

Introduction

Faith and Practice is the name given to a reference book compiled by each yearly meeting that contains the collective wisdom of the community, including queries and guidelines intended to support individual and corporate faithful living.

Catherine Whitmire, 2007

Historically, as Friends conducted their business and wrote down their decisions, they noted points where they were clearly and consistently able to see how to proceed. These records did not become inflexible rules, but were revised as needed in new circumstances and following new Guidance. Over the years, Friends created documents that served both as records and as guides. They often called such a document a “book of discipline.”

The word “discipline” in this context has two meanings. The first relates to how one lives a religious or spiritual life by following one’s inner leadings and adhering to practices or teachings to which one is committed. It was in this sense of loyalty and commitment that Jesus’s followers were known as his Disciples.

The second meaning relates to the conduct of the affairs of the religious body, i.e., corporate rather than individual discipleship. Such discipline describes the system of order by which the religious body seeks to remain true to its principles and to help its adherents remain true. It is a system of order chosen as a conscious alternative to the religious anarchy that can occur when impulse is the basis of decision and individuals or groups move on their own tangents without benefit of the discoveries and procedures that have been tested over time.

A Quaker book of discipline, also called *Faith and Practice*, reflects both of these meanings as it sets forth the attitudes and experiences of Friends as guideposts to be considered prayerfully and carefully, and the practices which Friends meetings have tested and revised over the years. Each edition reflects the attitudes, the experiences, and the unique approach to Quaker life of a particular body of Friends at a particular time. Yearly meetings typically revise their books of discipline every generation.

In 1656 the elders of the Meeting at Balby in Yorkshire, England, drafted a collection of advices to which they added a postscript:

Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all, with the measure of light which is pure and holy, may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.

Modern Friends still aspire to use *Faith and Practice* with this attitude in mind. In her 94th year, Jane Palen Rushmore spoke similarly, but in a different metaphor:

The teachings of our Quaker forefathers were intended to be landmarks, not campsites.

About this Edition of NPYM's *Faith and Practice*

The *Faith and Practice* of North Pacific Yearly Meeting (NPYM) is an evolving document. This third edition reflects the growing experience of NPYM Friends as we seek to follow the Inner Light. Members and attenders are urged to read and use the book in that Light.

The intent of the book is to be *descriptive*, not *prescriptive*. The Faith & Practice Committee took pains to make the tone of this edition of the NPYM *Faith and Practice* less directive than it had been. While it is still intended as a reference for “what do we do when—?” the book now notes a range of possibilities when different meetings have different practices around a given issue.

Readers familiar with earlier editions will notice that this edition puts topics in a different order. The Faith & Practice Committee used two general organizing principles:

1. To the extent possible, put everything about one topic in one place;
2. Order the topics generally “inward to outward.” Part I groups material first by spiritual disciplines that Friends use to come closer to the divine Center, then by outward manifestations of an inwardly transformed life which are further grouped around our main testimonies. Part II focuses on corporate practices, starting with the basic unit of the monthly meeting.

This edition includes new topics requested by NPYM Friends, such as sections on silence, ministry, and creativity in Chapter 3, “Friends Spiritual Disciplines,” and expanded material on clearness and support committees, conflict within meetings, leadership, and challenges in pastoral care in Chapter 5, “The Monthly Meeting.”

Quotations. Unless otherwise noted, this *Faith and Practice* quotes from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. The Faith & Practice Committee chose this translation for readability and inclusive language. There are many Bible translations and paraphrases available, and Friends are encouraged to read widely among them.

Quotations in this *Faith and Practice* are from Scripture or from Quaker sources. NPYM Friends find inspiration from a multitude of faith traditions and spiritual practices, and it would be impossible to quote from all of them even-handedly in these pages.

Gender Pronouns. Reflecting our yearly meeting’s rising awareness of gender fluidity and inclusion, this edition of the NPYM *Faith and Practice* uses “they” in the usual plural sense and also in a singular sense when necessary to refer to an individual without any assumption about that individual’s gender identity. That is, where readers might expect to see “a clerk decides when he or she will...” they will instead see either “clerks decide when they will...” or “a clerk decides when they will...”

Diverse and Inclusive Language. This book of discipline of North Pacific Yearly Meeting reflects the range of spiritual disciplines, faiths, and practices that are drawn upon by those in this one group, one of many in the Religious Society of Friends.

Friends are diverse in spiritual experience, with perhaps as many varieties of spirituality as there are Friends. In an effort to be respectful of each other, and to avoid conflict, we sometimes avoid talking about our spiritual experiences with other Friends. We may avoid words that we think may offend others, or we may expect others to avoid certain terminology so as not to feel offended ourselves. In either case we stifle our voices and the depth of our worship, and limit the vitality of our meetings.

Friends in our yearly meeting use many words and phrases to describe the divine life and power at the heart of the universe, including the Divine Principle, Energy, the Eternal, God, the Ground of all Being, the Holy Spirit, the Infinite, the Inward (or Inner) Light, the Light of Christ, the Living God,

Lord, Presence, the Seed, the Source, Spirit, Truth, the Word. All such terms are weak attempts to convey the inexpressible.

Appreciating this spiritual diversity and acknowledging the inadequacy of words, this *Faith and Practice* uses a variety of terms to indicate the object of our reverence. In reading this book, Friends may find themselves comforted or challenged by a particular name for the Divine. Readers can be warned—or reassured—that a different surprise can be found a few pages farther on. With the diversity of readers inside and outside our yearly meeting, it would be impractical to pursue exact equality in the language. The goal is not that *Faith and Practice* conform to every reader’s notions of what “should be,” but that all of us are able to see ourselves in the book.

The Inward Light is a universal light given to all ..., religious consciousness itself being basically the same wherever it is found. Our difficulties come when we try to express it. We cannot express; we can only experience God. Therefore we must always remember tolerance, humility, and tenderness with others whose ways and views may differ from ours.

Pacific Yearly Meeting, 1953

We pray for your tenderness of heart to listen beyond the imperfect words we are using to describe what the Living Spirit has done among us.... We know that the Truth is beyond any words we might use to describe it.

Epistle from Quakercamp at Stillwater, 2007

*One vessel, but many lives
swirling around the boiled pot
'til they are poured
into our separate entities,
[each cup] reaching out
to accept their living grace.*

Brianna (Richardson) Rossi, 2012

We will practice speaking our individual and communal experiences of the Inner Life, in the language that comes authentically from that experience, and listening to the variety of spiritual experience present, with ears ready to hear “where words come from.”

Lake Erie Yearly Meeting, 2012