our faith to grant respect to ideas that we are tempted to label as meaningless or negative. Different individuals connect very differently with all that is holy. It may be through song, through awareness of the Earth's majesty, through the sharp taste of injustice, or through unexpected moments of compassion. Our Quaker practice of listening requires us to go deeper and learn how we might engage with the Life that dwells in places we would avoid.

Margery Post Abbott, 2014

Advices & Queries — Expectant Worship, Vocal Ministry

We prepare ourselves for meeting for worship in many ways—for example, through regular study, meditation and prayer—so that we come into meeting with open, expectant spirits seeking after Truth.

Search within yourself before rising to give vocal ministry—be aware of the physical and spiritual

promptings that underlie true vocal ministry.

If prompted by the Spirit to give vocal ministry, we speak audibly, clearly, simply, and as briefly as possible.

Listen to the ministry of others as if it is the voice of the Divine; seek the thoughts behind the words and hold the speaker in love.

After a message is given, Friends take time to ponder its meaning and to give space before rising to speak if we are so led.

Prepare the children of meeting to understand and experience the power of Quaker worship and vocal ministry.

- How do we prepare our hearts and minds for meeting for worship?
- Do we worship together in a way that honors and respects other Friends' beliefs? How do we listen to ministry that seems wrong or misguided?
- Do we meet for worship in expectant waiting for the promptings of the Divine Spirit? How do we carry this inspiration into our daily living?
- How do we take care that our vocal ministry is not lightly given? Do we offer vocal ministry under the leading of the Spirit, in the simplicity and sincerity of truth?
- As we listen, or as we speak, are we guided by the inward Light and sensitive to one another's needs? Are we careful not to speak at undue length or beyond our call?

Silence

The silence we value is a deep stillness of heart and mind. Friends dwell in silence on many occasions. We provide for silence at weddings and memorials and at meetings for the transaction of business. Committee meetings open with silence, and silent grace quiets the heart before meals. These shared silences foster unity and charity among us.

Daily retirement for a period of quiet can give an individual a sense of peace and self-control. Another form of silence, described by Friends as an "opportunity," bears a resemblance to a brief meeting for worship. It arises either by prearrangement or spontaneously, and may occur during visits to the homes of Friends or in unusual circumstances, such as on a park bench or in a hospital waiting room.

Similarly, a pause may occur during general conversation, when we are drawn into stillness until words emerge again from a place of deep refreshment. Active silence gathers us to walk in nature, or to perform quiet tasks together such as needlework, devotional reading, leaf-raking, or washing dishes. We are enriched by those among us whose lives embody and dwell in silence.

Silent retreats are times set aside for the refreshment of the spirit. Some Friends set aside an occasional weekend for an individual retreat in silence and solitude, for example when carrying weighty responsibilities. They may spend the time in prayer and reflection, visiting a garden or nature preserve, or yielding to the call to rest in quiet. Regular times for silence and retreat seem essential for spiritual growth.

Organized silent retreats call Friends together for a period of time. The retreat provides an occasion for silence, worship, and prayer away from the atmosphere in which committees and business are usually conducted. The Friends come with the expectation that in waiting together we may be gathered in worship in a way different from private meditation or a quiet weekend in the country. This more sustained period of retirement shared with other Friends can deepen our individual spiritual lives and the life we share together.

Quotations

Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.

1 Kings 19:11b-12

Be still, and know that I am God!

Psalms 46:10

Be still in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts, and then thou wilt feel the principle of God to turn thy mind to the Lord God, whereby thou wilt receive his strength and power from whence life comes, to allay all tempests, against blusterings and storms. That is it which molds into patience, into innocency, into soberness, into stillness, into stayedness, into quietness, up to God, with his power.

George Fox, 1658

Remember [that] it is a still voice that speaks to us in this day, and that it is not to be heard in the noises and hurries of the mind.

William Penn, 1691

We were taught by renewed experience to labor for an inward stillness, at no time to seek for words, but to live in the spirit of Truth, and utter that to the people which Truth opened in us.

John Woolman, 1747

Silence is the inaudible echo of the voices of God which is heard with the ears of the heart. It is not simply the absence of speech but a state of being. It is a universal language that speaks and comprehends all, contains all languages and all accents, tolerates and absorbs all. The paradox of the silence is that one can never say enough about it since it is inexhaustible by its very nature. ... Silence enables us to escape the prison of words. ... You may step into the pool of silence denuded and in pain but you will emerge from it restored in truth and peace.

Peter and Carole Fingesten, 1987

Might part of the vocation of the Society of Friends be to keep silence alive as a service for the world?

Kathryn Damiano, 2000

We need a vocabulary to describe the different textures of our corporate silence so we can better appreciate the experience. When we focus on the vocal ministry to evaluate the quality of our corporate worship we have looked to the fruits and missed the source. Attending to the quality of the corporate silence can disentangle the personal issues that arise in reacting to the vocal ministry of another. Sometimes our experience in the silence might be fragmented, distracted, or scattered, with our thoughts and focus jumping from one thing to another. Other times it might be a deep stillness where many of those present feel held to attention, perhaps like what happens in a yoga asana where the breath moves through us while the mind is quiet. Practice can help us come to that place of deep, focused attentiveness more readily.

Debbie Humphries, 2009

The discipline of silence and openness must be practiced over and over, day after

day, week after week, alone and with others. The Light nurtures a Seed in us but to grow, that Seed must be repeatedly exposed to the Light.

Robert Griswold, 2010

Advices & Queries — Silence

All of us need to find a way into silence which allows us to deepen our awareness of the Divine and to find the inward source of our strength.

Amid the busyness of daily living, we seek to return to the stillness which grounds us.

We value silence, not as an end but as a means toward the end, which is communication with the Divine and fellowship with one another.

We must not remain silent when something is wrong, or when we are led to speak out.

Seek to be formed by a practice of silence, as a foundation for a mindful life.

- Do we set aside times of quiet for openness to the Spirit?
- How do we bring stillness into our daily lives?
- Do we seek to be formed by a living silence? How are our lives shaped by the practice of stillness?
- Do our hearts dwell in the silence beneath everyday busyness?

Prayer

Prayer is spending intentional time in the presence of the Divine. Regular times of corporate and personal prayer build our relationship with the Living Christ. This enables deeper communion for us as individuals through each day and for the meeting when we gather in worship.

Prayer can take many forms, such as thanksgiving, praise, self-reflection, and asking God's support for others, which many contemporary Friends call "holding in the Light." If we ask for specific outcomes, the Divine Power may not answer as we wish. An alternative is to take the issue or the person(s) in our minds and hearts to the Light and leave them there.

Some practices that Friends have found effective are:

- Sinking into the Spirit and opening ourselves to the motion of Love;
- Reading and deep reflection upon diverse sources of spiritual wisdom;
- Harmonious meditation in response to the wonders of the natural world;
- Offering gratitude;
- Seeking spiritual and practical guidance;
- Recounting the day's events along with the feelings, inklings, and openings contained within them.

Friends have found ways to focus their attention on the holy by devoting particular times of the day to prayer or through making reminders for themselves within a day. Many Quaker families pause for a quiet time of reminder and remembrance before each meal together. Others reflect and connect with Spirit whenever they encounter particular situations, such as passing through a doorway, stopping at a traffic signal, or waiting for a computer to start. Prayer in the setting of meeting for worship may lead to a "gathered" meeting, where Friends unite in a deep contemplative connection with each other and the Divine.

Quotations

...Not my will but yours be done.

Pray without ceasing; give thanks in all circumstances....

1 Thessalonians 5:17-18a

I remember one morning it came into my mind that I would write a prayer of my own composing ...; which I did, though I could then scarcely join my letters, I had learnt so little a time to write. The prayer I wrote was something after this manner: "Lord, thou commandest the Israelites to offer a morning sacrifice, so I offer up the sacrifice of prayer, and desire to be preserved this day." The use of this prayer for a little while gave me some ease. I soon quite left my prayer books, and used to write prayers according to my several occasions. The second that I wrote was for the assurance of the pardon of my sins.

Mary Penington (1616–1682)

One of these deep constructive energies of life is prayer. It is a way of life that is as old as the human race is, and it is as difficult to "explain" as is our joy over love and beauty. It came into power in man's early life and it has persisted through all the stages of it because it has proved to be essential to spiritual health and growth and life-advance. Like all other great springs of life, it has sometimes been turned to cheap ends and brought down to low levels, but on the whole it has been a pretty steady uplifting power in the long story of human progress. The only way we could completely understand it would be to understand the eternal nature of God and man. Then we should no doubt comprehend why he and we seek one another and why we are unsatisfied until we mutually find one another.

Rufus Jones, 1931

But to establish the practice of the presence of God so that it becomes as natural as breathing—that requires a rigorous apprenticeship. When I think about it now it sounds silly, but I resorted to some trivial and seemingly ridiculous ways of keeping myself reminded. For instance, I fastened a large safety pin to the front of my dress and I carried a button in my pocket that I felt every time I reached in to find a pencil or a handkerchief.

Josephine Duveneck, 1978

*I read that I was supposed to make 'a place for inward retirement and waiting upon God' in my daily life, as the *Queries* in those days expressed it.... At last I began to realise, first that I needed some kind of inner peace or inward retirement, or whatever name it might be called by; and then that these apparently stuffy old Friends were really talking sense. If I studied what they were trying to tell me, I might possibly find that the 'place of inward retirement' was not a place I had to go to, it was there all the time. I could know the 'place of inward retirement' wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, and find the spiritual refreshment for which, knowingly or unknowingly, I was longing, and hear the voice of God in my heart. Thus I began to realise that prayer was not a formality, or an obligation, it was a place which was there all the time and always available.*

Elfrida Vipont Foulds, 1983

Has your heart ever come so close to bursting from joy—at the birth of the child or the beauty of a sunset, perhaps—that your whole being expanded with thankfulness? If so, your body was speaking a prayer of adoration, even if you uttered not a word. Have you ever been so passionately concerned for the welfare of one or more others—a deeply depressed loved one or refugees rejected by our government,

perhaps—that you could hardly eat or sleep? If so, you were praying without ceasing.
Carol Conti-Entin, 1989

There is a healing that comes through prayer in its various forms, through the laying on of hands, through music and dance, painting and colour, through communication with and understanding of the world of nature and through friendship.
Jim Pym, 1990

We often come to prayer as a last resort. Why? Our Quaker heritage is rich with examples of positive response to burdens and concerns through prayer. In our tradition, the Spirit is always invited to participate in seeking solutions and finding inner and outer peace. The need for healing is universal; faith and the practice of prayer, in the manner of Friends, is a gift. We need to unwrap it and use it generously.
Susan Carnahan, 1996

Contrary to a lot of opinion, there is no “best” way to pray. The best way to pray is as the Spirit is prompting or leading you at the time. Or, as Dom John Chapman is rumored to have said, “Pray as you can, not as you can’t.” It’s probably best to make time in your daily time of retirement to enter intentionally into whichever form of prayer is yours at the present—as well as to be sensitive and open to the moments of prayer that come upon you unexpectedly in the course of your days.
Patricia Loring, 1997

Count the stars in the sky; that is how many ways there are to pray.
Mary Jo Williams, 2007

We can bring ourselves again and again to the Light that reveals, confronts, and heals all that obscures the truth within us, and we can do this with a steady commitment that refuses to allow prayer to become merely a comforting retreat. The key is honesty, not piety, and a willingness not to get hung up on problems of belief. I asked the class to suspend disbelief, to take the love of God as a working hypothesis, and then to submit to prayer’s alchemy. Given that so much of what passes for prayer is merely the rehearsal of an ideology, it is not surprising that so many intelligent people reject it. But Quakerism insists that belief finds its ground and substance in direct experience. To come to that experience one must bring one’s whole being, mind, heart, and body to an attitude of anticipation, intense listening, fierce engagement, and an insistent desire to be re-formed in the Creative Presence.
Daniel Snyder, 2008

Advices & Queries — Prayer

In prayer, Friends find humility and courage, guidance and strength for our daily lives.

Prayer requires attention.

Any form of prayer can open our hearts to God. Frequent and regular prayer leads us to become faithful in our lives.

- Do we set aside times of quiet for openness to the Spirit? How do we come to know an inward stillness amid the activities of daily life?
- Do we encourage in ourselves and in others a habit of returning to the Source throughout each day?
- Are we open to new Light, from whatever source it may come?
- How do we give communal attention to prayer, giving voice to joys and needs that Friends

feel?

- How does our personal prayer life enrich meeting for worship?

Discernment

A community that emphasizes the present availability of divine guidance must take discernment seriously. Discernment is sorting, careful listening and recognizing. Discernment offers tools to distinguish between an interior leading from God and an impulse whose origin is less worthy....

Michael Birkel, 2004

Friends make decisions in the faith that there is one divine Spirit which is accessible to everyone and that when we follow the Light of Truth within, we find unity and right action. When we are faithful in discernment we become more patient, listen more carefully, feel stronger bonds of community, and are more sensitive to divine nudges. We find ourselves transformed and aligned with the Spirit.

Quaker discernment is a spiritual discipline that we practice in meeting for business, in committee work, in specially-constituted clearness and support committees, and in personal choices made every day.

Meeting for Business and Other Community Decision-Making. Conducting business on the basis of discernment is central to the existence of a Friends meeting. The Quaker way of living and working together can create and preserve a sense of fellowship in the meeting. It is the way the community comes together to do its right work under the guidance of the Light.

Whether in smaller groups or in the full meeting for business, discernment works best when Friends are fully attending to the Presence. The commitment to searching for unity depends upon mutual trust, implies a willingness to labor and to submit to the leadings of the Spirit, and increases as members grow in Love.

Quakers with a decision to make will not take a vote but will enter into worshipful discussion. All voices are heard and valued as the group seeks to recognize and follow God's direction. Observers may describe Quaker decision making as working by consensus instead of majority rule. Consensus, a concept from the secular world, is a good way to find a decision that is generally acceptable to most people involved, but it is not what Quaker meetings for business are really reaching for. The question is not "What do we want to do?" but rather "What do Truth and Love require of us?" A meeting for discernment strives to understand the divine will for this group of Friends at this time, as manifested by the sense of the meeting. Friends know the sense of the meeting by the collective internal harmony it brings, and acknowledge it in grateful worship. Sometimes discernment includes *not* making a decision because the group cannot find unity. Teaching the discipline of discernment to children and newcomers in the meeting can be particularly challenging and rewarding.

Other Occasions for Community Discernment. Regular committee work and other service to the meeting offer many opportunities to practice discernment and decision making, as do support groups and study groups. As in a meeting for business, all such occasions begin and end in silent worship.

Clearness Committees. From early times, Friends have appointed small groups to work with potential new members or with couples requesting marriage under the care of the meeting to test whether the way is "clear"—meaning that there are no impediments or unresolved issues—before the matter comes before the meeting for business. Gradually these clearness committees came to operate as pastoral counseling before approval of marriage or membership. (See Chapters 9 and 10, "Membership" and "Marriage and Committed Relationships.") This existing structure has expanded and Friends now use clearness committees for other purposes, for example in making a life-changing

decision or in testing a leading. Seeking clearness in this way is a spiritual discipline both for the Friend making the decision or testing the leading and for those serving on the committee. Committee members listen deeply and ask open-ended questions to help the seeker focus and turn to the Inner Guide for direction, without offering their own advice or solutions.

Other Individual Discernment. Spirit-led discernment is an ongoing discipline which Friends practice individually in many aspects of our lives, whether in service to the meeting or in our homes, workplaces, and communities. Quiet, centered discernment helps us to distinguish the right course among the many distractions, temptations, mixed messages, and conflicting choices of daily life.

See also “Friends Method of Reaching Decisions” and “Clearness and Other Care Committees” in Chapter 5, “The Monthly Meeting.”

Quotations

*If you indeed cry out for insight,
and raise your voice for understanding;
If you seek it like silver,
and search for it as for hidden treasures—
Then you will understand the fear of the Lord
and find the knowledge of God.
For the Lord gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.*

...
*Then you will understand righteousness and justice
and equity, every good path;
For wisdom will come into your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
Prudence will watch over you,
and understanding will guard you.*

Proverbs 2:3-6; 9-11

Being orderly come together, not to spend time with needless, unnecessary and fruitless discourses; but to proceed in the wisdom of God not in the way of the world, as a worldly assembly of men, by hot contests, by seeking to outspoke and overreach one another in discourse as if it were controversy between party and party of men, or two sides violently striving for dominion, not fellowship of God, in gravity, patience, meekness, in unity and concord, submitting one to another in lowliness of heart, and in the holy Spirit of truth and righteousness....

Edward Burrough, 1662

The spirit of worship is essential to that type of business meeting in which the group endeavors to act as a unit.... To discover what we really want as compared with what at first we think we want, we must go below the surface of self-centered desires.... To will what God wills is ... to will what we ourselves really want.

Howard Brinton, 1952

[I]t is the corporate Truth or Light for which Friends labor together, not the proof or justification of the rightness of any particular position.

Nancy Springer, 1980

Our task is not to find a decision of which we all approve, but the decision which is in unity with the Holy Spirit. We have arrived at the correct decision not when there is consensus or effective unanimity, but when the Spirit within us witnesses that the decision is correct.

Lloyd Lee Wilson, 1993

In seeking sense of the meeting, we open ourselves to being guided to a perfect resolution in Light, to a place where we sit in unity in the collective inward Presence. Through consensus we decide it; through sense of the meeting we turn it over, allowing it to be decided. "Reaching consensus is a secular process," says a Friend. "In sense of the meeting God gets a voice."

Barry Morley, 1993

I can count on one hand the number of times in my life when I have experienced what I would consider to be a true leading of the Spirit. In each case, the leadings have been characterized by a compulsion to act, fears that I would not be able to live up to what was being required of me, and a deeper sense that I wasn't being asked to do this entirely on my own strength. In any case, I knew that a decision not to act upon my conscience would be like a small death, a failure to allow myself to grow and discover in myself new strengths and courage.

Ruth Walmsley, 1997

In a "listening spirituality" ... our individual and corporate ability to discern, distinguish, or sift Divine Guidance from other promptings is critical. Rather than drawing a dualistic, yes/no distinction between good and evil, Quaker spirituality demands of us a commitment to a much more subtle and strenuous effort to discriminate movements of the Spirit among the complex motivations, forces and dimensions of experience within and around us.

Patricia Loring, 1999

Through the practice of unity, Friends seek a mystical experience in the last place most people would look for one—a business meeting.

Mary Klein, 2008

Perhaps the most outstanding aspect of Meeting for Business is its atmosphere, which one word describes, respect. Quakers respect one another. They are also open to each other and are unusually humble. Being non-violent they do not shout each other down or indulge in sarcastic remarks. In part, their respect for each other arises because of their common belief that everyone has the Light within. In part it comes because Quakers are wary of claiming truth for themselves, although they are willing to acknowledge their small piece of it. Moreover, they enter Meeting for Business with the belief that all are seeking the best solution to whatever problems confront them and that the group can arrive at a best solution through worshipping and working together.

Patricia Williams, 2008

This brings me to discernment, the skill of being able to recognize what is truly damaging and needs to be changed and sort that out from what is simply uncomfortable or outside our experience. George Fox was adamant about knowing one's own inner state so that we can see when we are the problem—today we would talk about not projecting our own fears and other problems onto the situation around us. Fear is the strongest inner headwind in my life and it often interferes with my ability to act. It is up to each person to be able to name what is true for them and find ways to warn themselves when such winds arise.

Margery Post Abbott, 2016

Advices & Queries — Discernment

Seeking and waiting for Truth's leadings is a discipline through which all can grow in patience, unity, and love. Decisions under the guidance of the Spirit knit the loving community together.

We remain patient and wait upon God as long as needed for a decision to emerge which clearly recommends itself as the right one.

We guard against contentiousness, obstinacy, and love of control and power. We remember that our views, however fondly cherished, may be wrong.

We season our decisions and test our leadings with patience and integrity. We take care to stay within our leadings, lest we outrun our Guide.

Friends approach meeting for business, committee meetings, and other occasions for group discernment with trust that the Holy Spirit will lead us to unity and right action. Unity is always possible because the same Light of Truth shines in some measure in every human heart. Communal discernment takes place in a context of worship as those present seek divine guidance.

Friends expect unity as the outcome, not as the starting point, of communal discernment. We proceed in the peaceable spirit of the light of Truth, with forbearance and warm affection for one another. Light will be shed on matters from many angles. We trust that as Truth is spoken, its power cannot be resisted.

We express our views but refrain from pressing them unduly. It is less important for any individual to be heard than it is for Truth to be given voice.

Group discernment and the search for unity may require us to accept with good grace a decision of the meeting we do not entirely agree with.

Contributing to the meeting's discernment is a responsibility of membership. This includes attending meetings for business and being faithful in the service of the meeting's affairs.

- Do we patiently seek divine guidance to discern the right course of action?
- How do we test our leadings? Do we patiently and prayerfully seek clearness in the Light? Do we offer spiritual aid for others who are seeking clearness?
- When our own way is unclear, do we seek the counsel of others in our meeting?
- What can we do to help others recognize, temper, and strengthen their leadings?
- Do we hold our meetings for business in the spirit of worship, love, and understanding? How are we seeking God's Truth together in community?
- Do we regularly take part in meetings for business? Do we uphold the meeting in prayer when we cannot be present?
- Do we come into meeting for worship for business prepared to be changed? Are we ready to let go of our individual thoughts and wishes and let the Holy Spirit lead the meeting to unity?
- As difficult problems arise, are we careful to meet them in a spirit of love and humility, with minds open for creative solutions? How do we avoid taking sides and forming factions?
- Do we avoid the pressure of time, neither unnecessarily prolonging nor unduly curtailing full consideration?
- Are we aware that we speak through inaction as well as action?

Ministry

Ministry is a motion of Love and a response to both internal and external needs. We are all called to ministry, and there are many occasions when we can minister to one another in the Life and Light.

Ministry takes many forms. One of the most visible is vocal ministry in our meetings for worship. (See “Expectant Worship, Vocal Ministry” above.) Our participation in the life of our meeting may provide us other opportunities to minister. (See “Participation in the Life of the Meeting” below.) We may be called to minister through our work with wider Quaker organizations.

Ministry arises through recognizing gifts in others. This may occur informally in our daily conversations with each other. The gifts may also be recognized through the discernment of our meeting, perhaps by the nominating committee. As ministers we are humble and open enough to embrace opportunities for service—that is, we “keep low,” in the old Quaker phrase.

There are also ministries of caring, support, and counsel that quietly and persistently work among us. These seek to meet the physical, social, and spiritual needs we all have and lead to deepening our mutual life in the Spirit. Inviting someone to lunch after meeting, making a friendly phone call, regularly visiting a Friend descending into dementia, opening our home to someone recovering from surgery, arriving before meeting for worship to open the meeting house and turn on the heat in preparation for worship: all are occasions of ministry.

We may be called by love to any number of duties. When a duty is performed through love, it is a ministry.

There is also ministry through the books, pamphlets, and periodicals that Friends publish; these publications can travel to places few might be able to visit. More than one person has come into our Society through the printed word. Likewise the websites and blogs we create, however singular they appear, are forms of ministry to the world and to each other.

Lastly, there is a continuing ministry in our deportment in daily life, how we live out our testimonies in the world. Each one of us is a witness to Truth, found in Love, which is the fundamental ministry.

See also “Friends in Ministry” in Chapter 5, “The Monthly Meeting.”

Quotations

True ministry is not goal-oriented. True ministry is a state of servanthood, for that is the root meaning of the word to minister: “to serve”. Success or failure in ministry is judged by God, not by human beings, and the basis of God's judgment is whether we have been faithful in the process of serving God and our fellow human beings, not on what the outcomes of that service have been.

Lloyd Lee Wilson, 1996

A concern for the ministry is a calling to be intentionally available to put our experience of the divine light and life at the disposal of others, for their refreshment and encouragement. If we accept the calling, then it is a commitment to redouble our inward watchfulness, so that we grow in faithfulness, and grow in our ability to serve. As we gain more of this inward experience, we find an increase in the clarity with which we are able to desire, pray for, serve, and rejoice at, the growth of the love to God and neighbor as it appears in anyone. This in turn feeds the life of the group, and invites others to come and see.

Brian Drayton, 2006

Again and again we [are] given the message that things will go wrong, someone will be an obstacle, others won't do as we hoped, we will at times fail. Yet in living our ministry, whatever it might be, we are given strength and we are asked to persist and find a way. If the support we need is not obvious, we might have to help others find the gift of nurture. If someone objects to our actions, we might need to listen them into a place where both might hear a way forward. Our own pains and trauma are

part of who we are. In the Light we may learn ways that these pains might be an aid rather than an obstacle to our work and our relationships. Generosity and patience are essential.

Margery Post Abbott, 2009

For Quakers, “ministry” is almost synonymous with “service,” but with the added sense that ministry is service that is done under God’s guidance.

Mathilda Navias, 2012

Advices & Queries — Ministry

Friends seek to discover the gifts and discern the service to which we are called. In making life choices, we consider ways that offer the fullest opportunity to develop our individual abilities and contribute to the wider community while providing for ourselves and our families.

In daily work, we seek to manifest a spirit of justice and understanding, thus giving a living witness to the Truth.

Friends recognize that we are given gifts for the use of the meeting and the world. The meeting seeks to recognize and nurture the use of those gifts.

Remember that our simple presence can be a ministry—at a bedside or at a protest.

- Are we careful to wait for and move under the leading of the Spirit in the exercise of our gifts?
- How do we minister to each other, offering and receiving advice and support in a spirit of love and humility?
- Do we hold with tenderness each of the varieties of ministry exercised among us?
- When our ministry involves social and political action, how does it stay grounded in Truth and Love?
- How does our meeting nurture and support calls to service?

Participation in the Life of the Meeting

Our Religious Society of Friends is enriched when all members and attenders take part to the greatest measure of their gifts. The working of the Spirit in our lives as Friends in community can be seen in many ways: through prophetic ministry, witness in the world, loving care for each other, conscientious attention to committee work, and the examples provided by lives lived in the Light. Quaker organizations and service groups offer opportunities for participation in the Religious Society of Friends as a whole.

The life of the meeting depends upon the varied gifts and leadings of all members and attenders. Awareness of the Presence in our lives connects us to each other, and over time we are known by the people with whom we gather. As we worship, work, and socialize together, we form friendships that strengthen our communities locally and in the wider Quaker world. A meeting grows as it includes new Friends and attenders of many ethnicities, social classes, backgrounds, political beliefs, and theologies. We offer informal advice and counsel to one another, thus gaining skills and experience that enrich our lives outside the Religious Society of Friends.

In addition, the health of the meeting depends upon practical contributions from everyone. Within meetings, the Nominating and Finance Committees point out needs and suggest ways for individuals to participate and contribute. Individual Friends discern what financial contributions we can make and what other support we are led to offer. Financial support is a vital component in the life of the monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings.

Quotations

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

1 Corinthians 12:4-10

For as in one body we have many members, and not all members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Romans 12:4-8

Not by strength of arguments or by a particular disquisition of each doctrine and convincement of my understanding thereby, came I to receive and bear witness of the Truth, but by being secretly reached by the Life. For when I came into the silent assemblies of God's people, I felt a secret power among them which touched my heart; and as I gave way unto it I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up and so I became thus knit and united unto them, hungering more and more after the increase of this power and life, whereby I might feel myself perfectly redeemed.

Robert Barclay, 1676

The way to call anyone into fellowship with us is not to offer them service, which is likely to arouse the resistance of their pride, but to ask service of them.

Simeon Shitemi, 1991

When I was sixteen and first came to Quakers, I felt so much that I kept coming back. And I began to understand that Quakerism is cumulative. The more you enter into the silence and the stillness, the more that you ask to be washed in the Light, the more that you participate, the more you begin to understand that there is ground opening up beneath you that is larger and deeper than you first imagined.

John Calvi, 2009

Advices & Queries — Participation in the Life of the Meeting

When meeting for worship holds a central place in our life, regular and punctual attendance follows. Friends hold in the Light those who are unable to participate fully in the life of the meeting.

We contribute to the life of the meeting in many ways: attending meeting for worship for business, committee service, offering and accepting spiritual support, and praying for the spiritual strength and health of the meeting. Contributing our time and resources makes our love visible.

Friends are encouraged to consider what gifts of service we are led to provide and how we may grow through this service. We also uphold others in their service.

We consider carefully the needs of our local meetings and wider Quaker work and the level of financial support we can bring to them.

We encourage attenders to become acquainted with Friends ways and to participate in the meeting community. We encourage attenders to apply for membership when it is evident that the meeting has

become their spiritual home.

- Do we each take an active part in the life of our meeting? In what ways do we grow by participating in the life of the meeting?
- How has our group grown together through its activities? Do we bring together groups across generations in a loving community?
- Do we provide youth with responsible opportunities and encouragement to participate in meeting life and structure?
- Do we express our skills and gifts in service to the meeting and to the Spirit? Do we recognize and support others in doing so?
- Do we visit one another in our homes, and keep in touch with distant members?
- How do we welcome and involve newcomers?
- How do we encourage attenders from all ethnicities, backgrounds, and faith perspectives to share in the life of the meeting? Do we urge them to consider membership when they are ready?
- How does God speak to each of us through relationship to the meeting?

Religious Education and Study

The primary way of imparting our Quaker testimonies—the fruits of the Spirit—is by living and acting faithfully in our homes, meetings, and communities. Friends have long recognized that education, particularly education that promotes spiritual growth, enhances the inward transforming experience. This brings us into closer harmony with the Spirit and enables us to live faithfully as Quakers. Friends hold that everyone has access to the Inner Light, and that all can benefit from education. At the same time we recognize that education itself does not necessarily lead to a deeper spiritual sensitivity.

Monthly meetings have a responsibility to bring the children and adults under their care into full participation in the life of the Meeting and into an understanding of the faith and practices of the Religious Society of Friends.

Children’s Religious Education. As individuals and families we show our children and each other that our search for Truth involves every aspect of life, and that the Truth may be found in many religions and spiritual traditions. Ideally, all members of meeting joyfully participate, as they are led, in the spiritual education and formation of the meeting’s young people. Many adolescent and young adult Friends find spiritual nurture in regional Quaker communities. These give young Friends a chance to learn Quaker practice and experience unconditional love.

Adult Religious Education. Meetings provide many ways for Friends to learn and grow spiritually throughout our lives. These include:

- Opportunities that help us live out our Quaker faith and practice, including the testimonies;
- Study and discussion of Quaker writings, the Bible, and other religious and spiritual literature;
- Service projects;
- Spiritual sharing groups;
- Worship sharing;
- Programs offered by regional meetings and by other Friends organizations;
- Online resources (see Bibliography and www.npym.org for suggestions)

Quotations

[T]he Bible is a training school in discrimination among alternatives. One of the most sobering facts is that it is not on the whole a peaceful book—I mean a book of peace of mind. The Bible is the deposit of a long series of controversies between rival views of religion. The sobering thing is that in nearly every case the people shown by the Bible to be wrong had every reason to think they were in the right, and like us they did so. Complacent orthodoxy is the recurrent villain in the story from first to last and the hero is the challenger, like Job, the prophets, Jesus, and Paul.

Henry Cadbury, 1953

It makes me sad when I hear discussions about not introducing children to “God” until they’re old enough to understand. I grew into the Lord’s Prayer, and I am still growing into it. All religious language, all devotional books, particularly the Bible, provide growing room for young minds and spirits. Because they have sometimes been used as straitjackets by adults who did not understand, does not mean that they are straitjackets.

Elise Boulding, 1975

I feel peace education is about teaching children to discover that they have the power to change things they see are wrong and developing the imagination to find alternative responses to conflict. This is not an objective for a course called ‘Peace’ on the timetable. It must permeate all our teaching. For we cannot teach one thing and act another. If we teach children to feel their own power we must be ready for them to criticize the [educators themselves]. In order to survive we must begin to teach them to challenge authority, our own included.

Janet Gilbraith, 1986

Our experience [is] that God speaks to and works through children as well as adults. Religious education needs to respect, affirm and value children’s insights.

Janet Scott, 1988

To find guidance from the Bible, I first had to learn how to wrestle and argue with it. To take it seriously enough to wrestle with it, I also had to learn to honor it, listening attentively to what its ancient voices actually say in their own way. The faithful must argue for justice, as Abraham and Job did, even against God Himself. It’s certainly no breach of the prophetic faith to argue with the Bible wherever it promotes what we see as injustice. Rather, anyone who fails to argue with the Bible on behalf of the covenant isn’t taking the Bible seriously.

Jim Corbett, 1991

For guidance in word and deed, we look first to the Spirit as revealed in ourselves and in others. We recognize as did George Fox that education in itself does not necessarily lead to a deeper spiritual sensitivity and that there are many who lack extensive formal education yet who bring pure water from the spiritual springs of life. But we also know from experience that the perspective provided by sound education, which includes the development of skills in listening and communicating, helps us to identify what is faithful to the Light in our own leadings, to interpret and communicate those leadings, and to weigh the leadings of others.

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 2007

Evidently the Bible has no magical power to require the most life-giving interpretations or prevent its own misuse. Maybe this is one way to state the lesson for Christian leaders in drawing upon biblical authority: beware of any institutional agenda we bring to biblical interpretation. Let the Bible express and serve the

promises of God, not the political priorities of humans.

Johan Maurer, 2012

I read the Bible the same way that I listen to messages in meeting for worship: I start with the assumption that the message was inspired by the Spirit, but with the understanding that it may not be for me that day. So I read the Bible, listen for the voice of God, pay attention to what is for me at that time, and let go of anything that is not.

Ashley Wilcox, 2012

Advices & Queries — Religious Education and Study

Friends study and learn throughout our lives in order to understand and deepen our experience of Truth and our Inner Teacher.

As individuals and families we make manifest our search for Truth in every aspect of life, and recognize that Truth may be found in many religions and spiritual practices. Friends participate, as they are led, in the spiritual education and formation of the meeting's young people.

As we learn together, we spiritually nurture each other according to our gifts and leadings, participate more fully in our meetings, and deepen our understanding of the beliefs and practices of the Religious Society of Friends.

- Do we help to develop the spiritual lives of all of our members, attenders, and children?
- Do we all take part in educating ourselves about the history and heritage of Friends?
- Do we prepare members and children for worship and for a way of life consistent with the Friends principles? How do we teach Quaker worship and discernment and their importance to the good order of our meeting community?
- Do we share our faith and spiritual journeys, as well as listen to and learn from others? Do we encourage such sharing within our families and meeting communities?

Creativity

The creative impulse is part of being human, a gift from the Holy Spirit, and a way of finding a deep connection with our Creator. Friends have long appreciated the strong creative element in all aspects of practical life, such as cooking, gardening, and woodworking, and have from early days embraced invention and innovation in engineering, science, and business.

Early Quakers disapproved of attending plays, playing or listening to music, dancing, and other aspects of the fine arts. These activities were understood to alienate the mind from the counsel of divine wisdom and to foster debauchery and wickedness.

After this long era of suspicion, the door opened during the past century to Friends' appreciation of the fine and performing arts as well. Nowadays we have among us cellists and watercolorists and novelists, to name a few of the arts practiced by Friends. We acknowledge that the searching heart can express itself in many forms. Spirit-led creative activity is a path into the Light, not a distraction or an obstruction from a centered life. Creativity can be a form of worship and witness, a ministry and a calling, a way of speaking out of the silence. Like other spiritual disciplines, creative expression carries the potential for spiritual transformation.

Quotations

Praise the Lord!

Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the faithful.

...

Let them praise his name with dancing,

Making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.

Psalm 149:1, 3

Let us beware of this, of separating or looking upon ourselves to be more holy, than in deed and in truth we are.... But Christ Jesus saith, that we must take no thought what we shall eat, or what we shall drink, or what we shall put on; but bids us consider the lilies how they grow in more royalty than Solomon. But contrary to this, they say we must look at no colours, nor make anything that is changeable colours as the hills are, nor sell them nor wear them. But we must be all in one dress, and one colour. This is a silly poor Gospel. It is more fit for us to be covered with God's eternal spirit, and clothed with his eternal Light, which leads us and guides us into righteousness and to live righteously and justly and holily in this present evil world.

Margaret Fell, 1700

Art has survived all cataclysms; it is imperishable because it is of the Spirit and it renews itself in constant creative giving.... Man creating order, form and meaning out of the raw material of thought, color and sound—the poet, the artist, the composer—wages his endless battle for perfection, for immortality, for truth and beauty. These fragile creations, wrought by mind, heart and hand, have left their mark on this earth. They will still be there long after the empires of kings and conquerors have gone to ruin and oblivion.

Fritz Eichenberg, 1952

I feel that the creation of poetry is not unlike the upsurging of words in a Quaker meeting. First, heart and mind must be prepared—and the emotional and mental preparation for art is something which few non-artists realize. Then there is the waiting, perhaps for months, because poetry cannot be forced: it is an act of imagination, not of will ... and then at last comes the moment of certainty, accompanied usually by some physical action, and the words begin to flow.

Clive Sansom, 1965

Quakers have not been handicapped in their relation to art because they don't have "religious" art in their Meeting Houses. Their custom may have been an enormous advantage: it has kept the general run of bad "religious" art out of the worship experience. I strongly favor the traditional simplicity of the Meeting House. By temperament each person needs to find his own spiritual relatives in the world of visual arts, and his needs change as he grows. Meetings can help their members come to recognize this need.

Dorothea Blom, 1974

The Holy Spirit can indeed restore us to health (or stimulate us to work well) through the medium of music as well as prayer or antibiotics! And why, indeed, should I be surprised that this is so? Creativity is the gift that we were given on the eighth day of creation. In naming and re-making the world we are co-workers with God, and whether we are making a garden or a meal, a painting or a piece of furniture or a computer program, we are sharing in an ongoing act of creation through which the world is constantly re-made.

Jo Farrow, 1994

In the way I view the world and my work, creation is a gift and a blessing. It comes from the Life-Giver, so our response as creators is to create something that is life-giving.

Linda Segar, 1999

We often think of creativity as the solitary expression of our inmost soul, but many of the creations which have made our Quaker community grow in the last few years have been shared enterprises which no one person could produce, and we have grown as we have made them together.... In order to create together, we gladly hand over our precious autonomy to the authority of the group, the authority of the event, the Clerk, the conductor, or skilled peacemaker, and we are prepared to be part of the group. We are learning together to use the disciplines and language of music and painting and theatre; this recreates our communities and simultaneously brings us more deeply into the ground of all this creativity, the silence and words of God.

Beth Allen, 2007

Creativity has become a spiritual practice, and my spiritual practice has become the creative process. These have become one. My work is about preparing the ground and then receiving and amplifying what comes. There is a transformation for us spiritually as we receive it.

Anna Fritz, 2016

Advices & Queries — Creativity

Friends exercise our creative gifts as spiritual disciplines that require time, focus, patience, trust, love, and openness to the Spirit. We are encouraged to develop and exercise them with awe and gratitude under the leading of that Spirit.

We acknowledge and cherish the creativity found in our meetings.

We remain aware of the spiritual danger of idolizing or belittling artistic gifts or accomplishments, whether our own or others'.

- Do we exercise our creativity in humility and gratitude to the Creator who makes our work possible? Do we recognize creation as a sacred act and creative ability as a gift from God?
- Do we use our creative gifts to bring beauty, healing, and joy into others' lives and to reflect the glory of creation?
- Within our meeting communities, do we recognize and encourage each other in the exercise of creative gifts?
- In a culture that glorifies individual achievements, do we hold our own creations lightly?

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