

Community Section of SAYMA Faith and Practice, submitted to SAYMA for approval, 2010

Community [2009 proposal]

“As 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 in the same life there is more of the glory of God.” Robert Barclay (1678)

"When we focus on our oneness and unity in the Love that is God, it's tempting to believe that we will all live happily ever after together, with never an unkind word or misunderstanding, much less legitimate complaints, anger or real nastiness. The challenge of course is to hold up and live out the vision while acknowledging and accepting the reality of our own flawed humanity and that of those we live with."
Patricia Loring,
Listening Spirituality: Corporate Practice Among Friends, page 37

(The first two paragraphs were approved as amended at Yearly Meeting 2009; the approved text is shown at the right.)

Community [2010 proposal]

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[1] Community is one of the important foundations of Quakerism. This testimony arises from our experience that a group worshipping together encounters God. Since the first generation, Friends have had a practice of discernment where unity is the focus, looking not only to individual inspirations but also to the movement of the Spirit in their midst. Friends followed this practice in meetings for worship with a concern for business. It was not the person with the most money, age, or length of history with Friends who made the decisions; it was the group as a whole that discerned the will of God. That sense of the meeting, that Spirit which the worshippers recognized in unity, was the authority.

[2] All Friends are bound together in community by our shared seeking of the Light. Our life together is grounded in the practice of listening deeply to each other and looking truthfully at how we live in the world. It is the task of the meeting community to affirm, inspire, and hold each of us accountable in our faithfulness to God's leadings.

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[original text]

[3] Ministering to each other's spiritual and material needs builds and nurtures community. Both requesting and giving assistance are essential aspects of Friends' life together; taking a warm, personal interest in one another's welfare strengthens the meeting and the individuals alike. Such assistance may take the form of a clearness committee, financial or other material aid, or other appropriate help. Friends also provide spiritual and emotional support by holding in the Light those experiencing special hardship or joy. When we join in service and support, whether in our home communities, in the wider community or in the world, we express our love for God and one another.

[4] Any community experiences difficulties. Open recognition of and respect for differences, forthright sharing, and sincere corporate reflection can strengthen the meeting as a whole and provide openings for new understanding. Friends should be encouraged to resolve conflicts in a direct loving manner because unresolved conflicts erode community. Conflicts affecting the whole meeting may be addressed through threshing sessions or worship sharing; SAYMA's Ministry and Nurture Committee may be called upon for help. Conflicts between individuals also affect meeting community; a clearness committee may be helpful in such cases. It is Quaker practice to prefer mediation or negotiation, avoiding litigation, to resolve disputes that cannot be resolved within the meeting. Harmony emerges not merely from coming to understanding and resolution but also from the mutual search for the truth conducted in a spirit of tender listening and care. Unity is not sameness of belief, but the oneness of people drawn together in love and concern for each other, grounded in the Spirit.

[proposed revision]

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[4] Every community experiences difficulties and it is important to avoid the temptation to "sweep them under the rug." Open recognition of and respect for differences, forthright sharing, and sincere corporate reflection strengthen meetings and provide ways to resolve conflicts in a direct and loving manner. Conflicts affecting entire meetings may be addressed through threshing sessions or worship sharing. SAYMA's Ministry and Nurture Committee may be called upon for help. For conflicts between individual Friends, a clearness committee may be helpful. It is Quaker practice to prefer mediation or negotiation to resolve disputes without litigation. Harmony emerges not merely from coming to understanding and resolution but also from the mutual search for the truth conducted in a spirit of tender listening and care. The unity we seek is not sameness of belief, but the oneness of people drawn together in love and concern for each other, grounded in the Spirit.

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[original text]

[5] Quaker community extends beyond the monthly and yearly meetings. Yearly meeting sessions and committee work, inter-meeting visitations, regional gatherings, visiting other monthly and yearly meetings, and participation in Wider Quaker Organizations are all opportunities for Friends to find nurture, spiritual growth and fellowship. The interconnectedness of all life continues to call Friends to be full participants in the universal community. Our understanding of God's love does not stop at the meetinghouse door. Friends strive to build "the blessed community" everywhere we go. Our testimonies of peace, equality, integrity, simplicity and community mean little unless they are practiced in relation to all.

[proposed revision]

[5] We want our meetings to be affirming and nurturing, but if we expect that we will always feel safe and comfortable there, we risk becoming unwilling to welcome Friends different from ourselves. The practice of inclusivity challenges each of us in different ways to reach past our limiting assumptions and fears to find the Light in others. When we do so, we find aspects of the Light we did not expect: the diversity of our community may be greater than we can easily accept. It is valuable, even if painful, to admit that we often fail to live up to our aspirations. Our meetings are often homogeneous – socially, politically, racially, spiritually, intellectually, culturally, and in other respects. The process of inclusion, though it requires adjustments from each of us, gives us all a deeper experience of the Spirit.

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