

ADVICES

&

QUERIES

2013 Edition

Quakers

The Religious Society of Friends

In Aotearoa/ New Zealand

Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri

www.quakers.nz

Introduction

This is a practical and informative guide to Quaker practice in this country. It is not a rigid set of rules and regulations but a description of what seems to have worked best in the past, based on Quaker theology, values and experience.

The historical basis of Friends' practices lies in 17th century England. George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, sought religious truth through prayer and Bible-reading, and was grieved by what he saw as the failure of professing Christians of his time. After much travelling and listening to priests and preachers, he lost all hope of help from them. Then one day, when sitting alone, he became conscious of the presence of God's Spirit within himself, directly answering his needs and giving him hope, power and understanding. When he spread this message that the divine Spirit was active within all human beings, his words spoke to the experience of other seekers. With their keen response, the Quaker movement took form in the 1650s.

From these insights the early Friends developed their form of worship, their organisation and their religious and social testimonies. In worship they rejected all material aids, waiting silently together in fellowship for an inner awareness of the presence of God. Business meetings were held in the same manner, with Friends seeking to speak to the matter in hand as they were led by the Spirit, and from this decisions were made to accord with the sense of the Meeting.

In 1682, when the Religious Society of Friends was still taking form and when many Quakers were in prison, London Yearly Meeting asked representatives of Quarterly Meetings to respond to three questions about the welfare of Friends in their areas. In subsequent years these questions became more numerous, and more devotional in character. A century later they were supplemented by

separate paragraphs of advice, thus forming what was known as ‘Advices and Queries’. The present document is one of many revisions and re-workings that different groups of Quakers have made over the centuries.

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 that is pure and holy, may be guided; and so in the light walking and abiding, these things may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.

Attached to an epistle issued by a meeting of elders at Balby,
Yorkshire, in 1656.

Section A: God and ourselves

1. Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your heart, and respond to them; they are the leadings of all that is good and pure. In each of us there is a light to show us our condition and to renew us.

2. Cherish that of God within you, so that love may grow in you and guide your life.

Do you bring the whole of your life before God, responding to the healing power of love and accepting the forgiveness and joy it brings?

3. The Religious Society of Friends has its roots in Christianity, and has always found inspiration in the life and teachings of Jesus.

How do you interpret your faith in the light of this heritage?

Are you following the example of love in action shown by Jesus?

Are you learning from his life of compassion the reality and cost of obedience to God? How does his closeness to God challenge and inspire you in the way you live?

4. Do you use the guidance of the Spirit when seeking truth?

5. Let others know what is valuable to you. Let your life speak.

6. Do we try to live as a society of friends in community with one another by acknowledging and responding to that of God in each other?

7. Consider the means of spiritual growth in your life.

Do you make time for regular meditation, prayer and reflection? Are you gaining insights and inspiration from the Bible, from other writings including the literature of other faiths, and from the religious experiences of Friends and others, past and present?

8. You can gain inspiration from people of all ages whom you meet throughout your life and also from the example of people throughout history, including the present day. You can find inspiration all around, in the natural world, in the arts and sciences, in your work and friendships, in your sorrows as well as in your joys.

Are you open to new light from whatever source it may come? Do you approach new ideas with discernment?

Section B: Reaching towards God

1. Our Meetings for Worship, in which we join together in stillness, are the central activity of the Religious Society of Friends. In our worship, we respond to an awareness of God's presence. We seek to find through the stillness and quietness the mysterious and unknown. We can reflect and worship at any time, in any place. From our worship flows guidance for our daily lives.

How can you best prepare yourself for worship, in heart, mind and body?

2. To widen our vision and deepen our experience, we all need times of solitary quietness for worship and reflection, as well as times for joining together in worship.
3. Come regularly to Meeting for Worship, especially at those times when you feel angry or tired, or spiritually low. Bring your joys and your hurts, your hopes and your fears, and your awareness of the needs of other people. As you do so, you may find that you see and feel things differently. In the silence ask for and accept the support of others joined with you in worship. Be open to spiritual wholeness encompassing sorrow, suffering and anguish, as well as thankfulness and joy. Prayer, springing from a deep place in the heart, may bring healing and unity as nothing else can. Let Meeting for Worship nourish your whole life.
4. Be aware of each person in the Meeting. Enjoy and affirm Friends of all ages and backgrounds. Seek to move into a gathered silence in which you are open to one another.

5. Rejoice in the presence of children and young people in your Meeting and recognise the gifts they bring. Nurture them, remembering that the Meeting as a whole shares a responsibility for every child in its care.

Do you respond to the special needs of children and young people during Meeting for Worship?

When they are involved in separate activities, do you uphold them and those who are with them?

How do you share your deepest beliefs with them, while leaving them free to develop as the spirit of God may lead them?

They may be led along paths you had not anticipated. Are you ready to learn from them and to accept your responsibilities towards them?

Are you aware of the example you set for children?

6. All of us are at times preoccupied and distracted in Meeting. Accept these wanderings and then release them so that you can move towards the still centre of your own being and find the unity of the Meeting.

7. Remember that ministry – in silence, speech, and other forms – is the responsibility of everyone; and that all present contribute to the quality and depth of Meeting for Worship.

8. If you are prompted to speak, do not be prevented by a sense of your own unworthiness, or a fear of not finding the right words. Pray that the Spirit may guide you and that your ministry may arise from deep experience. Wait patiently to know that the sense, the occasion and the timing are right. When you are sure, have confidence that the words will be given to you. Faithfulness and sincerity in speaking may open the way to ministry from others.

9. *Do you sometimes speak too often, too predictably, or too soon after someone else has spoken?*

10. Be sure to take time to reach for the underlying meaning in the spoken ministry of others. Receive it in a tender and understanding spirit, and avoid hurtful criticism. What may seem of little value to one hearer may for another be the direct word of God.

Do you accept that in worship God may ask hard questions of you, and challenge you to make difficult decisions?

11. Do not feel that your ministry must conform to that of others. You may be moved to sing, to dance, or to express something new or different.

Are you prepared for worship to bring exhilaration, grieving, passion or mystery?

Are you prepared for worship to bring challenge? Are you able to worship even in times of spiritual dryness, when life seems humdrum or you feel lethargic?

12. Prayer springs from a deep place in the heart. The spirit of prayer will be active in a gathered Meeting. Vocal prayer, though it may be expressed in imperfect words, can draw those present into communion with God and with one another.

13. Bring everything that concerns you into the light, so that you feel a weakening of what is unworthy in you, and a strengthening of what is good. Accept and support each other in love.

14. Even the mundane activities of everyday life can be performed as a form of worship.

Section C: Seeking God's will in decision-making

1. Our Meetings for Business are an integral part of our Quaker life. They are conducted in the spirit of worship. We seek to discern the will of God rather than reach a majority decision or consensus. Listen in the expectation that the right way will become clear. The way that opens may not be the one that seemed obvious to anyone at the start of the Meeting.
2. Meeting for Worship for Business is strengthened by having the worshipful consideration of as many people as possible.
Do you take your right share in Meeting for Business? Do you uphold the Meeting and its decisions, even if you cannot attend?
3. Come to Meeting for Business with a willingness to listen to everyone whatever their contribution. Allow your insights and personal wishes to take their place alongside those of others, and if necessary, let them be set aside. Use as few words as possible, but as many as are needed.
4. *Do you apply the principles of Quaker decision-making in your home, in your work, and in other areas of your life?*

Section D: Ourselves and one another

1. Make time to learn about other people and their spiritual lives. Let your life speak.

Do you use all opportunities for sharing, in a spirit of worship, what is spiritually meaningful in your life?

2. Be faithful to your experience of the Spirit, in whatever way it has come to you. Carry it into your daily life. Do what love requires of you, which may not be the same as great busyness.

3. *In our local Meeting, how can we build a community in which each person is accepted and nurtured, and newcomers are welcomed?*

4. Both within our family of Friends and in our wider communities, we need sensitivity to each other and to our various cultural roots.

What joys and what responsibilities does this bring?

Do we aspire to an understanding of ourselves as people of Aotearoa/New Zealand and the South Pacific?

5. A caring Meeting can bring healing at times of difficulty or despair. Listen sensitively to what, although not clearly expressed, may be a cry for help.

Are you available to help others, even at some cost to yourself?

Are you willing to be helped, both practically and spiritually?

6. Cherish friendships so that you grow in depth, understanding and mutual respect. When we love, we may risk hurt as well as finding joy. When we experience great happiness or great pain, we may be more open to the working of the Spirit.

7. *Are you patient and considerate, even towards people you don't like?*
Do you avoid and discourage unkind criticism and gossip?

8. Each individual's journey through life is unique. Friends in the Meeting may be in different types of relationships. These may change through choice or circumstance. Ponder on your own choices, and try to understand the choices of others.
Are you inclined to make hasty judgements about other people's relationships?
Do you support others as they work towards making their decisions?

9. Every relationship brings responsibility.
Remember the value of prayer, perseverance and a sense of humour.
Are you careful to avoid harbouring grudges, exploiting or belittling other people?
Are you sensitive to their needs?
Do you enter imaginatively into their experience?

10. Corruption and destructiveness can grow from very small seeds, as can courage and loving kindness. Consider the words you use, and your tone of voice.
Do you refrain from verbal and psychological violence?
When people attack you with angry words, do you listen for the underlying hurt?

11. A loving relationship brings both fulfilment and tension, and requires long-term commitment.

Do you acknowledge and explore personal differences creatively?

12. Sometimes, despite strong commitment, a relationship comes apart.

If this happens to you, are you willing to seek help in understanding the other point of view, and in finding the right way forward?

Where children are involved, do you remember their needs and vulnerability and care for them?

13. Be selective in the lifestyle you choose. Take care of your body and your own well-being. Consider the harm you may cause to yourself and others with unhealthy substances or selfish practices. Be aware that the mass media and other social pressures can dull your vision.

14. Aim to live simply. A simple lifestyle freely chosen is a source of strength. Value beauty in all its forms. Share what you have.

15. *How can you make your home a place of friendship, refreshment and laughter, a peaceable place where the Spirit becomes more real to all who are there?*

Do you recognise the needs and gifts of each member of your family and household, including your own?

16. We all have different gifts and needs. Discover, acknowledge and respond to your own, and those of other people. Free yourself from limiting ideas, for example about gender roles.

When choices arise in work, leisure, interests, relationships or education, do you follow the way that provides the greatest opportunity for the development and use of your gifts in the service of God and the community?

Look for the leadings of God in all circumstances, even if you seem to have no choice. Live adventurously.

17. Certain times of life bring energy and activity; other times bring a need for rest and renewal.

Do you respond to the rhythms of your life, accepting or declining commitments without an undue sense of pride or guilt?

18. Approach old age with acceptance and anticipation.

Like other times in life, it can be a time for growing. Try to discern the right moment for relinquishing long-term responsibilities, and look for new opportunities for involvement. As outward activity lessens, your thoughts and prayer may liberate love and power in others.

19. In bereavement, allow yourself to grieve fully.

Allow others to mourn: let your caring embrace them. Through our acceptance of the fact of death, we are freed to live more fully.

Are you able to contemplate your own death, and the death of those closest to you?

Section E: Reaching beyond ourselves

1. We are convinced of the equal worth and value of every individual.

Do you appreciate the huge diversity of human personality?

Do you take into account the different experiences that people may have had in their lives and the impact this may have on them?

How can you help end social practices based on prejudice or fear, and systems which involve oppression of particular groups because of their gender, race, religion, class, age, sexual orientation or other characteristics?

2. We all need a sense of achievement and selfworth.

Are you able to value every individual, including yourself, irrespective of occupation or financial status?

Are you striving to change society's attitudes to work and remuneration?

3. We have a testimony to integrity, which includes honesty and plain speaking. Be utterly scrupulous both in personal relationships and in dealings with businesses and government departments or other public bodies. Do not be afraid to speak the truth as you discern it, with firmness and respect. Taking oaths sets a double standard of truth; ask to affirm instead.
4. Obey the laws of the state, except when they conflict with your inner conviction. Work to amend laws that you consider unjust. If you feel called to civil disobedience, seek the guidance and support of your Meeting. Be prepared to accept the consequences cheerfully.

5. All those who commit crimes have that of God within them, as do those who are the victims of crime.

Do you recognise or share in the work that is being done towards better conditions and rehabilitation for prisoners, towards alternatives to imprisonment, and towards meeting the needs of victims of crime?

6. *Do you strive to understand the challenges and choices offered by modern communications and technology?*

Do you take into account their impact, positive and negative, on the lives of people and the environment?

7. *Are you careful that your use of financial resources is in accordance with our values of integrity, peace, equality, simplicity, and concern for other people and for the environment?*

8. Do not be content to accept society as it is. Seek to discover the causes of social unrest, injustice, poverty and fear. Bear witness to the humanity of all people. Try to discern the new growing points in society.

Are you alert to practices here and throughout the world that discriminate against people on the basis of who or what they are or because of their beliefs?

Do you work for a social, constitutional and economic order which will allow each person to develop fully and cooperation by all?

9. Remember our obligation to honour the status of Māori as the indigenous people of Aotearoa and partners in the Treaty of Waitangi. Seek to discover the effects of the colonial and postcolonial history of Aotearoa. Work to ensure that the sharing of power and resources in our society is a genuine partnership.
- Do you acknowledge the values that the Māori world can offer?*
- How can we work together as equals, with mutual understanding and respect?*
10. Remember your responsibility as citizens of Aotearoa for the government of our country and for its relations with other countries, particularly our neighbours in the South Pacific.
- How can we help our nation to promote international peace, justice and care for the earth?*
11. We are challenged to enter into fellowship with people of all faiths and philosophies, locally, regionally and globally so that we may work or worship together and cooperate for peace, justice and care of the planet.
- Are you open to understanding and acceptance of Quakers of diverse traditions worldwide?*
- Are you open to understanding and acceptance of Christians of all denominations and people with other faiths and philosophies?*
12. Our peace testimony invites us to live “in the virtue of that life and power which takes away the occasion of all wars”. Consider whether your way of life might in some way benefit from or rely on violence.
- What are you doing to build a more peaceful world?*
13. Seek to recognise in yourself the emotions that lie at the root of conflict. In industrial strife, racial enmity and international tension, work to foster

understanding between individuals, groups and nations. Stand firm against people who commit or prepare to commit violence. Seek that of God in those who oppose you.

14. We need to respect, revere and cooperate with other life systems on our planet. The earth's diverse riches are not ours to exploit. Seek reverence for life and a sense of wonder at God's continuing presence in all of creation.

Do you work to conserve the earth's beauty and resources, both now and in the future, for the many people who depend on this planet and the many other species that share it?

Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.

George Fox, 1656