

A Guide to Our Faith and Our Practice
Draft of Revisions to be presented to YM in June 2006

Dear SAYMA Friends,

As part of the continuing ten-year review of "A Guide to Our Faith and Our Practice", the Faith and Practice Revision Committee offers the following proposed revisions. These sections were revised after prayerful consideration of the responses that the committee received from most of SAYMA's constituent Meetings. When other groups, which are affiliated with the yearly meeting, felt moved to respond, the committee also included their Light in the process.

In Part II, We have added text about ad hoc committees, committee responsibility and yearly meeting approved changes in the composition of Ministry and Nurture Committee.

In Part III, we present new text on formation of worship groups consistent with the current practice of SAYMA Friends.

Part IV Testifying to the Life of the Spirit has been thoroughly reviewed and revised. A few words from Britain Yearly Meeting:

The word "testimony " is used by Quakers to describe a witness to the living truth within the human heart as it is acted out in everyday life.' [Quaker Faith & Practice, BYM 1994, 23.12].

'These testimonies reflect the corporate beliefs of the Society, however much individual Quakers may interpret them differently according to their own light. They are not optional extras, but fruits that grow from the very tree of faith.' [Quaker Faith & Practice, 1994, 23.12].

We are offering a new section on Integrity and revisions of the testimonies on Peace, Simplicity and Equality. There are changes from the revisions we sent in September 2006, but we only show the changes from the original text. (Changes in italics)

Since we are not able to include all the sections mailed out in September 2005, we are encouraging the constituent meetings of SAYMA that have NOT previously responded to the topics listed below, to please take this opportunity and join in on the process. Please send us minuted suggestions on our proposed revisions on the following sections by July 8th, 2006: (see pages 7 thru 12 of original mailing to your Meeting in September) on: The Meeting Community, Education, Government, Sexuality, Children, and Earthcare.

These sections will be reviewed and re-revised at the committee's next meeting on July 21-22, 2006 in Asheville, NC.

Please mail your e-mail responses to: (preferred method)

freepolazzo@comcast.net

Or

Snail Mail your print responses to:

SAYMA Faith and Practice Revisions
 C/o Free Polazzo
 5525 Dorsett Shoals Lane
 Douglasville, GA 30135-4072

At our next SAYMA Yearly Meeting, June 8-11, 2006, to be held at Warren Wilson College, in Swannanoa, NC, the revisions on the following pages will be considered for approval by the assembled yearly meeting.

Blessings,

SAYMA Faith and Practice Revision Committee:

Barbara Esther, Recording Co-Clerk, Asheville Friends Meeting
 Missy Ivie, West Knoxville Friends Meeting
 Geeta McGahey, Recording Co-Clerk Celo Friends Meeting
 Melissa Meyers, Boone Friends Meeting
 Free Polazzo, Clerk, Anneewakee Creek Friends Worship Group,
 Atlanta Friends Meeting

Second Month 24th day 2006

[ORIGINAL TEXT]

YEARLY MEETING SECTION

1. Committees of yearly and representative meeting

The nature and function of all committees established by the yearly meeting change as time and experience reveal new opportunities for Friends. Usually constituted by the yearly meeting or occasionally following action of the representative meeting, such committees and their functions are described in the Handbook. The yearly meeting nominating committee recommends to the yearly meeting names to fill positions on these committees. Current standing committees are:

[NO PREVIOUS SECTION]

[PROPOSED TEXT] YEARLY MEETING SECTION

*[Italics represent new wording]***[Brackets indicate Committee Comments]****[Paragraph numbers are not part of the final document. They are shown to make discussion easier for Friends]****1. Committees of yearly and representative meeting**

[INSERT THE SENTENCES BELOW] The nature and function of all committees established by the yearly meeting *can* change as time and experience reveal new opportunities for Friends. . *The yearly meeting usually constitutes such committees. They may occasionally be formed following action by the representative meeting. The functions of these committees are described in the Handbook.* The yearly meeting nominating committee recommends names to the yearly meeting to fill the positions on these committees. *Ad Hoc committees are formed as the need arises. The yearly meeting clerk appoints clerks and committee members. All committees make annual reports to the yearly meeting. They also report to the representative meeting as necessary.* Current standing committees are:

2. Ministry & Nurture Committee, formed in 1990, supports and supplements the work of the monthly meetings' ministry and nurture *efforts* and addresses spiritual issues that span the yearly meeting community. *Members serve at the request of each monthly meeting. SAYMA's nominating committee also recommends three members and a clerk, who serve staggered two-year terms.*

The Ministry and Nurture committee (or M&N) nurtures meetings and worship groups by:

- Being mindful of the state of the spirit in meetings and worship groups. "...How the Truth has prospered amongst them...?" (Query, 1682)
- Nurturing the yearly meeting by being a spiritual presence during meetings.
- Providing spiritual support for the yearly meeting clerks.
- Encouraging intervisitation and regional gatherings;
- Facilitating communication and information sharing;
- Providing resources and help regarding membership issues, Quaker faith and practice, *and advancement*
- Organizing educational workshops, often during yearly and representative meeting sessions;
- Responding to requests from meetings and worship groups within the yearly meeting for involvement in sensitive situations, particularly in areas of spiritual life and Quaker process that face meetings, are between meetings, or between meetings and worship groups. Possible responses include listening, consultation and /or arranging clearness committees.
- Facilitating clearness and accountability for Friends seeking endorsement by the yearly meeting for ministry to which they are called.
- Providing a clearness process and holding accountable released Friends who receive financial assistance from SAYMA's Released Friend Fund;
- Administering the disbursement and accounting of the Spiritual Development Fund.

Part III:
Forming a worship group

Beginning with the second paragraph:

1. [DELETE] Once such a group has come together within the SAYMA region, participants should notify both the yearly meeting's Advancement Committee and the closest monthly meeting. SAYMA Friends and, especially, Friends from the closest monthly meeting should make every effort to join in the worship of new groups and to offer such encouragement and support as is possible. In order to share in the spirit of and to observe SAYMA and monthly meeting practices and to share with them the enthusiasm and energy of new worship groups, worshippers in a new group are encouraged to visit and join in the worship of established monthly meetings and to send participants to SAYMA representative and yearly meetings.

2. Attenders of a worship group who wish to become members of the Religious Society of Friends must apply through the nearest monthly meeting with which they are acquainted, unless they are already a member of a distant: meeting.

Part III: [It is presently our yearly meeting policy to require a worship group to be under the care of a monthly meeting in order to be part of SAYMA. There is no body at the YM level that can nurture a worship group adequately]

1. Forming a worship group [Later sections address becoming a preparatory meeting and then a monthly meeting]

[REPLACE WITH] *A group that meets regularly for worship after the manner of Friends and desires to be affiliated with SAYMA as a worship group must establish an association with an existing monthly meeting. Worship and fellowship between the two groups promotes understanding of Friends faith and practice and contributes to deepening the life of the Spirit in both the new worship group and the associated monthly meeting. The monthly meeting assumes the functions of nurture and guidance and establishes appropriate mechanisms that address the needs of the worship group. Such a relationship can include shared worship, intervisitation, fiscal support, and attendance at meetings for the conduct of business of the monthly meeting. It is helpful to identify an individual or two in the existing meeting to whom the worship group can turn for advice.*

2. *Worship groups are encouraged to participate in all yearly meeting activities. The SAYMA Ministry & Nurture Committee is available as needed to help identify appropriate pairings and to provide spiritual support and nurture for these associations. M & N is also available to work with meetings and nearby new worship groups even where there are raw feelings or issues to be resolved to create communities in a spirit of love.*

3. *Should an individual in a worship group desire membership in the Religious Society of Friends; application is made to a monthly meeting for consideration.*

4. *Through recommendation from a monthly meeting, a worship group becomes part of the yearly meeting.*

PART IV TESTIFYING TO THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT

[ENTIRELY NEW SECTION: READ BOTH SIDES]

Integrity

*“Swear not at all... let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ and your ‘no’, ‘no’”
(Matthew 5:34, 36)*

*“Integrity calls for obedience, or if you prefer, faithfulness to conscience illuminated by the Light Within. For Quakers this is the seat of religious authority and, therefore, the touchstone of our faith.”
Wilmer Cooper, “The Testimony of Integrity”; 1991*

1. *Although not referred to as a testimony until much later, integrity implicitly forms the basis for most of the other testimonies. Integrity implies wholeness, a wholeness rooted in God’s revelation to those who have discovered the divine will. One of the original names of Quakers, “Friends of the Truth,” required Friends to be loyal to their understanding of God’s will in their lives. These understandings were private, even as they were subsumed in and later affirmed by the collective wisdom of the meeting community. Integrity remains central to the public and personal witness of Friends and speaks of our willingness to acknowledge and submit to divine guidance in all activities.*

2. *Integrity requires consistency of action and straightforward and honest speech. “Do all aspects of your life bear the same witness?” is a modern query, yet reflects an approach harkening back to the earliest years of the Religious Society of Friends. No private way of acting may differ from a Friend’s public stance. Each is equally important and integrity calls us to complete obedience to divine guidance.*

[Continued on right side of this page]

[ENTIRELY NEW SECTION: READ BOTH SIDES]

Integrity [continued from left side of this page]

3. *Integrity requires a willingness to live a life that testifies to the divine reality, even in harsh, threatening, and uncomfortable situations. The demands of a life of integrity, lead each Friend to live in a consistent manner that exemplifies faithfulness in living out all the testimonies. Historically, it led to imprisonment for refusal to swear oaths and to ostracism for refusing to say “sir” or “madam” or doff one’s hat to those who thought themselves deserving of such honors, even parents. Currently in our region, SAYMA Friends face ostracism and lost of income for their activities for racial justice, diversity in marriages, opposition to war, yet are not reticent in expressing their spirit led opposition to inhumane practices.*

4. *Integrity is the capacity to stand in relationship to this Ultimate Reality, which is larger than our egos. In this close relationship, we speak and act with firm adherence to the Divine. Integrity is the quality of being complete, sound, undivided, honest, incorruptible and true. The testimony of integrity is not simply telling the truth; it is applying ultimate truth in each situation. It means refusing to place phenomena and things other than God at the center of one’s life – whether it be one’s desires, anxieties, vanities, possessions, or the esteem of others. It is knowing that even good things are no longer good when they deny or supplant the Divine as center.*

5. *It remains the foundation for Quakers’ lives and ethics, and our dealings with each other, non-Friends, and the larger world.*

[ORIGINAL TEXT]

Peace

We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretence whatsoever. And this is our testimony to the whole world. The Spirit of Christ, by which we are guided, is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing as evil and again to move unto it; and we do certainly know, and so testify to the world, that the Spirit of Christ, which leads us into all Truth, will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdoms of this world.-

Declaration from the Harmless and Innocent People of God, called Quakers (1661)

1. Our peace testimony is grounded in our faith and understanding of God's way. Early Quakers believed they were led by the Christ within and by the Christ of the New Testament to love those people who considered them enemies and to refrain from all wars and fighting. Though individual Quakers have participated in wars since then, Friends still affirm that the best way to relate to people is to appeal to that of God within them. Trusting in the leadings of the Spirit and respecting the Inward Light in all others can avert violent conflict.

2. In attending to this divine leading, we try to live in ways that promote justice and avoid the causes of war; we deny its legitimacy and seek creative alternatives; and we undertake, with impartiality, to aid those who suffer from violence and war's devastation.

3. Materialism, oppression, and narrow nationalism lead to war. Friends oppose materialism by living simply and working to re-order priorities toward global justice and well-being. We work to remove oppression at home and abroad by trying to reach the common humanity in both oppressor and oppressed, challenging the assertion of dominance upon which oppression is based. We reject narrow nationalism and support programs to increase our understanding of other cultures and to work for more effective world government.

4. Denying the legitimacy of war, Friends support those led by the Spirit into conscientious objection to military service, resistance to conscription or a military draft, war tax resistance, or other acts of civil disobedience that witness against warmaking. Friends do not recognize "just" wars, since war represents a refusal to pursue other ways of resolving conflict. We work to gain wider support for nonviolent solutions.

[PROPOSED TEXT]

Peace

[QUOTE CORRECTED]

[Quote corrected]"All bloody principles and practices, we . . . do utterly deny, with all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretense whatsoever. And this is our testimony to the whole world . . . The spirit of Christ, by which we are guided, is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing as evil and again to move unto it; and we do certainly know, and so testify to the world, that the spirit of Christ, which leads us into all Truth, will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdoms of this world."

-Declaration from the Harmless and Innocent People of God, called Quakers (1661)

"We are a people that follow after those things that make for peace, love, and unity" Margaret Fell's letter to the King On Persecution; 1660

1. Our peace testimony is grounded in our faith and understanding of God's way. Early Quakers believed they were led by the Christ within and by the *teachings* of the New Testament to love those people who considered *themselves* enemies and to refrain from all wars and fighting. Though individual Quakers have participated in wars since then, Friends still affirm that the best way to relate to people is to appeal to that of God within them. Trusting the leadings of the Spirit and respecting the Inward Light in all others *can awaken all to God's love, averting* violent conflict.

2. [SECOND PARAGRAPH UNCHANGED]

3. *Fear and greed manifested in oppression* and nationalism lay the foundations for war. *Friends oppose greed by living simply, valuing the spiritual over the material, and working to re-order priorities toward a just sharing of world resources. We work to remove fear at home and abroad by seeking that of God in all. Thus we support programs to increase understanding of other cultures and to work for more effective governance. We aim in our business affairs, investments and consumer practices to pursue opportunities that promote justice and harmony*

4. Denying the legitimacy of war, Friends support those led by the Spirit into conscientious objection to military service, resistance to conscription or a military draft, war tax resistance, or other acts of civil disobedience that witness against *war making*. Friends do not recognize "just" wars. We work to gain wider support for nonviolent solutions that lead to finding common ground in *conflicts*.

[ORIGINAL TEXT continued]

5. Friends aid the victims of war and other violence out of the belief that each person is uniquely valuable. Support for refugees, programs for worldwide economic justice, and similar efforts serve not only to remove the causes of war and to aid the victims of violence and oppression, but also to encourage non-violent means of solving world problems.

6. We recognize that violence can manifest itself in words as well as deeds. As Friends, we endeavor to bring all aspects of our lives into harmony with our testimony. The peace we seek starts in the individual heart and its relation to God. It is expressed in our relations to parents, spouses, children, friends, and indeed in all our actions. In our daily lives - our employment, our recreation, our investments, and our relations to institutions and governments - we commit ourselves to follow God's command to be peacemakers above the demands and enticements of the secular society. In doing so, our aim is to live God's truth.

7. The challenge of the peace testimony is to find ways for all people to live nonviolently in a world where violence remains an ever-present threat. Friends as individuals and as a Society continue to struggle with this challenge.

[OLD TEXT] **Simplicity**

Simplicity frees one of the clutter that interferes with communion with God.

Martin Cobin, **The Value System of Friends**, Southern Appalachian Association of Friends, Crossville, Tennessee (May 1-3, 1970)

1. To the earliest Friends, simplicity meant freeing oneself of all that was unnecessary and worldly. Just as all ritual, program, and clerical functions were seen as a hindrance to worship, so elaborate and insincere speech, as well as ornamentation of dress, were seen as distractions to the right ordering of life. Adding an economic reason for simplicity, William Penn said that "the very trimmings of the vain would clothe all the naked ones."

2. Simplicity leads us to be honest and straightforward in mind, tongue, and heart. It can assist Friends in focusing on the essentials of life, in being open spiritually, and in following the path of love. For some Friends, this commitment has required a radical break with the conventional way of life in our materialistic age. For all of us, seeking the inner light leads to a removal of distractions and an ordering of priorities so that we may be more open to leadings of the Spirit.

3. Simplicity need not mean stark denial but can create joy and beauty in our lives. In use of time, habits of consumption, sharing of world resources, and indeed every aspect of daily life, simplicity is central for us because it both mirrors and deepens spiritual centeredness.

[PROPOSED TEXT continued]

5. Friends aid victims and *reach out to perpetrators* of violence, whether *from war, crime, community or family strife* out of the belief that each person is uniquely valuable. To address the causes and aid *those touched* by violence and oppression, Friends support *prisoners*, refugees, and the economically disadvantaged. These efforts also serve to encourage nonviolent means of solving problems, *locally and globally*.

6. We recognize that violence can manifest itself in words as well as deeds. As Friends, we endeavor to bring all aspects of our lives into harmony with our testimony. The peace we seek starts in the individual heart and its relation to God. It is expressed in our *interactions with* parents, spouses, children, friends, and indeed in all *of our relations*. In our daily lives - our employment, our recreation, our investments, and our relations to institutions and governments - we commit ourselves to follow God's command to be peacemakers above the demands and enticements of the secular society. In doing so, our aim is to live God's truth.

7. The challenge of the peace testimony is to find ways *to build the blessed community, the realm of God, on earth*. Friends **have believed** *that simplicity, equality, integrity, justice and harmony are all ingredients of that healed world*. Friends as individuals and as a Society continue to struggle with this challenge.

[PROPOSED TEXT] **Simplicity**

"Simplicity frees one of the clutter that interferes with communion with God."

Martin Cobin, **The Value System of Friends**, Southern Appalachian Association of Friends, Crossville, Tennessee (May 1-3, 1970)

1. [FIRST PARAGRAPH UNCHANGED]

2. Simplicity leads us to be honest and straightforward in mind, tongue, and heart. It can assist Friends in focusing on the essentials of life, in being open spiritually, and in following the path of love. For some Friends, this commitment has *led to* a radical break with the conventional way of life in our materialistic age. For all of us, seeking the inner light *calls for recognition and* removal of distractions and an ordering of priorities *in order to* be more open to leadings of the Spirit.

3. [LAST PARAGRAPH UNCHANGED]

[Old TEXT] **Equality**

There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath had different names. it is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion nor excluded from any where the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nation soever, they become [brothers and sisters] in the best sense. John Woolman, "Considerations on Keeping Negroes," **Works** (1774)

1. Friends believe that all people have the capacity to bear and respond to the Light and that all forms of human relations should reflect this spiritual truth. Deeply concerned that every individual, as a beloved child of God, be respected and afforded equal access to social opportunities, Friends believe that we are called to work toward an end to prejudice and oppression.

2. Each of us has God-given gifts that express themselves in different ways. Friends believe that the way in which God's gifts are realized may be shaped by the world in which we live. Our ability to both bear and respond to the Light can be affected by social prejudices that dim awareness of God's leadings.

3. A commitment to equality, the first of Friends social testimonies, led early Friends to affirm that no person is superior to another because of birth, wealth, or formal education. They rejected the use of honorific titles, provided expanded leadership roles for women in their communities, and eschewed "hat honor", removing one's hat as a sign of deference. They retained the traditional "thee" and "thou" to avoid the emerging seventeenth century usage of granting an undue distinction to an individual with a plural "you". Modern Friends have expanded our awareness of what equality demands, in it continued application in our daily lives.

[PROPOSED TEXT] **Equality**

Quote: Same

[Rearranging First and Second and Third Paragraphs]

1. Friends believe that all people have the capacity to bear and respond to the Light and that all forms of human relations should reflect this spiritual truth. *Each of us has God-given gifts. Each of us can grow in tenderness. Our differences provide openings that allow God's grace to shine through us in unique ways.*

2. A commitment to equality, the earliest of Friends' social testimonies, *was partly an assault on pride. In keeping with the teaching of the New Testament, early Friends held the radical belief that God could speak to every person, regardless of gender, race, class, age, or formal education. This led Friends to eliminate behaviors that granted superiority based on social status or wealth.* They rejected the use of honorific titles, provided expanded leadership roles for women in their communities, and eschewed "hat honor," removing one's hat as a sign of deference. They retained the traditional "thee" and "thou" to avoid the emerging seventeenth century usage of granting an undue distinction to an *upper-class* individual with a plural "you." For these beliefs, they sometimes paid with their property, and sometimes with their lives.

3. Our ability to both bear and respond to the Light can be affected by social prejudices that dim awareness of God's leadings. Friends believe that we are called to work to end to prejudice and oppression. *Modern Friends have wrestled with our awareness of what equality demands in its continued application in our daily lives. In order for individuals to follow their leadings, and exercise their God given gifts, social and physical barriers often must be broken down. In the last two centuries, many Friends have worked and are working toward honoring and expanding the rights of women and people of color.*

4. In seeking to apply this testimony, Friends have often been in the forefront of social change. Recognition of inherent worth in all people despite individual or group differences has often caused Friends to live and act contrary to accepted societal norms, rejecting stereotyping, discrimination, and artificial barriers that separate people from one another. Equality has been the foundation of Friends approach to each other and the world.

5. We believe all are equally empowered by God and encourage all to speak for themselves, expressing their own experiences and goals. We must speak the truth to others as it is revealed to us, and we must listen for truth that is in them, lest we miss it. Understanding other's perspectives can change us and inform the actions we take to work toward equality. In our continuing spiritual search, we are open to revising our approach to social change as new insights arise.

6. We seek a world free of oppression, where laws and customs foster human dignity. We encourage all people to realize their full potential as human beings bearing the light of God.

4. *More recently, Friends are beginning our work to expand equal rights regardless of sexual orientation.* Recognizing that of God in all people, acknowledging that the previous examples are neither inclusive nor exhaustive, Quakers embrace individual and group differences. Friends reject stereotyping, discrimination, and artificial barriers that separate people from one another. Equality has been the foundation of Friends' approach to each other *and the world.* *Friends recognize that much work still needs to be done within ourselves, within the society at large, and within our meetings, where privileges of educational attainment and social status too often prevail.*

5. We believe all can be empowered by God and encourage all to speak for themselves, expressing their own experiences *and understanding of God's leadings.* We must *lovingly* speak the truth to others as it is revealed to us, and we must listen for truth that is in them, lest we miss it. Other's perspectives can change us and help our meetings discern the actions we take to work toward equality. In our continuing spiritual search, we are open to revising our approach to social change as new insights arise.

6. We seek a world free of oppression, where laws and customs foster human dignity. We encourage all people to realize their full potential as human beings bearing the light of God