

## Proposed Revisions to *The Guide to Our Faith and Practice*

18th day of second month, 2011

Dear SAYMA Friends,

The Revision Committee for SAYMA's *Guide to Our Faith and Practice* will present three proposed revisions at Yearly Meeting 2011. Two proposals would affect section IV.B., *Areas of Witness*: a revision of the existing IV.B.2, *Education* and a new one, IV.B.5, *Harmony with Nature*. The third proposal would add a new section, II.C., *Meeting for Threshing*, to *Nurturing the Life of the Spirit*.

The texts of the proposed changes are being sent in advance to the clerks and SAYMA representatives of SAYMA's monthly meetings, preparative meetings, and worship groups, and will be posted at the SAYMA web site, [sayma.org](http://sayma.org).

These proposals are revisions of those sent in Eighth Month of 2010 to the constituent meetings of SAYMA. The committee has reviewed and incorporated minuted suggestions from the many meetings that responded. We appreciate very much the worshipful care evidenced in the observations and recommendations. Thank you, Friends.

We are not asking for further responses from meetings before the beginning of yearly meeting in June. The committee will not meet during that time. We do ask that clerks and SAYMA representatives inform their meetings that the texts are available so that Friends may come prepared to yearly meeting. The proposed revisions will be presented during business sessions and there will be ample opportunities then to suggest changes. We encourage attendance and participation in this ongoing process of worshipful discernment.

Respectfully submitted,

Revision Committee for the *Guide to Our Faith and Practice*

Kathleen Mavournin, Clerk (W. Knoxville)  
Barbara Esther, Recording Clerk (Asheville)  
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## IV.B.2 Education [ORIGINAL TEXT]

“We shall never thrive upon ignorance.” Joseph John Gurney (1831)

“To Friends, education is an intensely religious thing; it means the training and development of the spiritual life, the liberating of the Divine that is within us. Gerald K. Hibbert (1930)

[1] Friends’ basic belief in the Inner Light, the presence of “that of God” in everyone, has guided us to promote a society based on understanding and good will. Although God’s truth transcends mere schooling, education is fundamental to full participation in that society.

[2] Those who read and study are better equipped to pursue corporate truth within the Religious Society of Friends and better able to act as individuals in the wider world. We have a concern for the educational welfare of all.

[3] Friends encourage the development of integrity, simplicity, moderation, and an inward sense of values. We try to foster in ourselves and our children a steady growth in self-discipline, respect for the rights and needs of each individual, and celebration of differences in others. We recognize that values are being taught - consciously and unconsciously - in our communities and institutions; we seek to encourage cooperation rather than competition, and we attempt to cultivate a sensitivity to social problems and injustices and the concern to do something about them.

[4] These goals have been reflected in our support for and participation by adults and children in First Day School, Friends’ schools, home schooling, private and public education, and higher education. For Friends, education nurtures our own individual understanding of the Inner Light, teaches us to be

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Gerald K. Hibbert (1930)

*When it is faithful to its foundations, Quaker education is neither student-centered, nor discipline-centered; it is inward-centered. Quaker education operates from the conviction that there is always one other in the classroom—the Inward Teacher, who waits to be found in every human being.*  
Paul Lacey, *Growing into Goodness: Essays on Quaker Education*, 1988

[1] Early Friends, including George Fox, were described as Seekers. Seeking knowledge of God, they discovered that God could speak to and teach them directly, the central lesson of what became Quakerism. Today, Friends continue to seek truth in spiritual and secular matters and to see our seeking and finding as a life-long practice and part of our spiritual journey. This attitude underlies Friends’ approach to education.

[2] The root meaning of education is “to draw out.” For Quakers, education involves drawing out each person’s self-awareness and nurturing individual gifts. Knowledge of the world around us provides us with tools that enhance our understanding. The Inner Teacher, essential in our efforts, leads us to use our gifts in the service of others.

[3] Friends endeavor to share our understandings and listen to each other. We are open to learning from nature and from the Spirit, from people with authority and from those without a voice. Friends sponsor First Day Schools, along with a variety of study groups, retreats, and workshops at all levels of Quakerism. We welcome critical exploration of all topics, recognizing that truth does not lie in one religion, group, text, or point of view.

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guided by it, and helps us foster that understanding in others. Friends have been pioneers in providing equal educational opportunities for all people as a means toward full participation in the Society and in the wider world. In our awareness of the Light that lights everyone who comes into the world, Friends are open to listening and learning from the oppressed, the deprived, and the excluded.

[5] We look upon education as a lifelong process. Because knowledge and inspiration do not lie solely in one religion, group, or text, we search widely for diverse contributions to a corporate truth. Coupled with our concept of continuing revelation of Truth is a belief that we have a continuing need to study and open ourselves to new learning.

[4] Friends are deeply involved in education at all levels, as teachers and administrators and as advocates for schooling that reflects Friends values. We have been supportive of a wide range of educational settings, including, for example, Friends' schools, public schools, home schools, vocational schools, colleges, and universities. We continue to work toward equal educational opportunities for all people as a means toward full participation in the Religious Society of Friends and in the wider world. God's gifts come in many forms, and different institutional arrangements may be needed to draw out and develop different gifts.

[5] The Inner Light is present in the very young and can be greatly affected by adults with whom children have relationships. We recognize that values are taught both consciously through instruction and unconsciously through the examples of our lives. All children are schooled at home and in their communities, no matter where they attend "school." Our testimonies describe the environments we would like to provide for our children: peaceful, simple, equitable, infused with the spirits of community and integrity. We reject violence, physical or verbal, as a means of control, instead believing we can all learn from our mistakes if they are viewed creatively and with compassion. We encourage cooperation rather than competition and attempt to cultivate sensitivity to social problems and injustices along with a concern to do something about them. We try to foster in ourselves and our children a steady growth in self-discipline, respect for the rights and needs of each individual, and celebration of differences.

[6] Guiding all these efforts is a desire to foster in all people an inward sense of Spirit-guided values. Quaker faith in continuing revelation tells us that truth is not static and that gaining knowledge ultimately brings us closer to God.

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## IV.B.5 Harmony with Nature [NEW PROPOSAL]

*"It would go a great way to caution and direct people in their use of the world, that they were better studied and known in the creation of it. For how could [they] find the confidence to abuse it, while they should see the Great Creator stare them in the face, in all and every part thereof."* William Penn, 1693

*I have known landholders who paid Interest for large sums of money, and being intent on paying their debts by raising grain, have by too much tilling, so robbed the earth of its natural fatness, that the produce thereof hath grown light... The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age.*

John Woolman, Conversations on the true harmony of mankind and how it can be promoted, 1772

*Only when we see that we are part of the totality of the planet, not a superior part with special privileges, can we work effectively to bring about an earth restored to wholeness.* Elizabeth Watson 1996, Your God is too small

[1] Friends' concern for the earth is a spirit-led extension of established Quaker testimonies in response to persistent overuse and disruption of Earth's ecological systems. It is rooted in a profound awareness of and love for the Divine indwelling within the material world.

[2] Friends have long recognized that there is a relationship between human misery and habits of consumption and production. Through the work of early visionaries like John Woolman and Elias Hicks, Friends came to understand that the way they lived had an impact on the lives of others, even if those who suffered were far away and unknown to them.

[3] Today, we are challenged to continue expanding our understanding of the interconnection of all living things and the delicate balance required to sustain the community of life. Human aspirations for peace and justice depend upon earth's ecologi-

cal integrity. By being patterns and examples of sustainability, and by providing support to those engaged in the task of transforming our treatment the earth, we promote these aspirations.

[4] SAYMA Friends respond in a variety of ways to the challenges of sustainable living. Many of us work to reduce the harmful consequences of our activities: use of energy, housing choices, modes and distances of travel, diet and other consumption habits. We are called to find more effective ways to live harmoniously as a part of the natural world. It should be the birthright of all generations to be immersed in a world in which they can experience a sense of wonder, an intimate connection with the grand diversity of life and an appreciation of their interrelationship with all life processes.

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## II.C. Meeting for Threshing [NEW PROPOSAL]

[1] Friends believe that the Light is accessible and within each of us. Thus, we make corporate decisions with faith that the Divine Spirit will guide us to unity. However, strains that develop over troublesome issues can prevent us from seeing the fullness of truth. In such situations, Friends' meetings often hold one or more "threshing sessions" to allow ample time and opportunity for differences to be aired and faced.

[2] Meetings for Threshing are usually called by a decision of the business meeting but may also be called by the meeting clerk or Committee for Ministry and Nurture. They are not part of business meeting or any other meeting. In threshing meetings no decision is made, but through them the chaff can be separated from the grain. Such meetings can clear the way for later action on the issue.

[3] It is essential that full notice of a threshing session be given and special efforts made to see that Friends of all shades of opinion can and will be present. To the extent that Friends of a given view are absent, the usefulness of such a meeting will be impaired. If factual material needs to be presented, persons knowledgeable about the topic should be asked to present it and be available to answer questions. It is essential that someone take notes for later reference. The clerk of the threshing session may make a report to the meeting.

[4] Clerking a threshing meeting takes great sensitivity and care. The clerk of a threshing session makes it clear at the start that the meeting not only expects, but welcomes expressions of wide differences of opinion. Friends are urged not to hold back what troubles them about the issues at hand. Hesitancy to

share a strong conviction because it may offend someone reflects a lack of trust. The clerk's job is to draw out the reticent, limit the time taken by too-ready talkers, and see that all have an opportunity to speak, rather than to listen for a sense of the meeting.

[5] Threshing is an activity to nurture and strengthen the community. Friends must take care that expressions of strong opinions and feelings do not spill over into personal attacks. Periods of silence can help Friends hear each other more clearly. Friends need to remain mindful that a threshing session is not only an opportunity to speak but also an opportunity to listen carefully and deeply.

### Guidelines for Threshing Meetings

1. Speak from your own personal experience.
2. Address remarks to the clerk; do not reply directly to or rebut others.
3. All ideas and thoughts on an issue are welcome for consideration.
4. Everyone should have a chance to speak.
5. Everyone with dissenting views has a responsibility to make them known.
6. A threshing session is not an opportunity to admonish others.
7. Passion is permitted!
8. Corporate decisions are not made during a threshing session.