

## **Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association**

- **Report of the Ad Hoc Committee to Revise the Guide to our Faith and Practice**

**March 9, 2020**

The ad hoc Committee to revise the Guide to our Faith and Practice (Guide) is happy to submit our final draft version of our recommended revisions to the Queries Section of the 2012 Guide. The queries we were asked to revise were first approved in 1990 and then partially revised in the 2000 Reprint Edition. Our committee started its work in 2014 and has been in contact with many of SAYMA's Committees and Monthly Meetings. Each had Light that we determined was needed. All responded. Eventually! Each response was seen as a gift we happily received. We appreciated hearing from SAYMA Friends that their meetings and/or committees had become clearer about their spiritual path because our queries revision process allowed each to work at their own pace.

The Guide, on page 5, has an Explanatory Note that states; "The Guide reflects our understanding of the spiritual basis for our practice as Quakers." This understanding includes the Queries Section which can assist readers to focus on a specific practice or testimony and also introduce topics which, while important, have not (yet) have found its way to be included in the Guide's other sections.

The revision committee has labored long and hard and joyfully to include as many of these topics as possible. We ask that Friends be tender when encountering such queries. Consider that there are Friends to whom the query you may not care for would still be helpful to SAYMA Friends whose spiritual paths diverge from yours. SAYMA's spiritual diversity can be seen in the wide range of topics that dwell in our queries section.

We remind Friends that our work is to describe what SAYMA Meetings are asking as well as what they might want to say to the world about SAYMA's condition. This committee recognized and shared its leading with SAYMA's monthly meetings that a complete revision of the queries section was necessary as the majority of the "Queries" we found in the 1990 reprint were actually "Advices" (See the Guide's glossary for clarification). We were happy to hear from all of SAYMA's Monthly Meetings that responded that they agreed with our leading.

Note that there are a several "queries" that the committee determined advices (often as part of a query) would be more useful due to its importance to many, though not all, of SAYMA meetings. These include queries A7, A 21, A31, B1, B6, B10, C7, E 20. Note that Sub-Section H was retitled to actually say "Queries & Advices". Our committee recognized that this sub section would be used as a checklist to help a SAYMA Sponsoring Meeting discern whether its Preparative Meeting was ready to be recognized as SAYMA Monthly Meeting. We have also asked the Handbook Committee to consider including this sub-section in the SAYMA Handbook.

SAYMA's Monthly Meetings are each unique and represent communities that can differ greatly from each other. If we failed to include a Query that speaks to your condition, remember that any Monthly Meeting may send a Minute to the clerk of the YM asking for change(s) to the Guide. We refer you to page 5 of the current Guide (2012) for more details on how that works.

We ask SAYMA Friends that as you review the Draft of the Revised Queries you recognize that the query that does not speak to you can be an important one for SAYMA Friends who may be on a separate spiritual journey from yours. The beauty of Friends' Faith & Practice is how it weaves together the diverse spiritual journeys of so many Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association members. The ad hoc Committee to Revise the Queries Section of the Guide, asks for your approval of these queries.

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*Queries are understood to have three distinct values: the personal value, as we find the answers in ourselves; the interpretive value, by which the progressive application of our religious principles to life is disclosed; and the corporate value, by which the state or the Society can be appraised. At the reading of them, let us search our own hearts in the Light of the Holy Spirit and carefully ponder these questions for our personal answer."*

Faith and Practice, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (1935)

### **Introduction to the Queries Section:**

*Friends' queries are spiritual. Because we believe in continuing revelation, any answers to these queries may change as we grow in spiritual awareness. They are designed to be thought-provoking and to inspire prayerful consideration. Friends are urged to keep in mind that rather than following rules, we are following our leading to hold all things in the Light. Queries help us consider whether current practice gives all witness to faith.*

*Queries may be read at meetings for worship or business, used in worship sharing, included in newsletters and studied by individuals. Allow a period of silence after reading a query.*

### **A: Queries for Monthly and Yearly Meetings**

**A 1:** During a meeting for worship, how do I seek guidance from the Light? In our meeting for worship, are we open to various forms of vocal ministry as coming from the Spirit?

**A 2:** How does our meeting create an environment that helps worshipers center down into deep worship no matter what distractions occur?

**A 3:** How does our meeting remain in a spirit of worship when conducting business? In meeting for business, how can we be open to search for a sense of the meeting and to be guided toward resolution in the Light.

**A 4:** How does our meeting encourage all members and attenders to participate in a meeting for business?

**A 5:** How can we each use our individual gifts in the work of maintaining our meeting? In what ways can we honor the wide range of Friends' contributions to the meeting? How do we help Friends recognize their own gifts?

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**A 6:** How do we support those who serve our meeting?

**A 7:** Do we individually assume our rightful share of responsibility for the work and the financial support of the monthly meeting?

**A 8:** How do we seek peace and unity in our meeting? How do we address discord and conflict in our meeting?

**A 9:** What is my understanding of eldering? How do Friends in our meeting use the practice of eldering to encourage others to share their gifts as well as to provide guidance? Before eldering someone, do I confer with other members of the meeting?

**A 10:** How are we strengthened as we struggle together using Quaker process? How can we Friends make better use of tools such as clearness committees, care committees, support committees, and threshing meetings to help in personal and/or corporate discernment?

**A 11:** Am I open to insights from other Friends in the meeting? When do I know to seek guidance from others?

**A 12:** How do I discern whether to pursue a leading that is not supported by my meeting?

**A 13:** How do we show that we value older Friends among us?

**A 14:** What binds us together as Friends? What weakens or strengthens us on our path toward a stronger community?

**A 15:** How do we build a more inclusive community through fellowship, service, and learning in monthly and yearly meetings.

**A 16:** What can our monthly and yearly meetings do to foster a more inclusive environment?

**A 17:** How does our meeting reach out to the broader community? How does our meeting create a welcoming environment and spiritual home for everyone including newcomers?

**A 18:** How do we minister to each other in times of need? How does our meeting take responsibility for the vulnerable in our meeting community instead of relying solely on our "care and nurture committee" (or equivalent)?

**A 19:** How does our meeting identify and reach out to Friends, especially those who may be difficult, unlikeable, and/or challenging? How do we support and learn from absent Friends who may have left the meeting under painful circumstances?

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**A 20:** How do we interact with those who have been hurt by the meeting community? How does our meeting respond when someone ceases to attend?

**A 21:** Are we sensitive to the spiritual and physical needs of those making up the meeting community? How do we and our meeting lovingly respond to the needs of homebound, distant, or lonely members?

**A 22:** How does our meeting make it possible for an elderly Friend or for caregivers of the very young or disabled to participate fully in the life of the meeting community?

**A 23:** How does our meeting support and provide resources for those with special needs? How does the meeting recognize, in a timely way, when these resources are needed?

**A 24:** How do we support Friends who require extra care? How do we support those giving the extra care?

**A 25:** How can I speak so that Friends can hear messages more clearly? How can the Meeting improve the spiritual experience for Friends who have difficulty hearing?

**A 26:** How does our meeting assist those who are coping with addiction, mental illness, or trauma? In what ways does our meeting address the systemic causes of these challenges?

**A 27:** How does our meeting provide for continuing religious education in the manner of Friends? How do we ensure that materials avoid stereotypes, draw from a broad range of cultural backgrounds, and present realistic positive views of marginalized people?

**A 28:** How does our appropriate use of electronic devices and other technology enhance, detract, or distract from the spiritual life of the meeting?

**A 29:** How is information about the work and the life of the meeting communicated?

**A 30:** In what ways is our meeting creating and maintaining outreach materials in print, on its website, and on social media that conveys a lively welcoming presence? How do we ensure that our outreach materials appeal to a diverse range of cultures, backgrounds, and abilities?

**A 31:** Has your meeting formed alliances with faith communities, social justice groups, and/or other community groups which are composed primarily of people of color? What processes contributed to the formation of those alliances?

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**A 32:** How do I and my meeting interact with other cultural/racial groups in my own community and in the wider community?

**B: Queries for Personal Discernment**

**B 1:** Do I make time daily for meditation, prayer, or worship? Do I seek spiritual guidance in making decisions, especially in difficult times? If so, where do I seek it?

**B 2:** How do I make use of the Bible, the writings of Friends, and other inspirational literature? Am I open to new Light, whatever its source? How do I seek to understand and appreciate those of other faiths?

**B 3:** How has continuing revelation informed my spiritual journey?

**B 4:** How do I discern the distractions that keep me from the right ordering of my life? How do I address them?

**B 5:** How do I minimize distracting others during Meeting for Worship? How can I minimize my reaction to distractions during Meeting?

**B 6:** Do I hold in the Light the responsibility to share my views even though I perceive I may be a minority of one? How do I discern when to stand in the way or when to stand aside?

**B 7:** How do I discern what yearly or monthly meeting responsibilities are mine to do? How do I discern which are not mine?

**B 8:** What does it mean to me to look for that of God in every person?

**B 9:** When I see Friends engage in actions or words that seem inconsistent with the testimonies of the Religious Society of Friends, how do I season my reaction to be sure it does not come from lack of understanding or unrecognized prejudice? How do I respond?

**B 10:** Do I recognize, empathize with, and try to understand the discomfort in a person or group that often accompanies the experience of being perceived as different or "other"?

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**B 11:** How have my unexamined assumptions about individuals and groups of people caused them pain? How has this awareness led me to eliminate biases and change my behavior? What concrete steps am I taking to eliminate my biases such as ones related to race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, and/or religion?

**B 12:** How does the history of over 300 years of slavery in our country affect my thinking and my behavior? How do I address racism in myself and in my community in light of this history?

**B 13:** How has growing up as part of a society with a history of institutionalized persecution and expropriation of indigenous peoples affected my attitudes and behavior?

**B 14:** What activities do I participate in that are restorative? How do I develop my physical, emotional, and intellectual abilities? How do I care for my body as a gift from the Spirit?

**B 15:** How is fun a part of my life? Where do I find joy in my life?

**B 16:** How does my expression of sexuality reflect love and respect for myself and for my partner?

**C: Queries Concerning Friends' Testimonies**

**C 1:** How do I distinguish between needs and wants? How do I decide how much is enough? How important is it that I consider the way that my consumption affects others?

**C 2:** How do I or we address conflict? How am I led to work toward unity and harmony in my personal life and in my meeting? What kind of risks am I willing to take to resolve conflict?

**C 3:** How does the way I live my life help eliminate the causes for all wars?

**C 4:** How do I practice Friends' testimonies against any participation in war, including military preparations?

**C 5:** How do I bring nonviolent practices to all my relationships?

**C 6:** Where there is hatred, division, and conflict, in what ways do I seek to be an agent of reconciliation?

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**C 7:** Do all aspects of my life bear the same witness? How do I center my life in the awareness of the presence of God or Spirit so that all things take their rightful place? How might I address those aspects of my life that do not bear the same witness?

**C 8:** Under what circumstances is it difficult for me to act with integrity? Do I attempt to tell the truth at all times? How do I discern whether it is better not to say anything?

**C 9:** How do I discern right action when the truth is unclear?

**C 10:** How do I show respect for all people, including those I perceive as different or "other"?

**C 11:** How do I address inequality in its many forms? What am I doing to bring about equal opportunities for those who suffer discrimination?

**C 12:** How do I recognize and celebrate the diversity that exists in my meeting?

**C 13:** In what ways do I search for that of God within all persons regardless of how similar or different they are from myself?

**C 14:** In what ways do Friends' beliefs and testimonies influence my life choices? What are my priorities with respect to how I use my time and treasure?

**C 15:** How do my Quaker values inform my choice of work? How do I conduct my business and financial affairs so they are consistent with Friends' testimonies?

### **D: Queries for Families**

**D 1:** How do I define "family" in all its various configurations?

**D 2:** How do I recognize marriage/joining as a loving and sacred relationship requiring mutual consideration and continuing adjustments?

**D 3:** How do I support those whose marriage/joining is under the care of the meeting?

**D 4:** How do I practice the art of listening in my family, even beyond words? How do I show respect and understanding for all family members? How do I plan activities that will give my family time to grow together? How do I share my deepest beliefs and skills with all members of my family?

**D 5:** How do I grow in love and understanding with my children and young people? In what ways am I an example for them? How do I seek out and learn from their insights and concerns?

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**D 6:** How does my family use Quaker testimonies to build community and grow in the Spirit? How does my family address difficult topics in ways that encourages honest and respectful communication?

**D 7:** How do I prepare my children to be responsible and to live with integrity in an ever-changing world?

**D 8:** How do I balance the need for privacy and intimacy in my family life with my desire to make my home a center of hospitality?

**D 9:** How do I make the presence of the Light felt in my home for those who live here as well as those who do not?

**D 10:** How does the Meeting care for those going through divorce?

**E: Queries for Living in the Wider Community:**

**E 1:** How does the meeting offer young people opportunities for fellowship and service? In what ways do I help them assume responsibilities in the home, the meeting, and the larger community? How do I grow in love and understanding of young people?

**E 2:** How am I involved in the schools, service, and governmental organizations in my community? How do I support and foster practices that extend Friends' values in those groups?

**E 3:** How does my meeting address the systemic causes of addiction, mental illness, and trauma in both my community and in the wider community?

**E 4:** How does my meeting maintain its integrity while participate in the wider community?

**E 5:** In what ways does my understanding of current issues inform my participation the wider community?

**E 6:** In what ways do I attempt to influence governmental actions?

**E 7:** How does being known as a Friend help me on my spiritual journey?

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**E 8:** When individual Friends are led to participate in civil disobedience, are they encouraged by their meeting to seek clearness about their action? How does the meeting decide whether and in what ways to support that action?

**E 9:** In what ways do I discern that my actions result from leadings of the Spirit?

**E 10:** How can I be more aware of the subtle as well as obvious injustices which may exist in my social, spiritual, and economic life? How do I address these injustices?

**E 11:** How do I and my meeting interact with other cultural/racial groups in my own community and in the wider community?

**E 12:** How can I seek to further understand and remove systemic causes of misery and suffering? How do I offer refuge and support to those who are oppressed and/or harmed by those systems, and yet seek that of God in their oppressors and those responsible for doing harm?

**E 13:** In what ways do I and my meeting support young people faced with the possibility of being recruited and/or registered for military service? How does this support extend to those people who are still active or are former members of the armed forces?

**E 14:** How does awareness of the living conditions of people in my local and global communities affect my purchasing choices? In turn, how do these choices affect the well-being of others?

**E 15:** How do I support fair and equitable use of resources?

**E 16:** How can we model right use of electronic devices so that both our personal lives and the life of the meeting are enhanced?

**E 17:** How do electronic devices contribute to or interfere with my relationships with others and with my participation in the face to face activities of my community?

**E 18:** How do we acknowledge and honor the Indigenous People whose land we occupy? How do we connect with and learn from Indigenous People whom we have impacted? How do we promote the healing of those impacted?

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**E 19:** How do I recognize and address problems that marginalized communities may have with systems such as criminal justice, education, healthcare, and immigration?

**E 20:** How do you affirm the leadership of people of color within Friends organizations and in other groups?

**E 21:** If you are a person of European descent, have you been part of a group which consists primarily people of color? What did you learn by being the "other" in the group?

**Section F: Queries for Care of the Earth**

**F 1:** How do I express my gratitude for Creation? How do I seek to preserve and protect the physical world?

**F 2:** How do I honor all living things, including myself? Do I seek God in the whole world?

**F 3:** How mindful am I that actions for peace and justice are interwoven with the right sharing of Earth's resources? How much is enough?

**F 4:** How do I hold in the Light the impact of climate change on the "least of these," the vulnerable members of the human, animal, and plant communities?

**F 5:** How do I seek to reduce my use of fossil fuels? How does my meeting seek to reduce its use of fossil fuels?

**F 6:** As I integrate care for the Earth into my life, how can I share the values of ecological concerns with my Meeting and others?

**Section G: Queries for and by Young Friends**

**G 1:** How do you stand firmly against inequality? How do you peacefully challenge discriminatory social institutional practices?

**G 2:** How do you create and nurture community?

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**G 3:** How do you practice good social action while nurturing your well-being? What avenues exist between those?

**G 4:** What do you do that harms/affects the environment? How can you lessen your impact?

**G 5:** In what ways do you use your voice and express your views? When do you reevaluate your perspective?

**G 6:** How can we be supportive of each other's identity and growth?

**G 7:** How do you remain grounded while living and/or working in a materialistic society?

**G 8:** How do you reconcile simplicity and self-expression?

**G 9:** How do you apply Quaker values to your social media presence?

**G 10:** How does your energy change as you enter adulthood?

**G 11:** What is the Light? Where do you find that in your life?

**G 12:** How do you identify as Quaker, and how do you explain that to your peers?

**G 13:** To whom do you extend your compassion?

**Section H: Queries & Advices for a Preparative Monthly Meeting and its Sponsoring Meeting**

**H 1:** Does the preparative meeting have an understanding of Quaker practice and history? How does this understanding contribute to the life the meeting?

**H 2:** Does the preparative meeting study "SAYMA's Guide to our Faith and Practice" and Quaker history?

**H 3:** Is the preparative meeting able to carry out usual organizational functions such as appointing a clerk, maintaining a treasury, and recording business meetings? Does the preparative meeting seek and listen to Spirit-led guidance in making decisions?

**H 4:** How does the preparative meeting face its challenges, seeking assistance from Spirit, the sponsoring meeting, and yearly meeting?

**H 5:** Are religious education programs available for people of all ages?

**H 6:** How does the preparative meeting build community in activities outside of Meeting for Worship?

**H 7:** Does the preparative meeting follow Friends' practice of service through faithfulness to the Spirit?

**H 8:** How does the preparative meeting welcome visitors?

**H 9:** Does the preparative meeting support the yearly meeting through financial contributions and attendance at yearly and representatives' meetings? Does the preparative meeting interact with Wider Quaker Organizations (WQO) such as Friends General Conference (FGC), American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), and Quaker Earthcare Witness (QEW)?

**H 10:** Are there enough Friends and attenders to support a preparative monthly meeting? If two or three of these were to stop attending, what would happen to the preparative meeting? Is there ongoing outreach for new attenders?

**H 11:** Is the preparative meeting receiving adequate spiritual and practical support from the sponsoring meeting?