

**ADVICES AND QUERIES  
OF  
IOWA YEARLY MEETING  
(CONSERVATIVE)**

**WITH SELECTED RESPONSES FROM ANNUAL  
SESSIONS**

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## **ADVICES AND QUERIES OF IOWA YEARLY MEETING (CONSERVATIVE)**

### **Introduction**

Quakerism is a living faith made real through the inward light of the living Christ. This faith holds that our individual lives and the corporate life of the meeting can be guided by continuing revelation through the Holy Spirit.

When we behold the splendor of creation, we realize that knowledge of what is divine is beyond description. Traditionally, Friends have referred to the divine in such terms as God, the Inward Light, the Living Water, the Creator, the Christ Within, and the Spirit. Many believe that when we limit the divine to one gender we also limit ourselves and each other. Becoming aware of how we discern Spirit is important to our worship.

The Quaker faith is not written in the form of a creed, but is experienced in our lives as a vibrant, living truth. Advices and queries serve to engage our minds and hearts in a process which may provide openings to the leadings of the Spirit within us. These leadings may speak to our individual and corporate needs. The advices and queries reflect experiences from many lives as they contribute to the gathered wisdom of the group. They serve to guide us on our spiritual journeys by opening our hearts and minds to the possibility of new directions and insights.

## **Uses of Advices and Queries**

We look for our own truths and the truths of our meeting when we discuss the advices; and answer the queries. It is suggested that one advice and one query be considered by the local meeting each month.

Monthly meeting answers to each of the queries are to be mailed to the assistant clerk of the Yearly Meeting one month prior to Yearly Meeting. While Friends are encouraged to consider each query in its entirety, replies need to cover only those questions the meeting is led to address. A summary answer, to be read at the Yearly Meeting session, will be chosen by the assistant clerk from among the monthly meeting answers.

# 1. MEETING FOR WORSHIP

## ADVICE

Meeting for Worship is the heart of the meeting. In the silence, we seek direct communion with God the Spirit, conscious of the seeking of others. From the depths of living silence may come an awareness of the presence of the Spirit.

Sometimes the silence is unbroken. At other times a message may come to any one of us which seems intended not simply for the worshiper, but for the gathering as a whole. If the message is not expressed one may feel a sense of not having been faithful to a leading of the Spirit, but if it is spoken, a sense of peace may follow. We are most effective if we speak clearly, simply and from our own experience. Because we are unique individuals who come from varied backgrounds and life experiences, our messages reflect diversity. Part of our worship together is listening with an open spirit, holding the speaker in love, remembering that silence after the message is part of the message.

Our daily lives are linked with Meeting for Worship. In the search for truth, Friends are encouraged to spend time in individual study, meditation or prayer and to be open to other sources of inspiration around us. The life of the meeting may be strengthened by a deep level of sharing, discussion or worship at times other than regularly scheduled meetings.

Friends should make an effort to arrive a Meeting for Worship prepared in mind and spirit to support one another in a worshipful atmosphere. As we give and receive, in speech or in silence, we are drawn together in the life of the Spirit.

## QUERY

- Are our Meetings for Worship held in a spirit of expectant waiting and communion with the Holy Spirit? How do we prepare our hearts and minds for worship?
- How do we refer to that which is divine? How does ascribing gender to the Holy Spirit affect our worship?
- How does the vocal ministry of the meeting contribute to its spiritual life? In what ways do we recognize and nurture vocal ministry and other spiritual gifts?

## SELECTED RESPONSES

### 1998

Friends noted how variable is the expectation and the response of what is received from Meeting for Worship; dry and fruitful times were experienced by all, related, perhaps to the investment made in preparation meditations or inspirational reading during the week. It is easier to go to a “prepared” service.

One F/friend spoke to the fact that the demandingness of meeting was what drew them here, and that much effort was put into being attentive and into expectant waiting; a dry time now may be because this Friend is not now bringing energy and “expectance” to worship. One Friend raised the difficulty of expectant waiting for what? Part of the response is that we are waiting to know what God requires of us, that the Spirit may be calling us to some work not yet begun, perhaps

in calling us to minister to one another, not limited to vocal ministry during Meeting.

Meeting is a corporate experience and a corporate practice. We need to be in it for the long term, and to be willing to invite the Spirit in. Several Friends shared their practice of willfully and consciously holding each other in the Light, especially at this time. There is a benefit from occasionally worshipping in larger (or other) groups of Friends. The experience was shared of "carrying" others during Meeting for Worship, or of being "carried." We recognize the value of the bonding or spiritual friendships which are developing among those who have participated in the Spiritual Nurture workshop offered by Northern Yearly Meeting; this may enrich the worship experience for all of us.

One Friend noted that each of us may feel the need for a religious community on one hand, and may also offer some resistance to being committed to that. The experience of being in a spiritual study group for 20 years was very therapeutic.

## **2000**

Friends have differing responses to and interpretations for many of the terms of the queries, such as worship, Holy Spirit, communion. Some described waiting with expectation or excitement, others more with openness, seeking to be "awake," sometimes with restlessness or fear. Some wait filling the silence with prior insights, familiar passages or memories. We are at different stages of learning to be silent. One looks forward to "clarity of word and thought," and is uplifted by that of others. One misses more verbal communication, and another fears that the Divine might be spoken and not recognized. In preparation for Meetings for Worship, Friends do a variety of things; listen to music, watch an inspirational television program, think of other persons who attend now or have attended in the past, making a conscious connection with them. A parent struggles with the difficulty of

readying children and finds it easier the weeks they are not here. The Holy Spirit seems relatively free from gender in our meeting. Many of us grew up with male-oriented terminology for the divine, but it was pointed out that both male and female references can be found in the Bible. Generally if we use gender specific terms there is a discussion about it. The Divine is seen as beyond gender. Life during the week is anchored by First Day morning. Some thought "worship" was not the best word. It was felt that Friends meetings tend to attract persons who resist hierarchy, but others felt that we will worship something whether we like it or not. Some are working for a form of communion at Meeting and in the outer world that gets down to the mystery that underlies life. Others seek communion for enlightenment or to communicate with the sacred. When we are gathered and a connectedness occurs, we're not here just as individuals. When it happens the energy is different. Some seek a safe place to feel love. One reported at first thinking vocal ministry interrupted her meditation but has learned that if she listens, it can speak to her. Guidelines for vocal ministry were discussed; such as speaking only once, seeking to distill thoughts to their essence, and not becoming "chatty" or rambling. Sometimes it is hard to recognize a leading. We have a responsibility, when not speaking, to listen. The Philadelphia discipline urges that we not come to meeting prepared to speak or not to speak. Vocal ministries that are most meaningful are not intellectual—usually a short statement of a feeling sort. Language can be both illuminating and obscure. The silence that follows vocal ministry is a part of the ministry. "Be still and know that I am God." Sometimes a leading to speak has been discouraged by being followed too quickly by another "answering." One friend wondered, "How do we encourage vocal ministry without encouraging vocal ministers?" It is no credit to have spoken except to say "yes" to the calling to speak. It is a message for the meeting. There is a lot to ponder.



## 2001

The tone of the response to Query 1 was positive. On the vocal ministry in the meeting, one Friend responded, "Ours is just right." We do not have what are sometimes called "popcorn" meetings. Vocal ministry is puzzling and mysterious, but it is essential to the health of the meeting. Maybe it can't be explained. Sometimes we are puzzled when vocal ministry sounds like announcements or anecdotes about social action, but different people approach things in different ways. We have tried not to have announcements during the meetings, and giving people time to make announcements after meetings may help with this.

On our preparation for meeting for worship, the meeting as a whole has a midweek meeting once a month and we take opportunities to support each other spiritually. One person meditates by gardening. Others do reading and silent meditation. Another does prayer and yoga in the morning. Thinking about the people who are in the meeting and holding them in the Light also prepares us for worship. Simply our daily lives and thoughts are worship and preparation for worship. All these practices make us open and attentive to the meeting.

We use different terms for the divine, and no one felt that these different terms presented problems in the meeting. One person uses the term "great spirit," and yet remains somewhat bashful and uncomfortable about this. It is an alias. Another person added that it is important not to get bogged down in literalism and recommended the book *Saving the Bible from Fundamentalism*. But we recognize that words can be powerful and we need to be careful how we use them.

Recognizing and nurturing vocal ministry may be a problem. Maybe we need to especially encourage the vocal ministry of new people in the meeting. A positive response to vocal ministry might occur within the meeting itself or after. Being aware of Friends' historical

insistence on humility in spiritual leadings, we need to take care that our spiritual nurture is done appropriately. We need the gifts of new insight and spontaneity, but also of tradition.

We believe that our meetings are held in a spirit of expectant waiting and communion.

## **2002**

Vocal ministry does not need to be in the context of meeting for worship. Friends have shared about how they know if they are led to speak or not—several people have said that their heart starts racing, their hands get sweaty, and they know this is something that they need to say. Nurturing vocal ministry needs to be done carefully, but it needs to be done. When someone speaks in meeting, and a Friend encourages them following meeting, it indicates that there was a need for that message. Lloyd Lee Wilson felt more led to speak in the time following meeting for worship, and considered that vocal ministry as well. There have been a few times when a Friend has felt led to share during meeting, but never with the heart racing—but felt at ease to share it following the rise of meeting. If an idea comes out of the silence, and it doesn't go away, but keeps returning, it is an indicator that it must be a message to be shared. One Friend wonders whether it is a fear factor that makes the heart race. If the words are allowed to come, and the thought is not fully organized before beginning, sometimes that means the idea came from the right place. Vocal ministry is puzzling and mysterious, but it is essential—we as individuals, seeking to be led, should not be hesitant to speak at the meeting; the idea that what I have to share is not all that profound, sometimes keeps people from speaking. Is it profound? If I have to ask, probably not. Meeting for worship is not something that happens to the individual, but to the faith community. We have had some experience with mid-week gatherings for worship, which were larger than the Sunday gatherings. What about the profound part—

what to say about the Spirit calling a whole community to ministry? Early Friends were seekers, and they were corporate seekers. A Truth that comes to one that seems to be a Truth for more than oneself, that is something to which we are called to provide ministry. Someone may be called to share something (profound or not), but it may need to be shared, and they need not apply the profound criteria. One Friend suggested that the rightness of a message is sometimes known following the message, if it is shared, or if it is not. There can be a great peace and a great release following a message if it was meant to be shared. Likewise, there can be great discomfort of unease if a message were meant to be shared, but was not.

The other statements remind us that there is more to worship than vocal ministry; more preparation, and anticipating the meeting for worship, tends to make worship a more fulfilling experience. It took one Friend a long time to shift from the “church” experience (where it was mostly just getting there on time) to the meeting experience, where there is even more need for preparation during the week. Preparation can be important for most any religious service. We noted the use of the phrase, “waiting for worship.” What do we use to prepare for meeting? Practicing the presence of God, or being in the presence of God, a matter of taking time to acknowledge that there is that Spirit that can enter, and be a part of me, reading of the Bible or other inspirational materials helps to focus attention.

Discussion about finding quiet times in noisy lives and noisy households, and how important ritual and routine (*à la* Now we Begin Again) and of the need to be thankful, and to recognize that a number of times during the day. We recognize how important are the regular habits of quiet and recognition of God's presence, and of giving thanks.

**2003**

A good portion of the discussion of this query centered around vocal ministry and the spirituality of the meeting.

One participant in the discussion felt that our meeting appears not to have a common, shared spirituality and that this may contribute to our difficulties in keeping young people in the meeting. Because vocal ministry tends not to come from a large variety of members, young people may not view the individual messages as messages from the meeting, but as messages from individuals.

Other participants expressed different viewpoints. One felt that our young people are here *because* of our spirituality. Another pointed out that one's view is dependent on the definition of "spiritual," and said that if a common belief is the basis of a common spirituality, then she felt that it was not necessarily desirable to have a common spirituality. She grew up in a meeting where there was a great deal of unity of belief, yet she was not entirely comfortable with all aspects of this belief. In thinking about the definition of spirituality, one participant expressed the view that spirituality is an aspect of what we share and how we care for each other. Another participant felt that it is not necessary to have a single definition of spirituality to have a collective sense of spirituality.

A number of participants expressed their personal experiences with spirituality. One expressed the difficulty during meeting for worship of letting go of one's own thoughts and letting the Spirit lead. Another talked about the ups and downs of life and the Spirit. There are times when a person clearly feels the presence of God and feels a sense of being led, but there are also times when a person feels utterly alone and adrift. One must be ready and open at any time for the presence of God to be felt. Sunday morning meeting for worship is in a sense the opportunity to practice readiness for communion with God. A third participant expressed her growth in spirituality through her struggle to find a

deeper level of spiritual energy in an effort to try to help others in the meeting.

#### **2004**

Personal preparation is the key to how meaningful a meeting for worship will be for each of us. The Sunday School hour preceding meeting continues to mean much to those who attend, often contributing to our preparation. We sense that our meetings are usually held in the Light of the Living Spirit. Appreciation was expressed during our discussion of this query for the gift of silence in our noisy world. What goes on in our daily lives is very important to our spiritual life, and we hope that each one who comes finds comfort and inspiration in the living silence.

We recognize the historical description of God as a male father figure can be hurtful for many. Most of us are not uncomfortable with this image, but we do try to use more inclusive gender neutral terms in describing our own religious experience. Sometimes this produces new insight into overly familiar phrases and Bible passages.

The vocal ministry of our meeting, while not frequent, contributes to the spiritual life of the meeting. We try to recognize and value all spiritual gifts.

#### **2005**

Meetings for Worship here are very quiet compared to others Friends have participated in. Some of us tend to edit ourselves, waiting for the right message, or for the right time to give it. Sometimes we settle in so deeply that it is difficult to speak. We have attended worship meetings where Friends seem to speak too easily about what is on their minds or on the news, and we don't want to follow this path. Perhaps in this meeting we are taking too seriously the instruction that we should speak only if we feel God is nudging or pressuring or commanding us to do so. We won't know the exact

meaning of our message to each of those present, or the effect our message might have, but we can have faith that God will help the message to be used or not used as it is needed.

People have appreciated spoken ministry from gathered meetings, and have sometimes voiced their appreciation to the speaker. Since we are a small, intimate group, this is naturally an unstructured, spontaneous occurrence rather than a formal procedure by the M&O Committee, as it is in some larger meetings.

Preparing our hearts and minds during the week helps to make our weekly corporate worship richer both in the silence and in the vocal ministry, but many of us feel we don't prepare as we should. One person noted that vocal ministry is more frequent after Yearly Meeting sessions, when many of us have been spending time focused on spiritual matters. One person makes a habit of carrying an exercise or meditation with him during his work day, and believes this deepens his weekly worship experience. One person spoke of her efforts to become more aware of God in the world, seeking guidance more frequently, remembering God every minute and every second as she goes through life. Our daily individual spiritual practices do not replace Sunday worship, which feels like a safe time set aside for the purpose and away from distractions and fear.

We are concerned about passing on our faith to the meeting's children. We want them to have genuine experiences of the Spirit, not just to go through the motions of attending meeting and repeating things we have said. We need to choose our words honestly when talking about our meeting for worship. Instead of calling it "silent" we like the phrases "Spirit-led" or "waiting worship."

## **2006**

Preparations for meeting for worship are relaxing, clearing the mind, and giving thanks, which lessens worries. One Friend finds praying for blessings helps. Another likes doing some Bible study before Meeting. Some find that arriving at Meeting early helps their preparation.

Meeting for worship is an intensification of what happens in daily life, the bringing to the foreground of what is normally in the background. Some experience an expectation that happens in old meetinghouses. Others prefer to let thoughts flow freely but without attachment.

Our meeting does not refer directly to the divine that often. Referring to Christ or God is fairly rare. Language can get in the way when trying to communicate about the divine. Some react negatively to various terms often used to describe or point to the divine. The words of language are symbols, which point to something higher. Many Friends come from other church backgrounds whose beliefs form a background for meeting.

It is important how we live outside of meeting. How effectively can we take worship outside of meeting into daily life? There seems to be a tension between belief systems and new revelations of truth.

## **2. OUTREACH**

### **ADVICE**

Friends believe it is essential to express in words and deeds the faith that sustains us and the convictions that arise from that faith. It is important to speak with integrity and courage ourselves as well as to listen to others with open hearts and minds. We seek fellowship with a branches of Friends and with other seekers of Truth. We recognize the oneness, of humanity in the Spirit and believe that in learning from one another we may come to respect differences. Truth is greater than any of us may know, individually or as a group.

As we work and share with others within our communities, we may find opportunities to invite them to attend our meetings for worship and other meeting activities. A genuine welcome to everyone is consistent with Friends' testimony of acknowledging the Divine Spirit in each person and of our belief in the dignity and worth of every human being.

### **QUERY**

- Do we encourage intervisitation within the Yearly Meeting and with other Friends?
- What are we doing to share our faith with others outside our Friends community? How do we speak truth as we know it and yet remain open to truth as understood by others?



- In what ways do we cooperate with persons and groups with whom we share concerns? How do we reach out to those with whom we disagree?
- How do we make the presence of our meeting known to the larger community? Do we invite others to share in our Meetings for Worship and other meeting activities? Do we welcome everyone and appreciate the gifts that differences such as race, creed, economic status, disability, age, gender or sexual orientation may bring to us?

## **SELECTED RESPONSES**

### **1998**

Friends noted that Meadowlarks are joining us for singing, worship, and outlook two weeks from today. This comprises outreach to other meetings. Another F/friend talked about our web page as a tool for reaching a broader community and described a business card for the meeting. It was noted as well that a F/friend had spoken as Quaker at a meeting convened by a local university on the topic of "Women of Faith." Her discussion group at the meeting was described as well attended and people were interested in the similarities between the topic "discernment" and Quaker concept of clearness.

We expressed concern about our relations with broad ecumenical groups. Our principal association at the moment is through the Great Plains Religious Media organization which maintains a web page with our meeting listed although they don't yet have a pointer to our page. This group is principally small and more liberal religious groups. We feel it appropriate that we should make efforts to participate in ecumenical groups around our city.

We discussed associations that focus on issues of concern to Quakers in the community such as Nebraskans Against the Death Penalty and Nebraskans for Peace. We usually support these groups through regular donations and through invitations to speak with our group. Furthermore, many members of our meeting are active participants in these and similar groups.

We discussed outreach to those of divergent beliefs, noting that we feel that regardless of doctrine and dogma there is an ultimate truth in all faiths. Our belief in the Light Within All argues against the notion of evil people, but we acknowledge that intolerance of beliefs can be a problem. Quaker religion is primarily a seeking religion rather than a structure. To a newcomer the silence can be intimidating. Quakers need to be aware of how they are perceived both by newcomers to a Friends Meeting and by the world at large where we are sometimes confused with Old Order Amish.

## **2000**

Intervisitation through the Eastern Iowa Gathering is most fruitful. Being an active Friend in our jobs, neighborhoods and larger community makes a difference in our lives as well as those whom we touch. Though we are not evangelical, it is often energizing and enlightening to invite friends to join us in our Meetings for worship or other activities. The practice of private meditation during the week is a good way to remind ourselves of the need for inner peace and to give us strength to be mindful of our presence in all family and community contacts.

## **2001**

Generally, we find it sometimes difficult to visit other meetings even though we think it is a fine idea. Some meetings in the conference aren't part of a yearly meeting and need closer involvement with other meetings. A couple of us have visited various of these. Another person has visited several, and wants to visit

more. One problem is the distances between us and others, a three- to six-hour drive.

One person suggested that there are millions who might find joy in meeting. So the question is, how do we let them know? She added that she was drawn to the Quakers because they do not proselytize. They share their beliefs through action. One person does library volunteer work and talked about Quakers to a co-worker. Another enjoys spirited discussions in his men's group, where he is the "token liberal." In summary, someone suggested that we "be ourselves and recognize that we're all in this together" and that we should be open to others.

Many of us are members, at least in part, of more than one faith. One speaks candidly for himself in these various places. Self-control is important. Choke back the "you're wrong," listen, and only afterward speak. Coming to meeting has made one person more patient. She has learned from the silence to listen and can now listen to other people without having to be upset, without having to disagree. Listen, be quiet, and have "something peaceful to say" without forcing it on the other person.

Another, visiting from Miami, mentioned the other Kansas City Quaker meeting. An attempt to link with them in the past has been unsuccessful. She also mentioned the Mennonites and getting together with like-minded groups to protest the Iraq bombings. Someone else reminded us that our reaching out to our neighbor next door has not been successful. Someone suggested inviting him to a potluck sometime. Reaching out sometimes succeeds, sometimes doesn't. John Woolman was able to gently talk to people with violently opposing views. It's sometimes possible to alienate even those with whom one is agreeing, when attempting to reach out. Even simple listening may not be very loving. Sometimes you won't be able to persuade, and listening is all you can do. "Walk softly." One person thinks that society has become more relaxed about

differences such as interfaith and interracial dating. Discussions are “more respectful than they used to be.”

One person wondered that even inside Meeting “how do we be respectful of differences?” Another suggested that we do well at this. Someone else mentioned that we leave ourselves open to difference when we say that each has his own truth. We have to expect disagreement. There is not enough racial diversity in the Society of Friends in this country, though there are increasingly many African Quakers. The remaining question is how do we reach out without proselytizing? Quaker silence is not for everyone. There may be an occasional person who is interested, or for whom it might be suitable, and one can point the way for them. One person had a friend who expressed interest in the Meeting. When she described it to him, though, he said he didn't think he could sit in silence for an hour. There was a general feeling that our meeting is good at welcoming all sorts of people.

## **2002**

We recognize the importance of intervisitation among meetings and encourage it, but have found no way as yet to carry out our intentions in any organized way. The consideration by the Iowa Yearly Meeting Ministry and Oversight Committee of just this issue gives us hope that something can be arranged on a more formal basis, especially among meetings within the yearly meeting.

We try to remind ourselves that if we accept the basic Friends' testimony of “that of God” in everyone we need to remain open to another's truth. However, in the adversarial atmosphere which currently pervades our contemporary culture it is difficult to remain faithful to this testimony. We find that the pace of our lives also often allows little time to contemplate a question from all sides which in turn leaves little opportunity for consideration of another's point of view. It is a constant struggle for many of us.

We find it relatively easy to get involved with groups and organizations with which we agree and share concerns. It takes much more energy and confidence to address issues where there is disagreement, especially about faith beliefs. As we get older, differences in faith seem less threatening to us personally. Our many contacts with other faith groups within our local communities allow us to be more aware of the spiritual values which we share in common with each other.

We are attempting to make our presence known in the larger community but so far only in fits and starts. We feel we have created an atmosphere of welcome although it is difficult to judge our efforts objectively. A few experiences of finding our meeting and feeling welcome as recounted by newer attenders indicates that so far we are achieving what we aspire to. We recognize that we need to be clear about just what we are and what we aspire to. We recognize that we need to be clear about just what we are and what membership in the Society of Friends means for those who seek us out.

### **2003**

We respect and value the diversity of our membership. We appreciate the warm welcome we have received from the Meeting and try to extend this to newcomers, but we are reluctant to speak openly about our personal beliefs. It is a challenge to take advantage of opportunities to share deeply held convictions with others, even within our fellowship.

Social justice is non-denominational. Many of us feel our values are not those of the society as a whole. The War on Terror and state budget cuts which have decimated programs for the disadvantaged are calling us to action. We seek ways of connecting with like-minded citizens regardless of religious affiliation.

Speaking our truth to hostile audiences, whether they are right-wing activists or family members with differing views is most difficult for us. We often “don’t bother”

since we doubt our ability to change minds. Here the counsel of those who have trained and experienced conflict resolution are most helpful. They reminded us the goal was not to evangelize the opposition by converting them to our truth but to simply state the truth as we saw it honestly and directly. Speaking truth has value even if it appears our message was not heard. We cannot know the long-term results of our actions.

We reach out to the community by making the Meeting House available to community groups. Our meeting is enriched by members' participation in FWCC, FGC and Iowa Yearly Meeting. We enjoy Thanksgiving fellowship with First Friends, and young friends from across the Yearly Meeting have gathered at a friend's rural farm house for weekend retreats.

## **2004**

We ponder why many Friends raised in the Meeting do not stay with it. Even William Penn's sons didn't remain as Friends. It is important for each of us to choose our faith. The issue of sharing faith requires us to walk a fine line: how to share without feeling as if you are "recruiting." Because of a lack of understanding, Quakers may seem "strange" or "weird" to outsiders. Because we don't proselytize, we wonder how hard it is for others to find out about Quakers.

In terms of visible philanthropy, we are more comfortable with the Biblical injunction from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, "let not the right hand know what the left hand doeth." This is a spiritual matter. When you give this way, the idea is to enrich the world and not the giver.

We are conscious of our different approach to many common cultural views. Being a Quaker is a very personal thing. Many times we strive to make our presence known to the community by example and precept. Our aim is not to push our religion but rather live it so that it may be seen.

## 2005

We had a lively and wide-ranging discussion of this advice and query, perhaps reflecting other discussions we've had recently about the vitality and diversity of our meeting.

How do we make the presence of our meeting known to the larger community? Some churches have taken to conducting mass mailings that advertise their "grand openings." Maybe they're on to something—a mass marketing approach can get the word out to busy people with active lives.

Why are we reticent to reach out like that? We don't want to push our beliefs on others. The topic of religion is generally avoided in polite company. Is there a way that we can express our beliefs in social situations without offending others? Perhaps we are overly shy or careful in this area.

It's important to let people in our community know that our meeting exists. If we were to put an ad in the local paper, for example, what would it look like? We suggested that it might be time for us to hold another open house. We have sponsored speakers in the past and extended open invitations to the community, but we've primarily drawn members of the Friends Church. We discussed the possibility of holding our Oxfam Simple Supper as a public and publicized event, as the Paullina Meeting has done for many years. It would offer us an opportunity to open our doors to the wider community. We pointed out that our trustees are looking at ways to spend some of the funds that the meeting will receive from the estates of Bob Berquist and Bob Darby. Should some of those funds be devoted to outreach projects?

The Whittier Meeting recently had a letter to the editor published in *The Gazette*. It seems that someone has repeatedly taken from the meetinghouse property signs that express the meeting's anti-war position. The

letter invited that individual or individuals to discuss their objections with the meeting rather than taking their signs. Sometimes, outreach occurs in unexpected ways.

We talked about how some of us have come to Quakerism. One person first encountered Friends as a college student through an older brother's gift that enabled her to experience an AFSC Work Camp. Many misconceptions about Friends exist today among young people. They would benefit from an introduction to Friends and Quakerism.

It's true that we've generally been raised to avoid talking about religion and politics in social settings, but it seems that we should be able to have civil dialogues about our values and beliefs. Perhaps we should concentrate on listening to others' points of view before or rather than explaining our own. By doing so, we could begin to find the common ground that unite us, rather than focusing on the differences that divide us. The simplest things are often the most difficult to do. If we look for that of God in others, if we conduct every encounter in that manner, our lives can serve as powerful statements of our beliefs.

Out of politeness, we sometimes remain silent when others say things that we disagree with or that we believe are wrong. Perhaps we should feel comfortable saying that we don't see things that way. Perhaps it's better to make a comment that offers an alternative to that statement, rather than responding directly and judgmentally to the statement.

One challenge to keeping our meeting vital seems to be the cerebral and meditative nature of our worship experience. Churches that offer a more physical and sensory service might especially appeal to youth. We marvel at the ability of many young people to handle multiple sensory stimuli: listening to music, watching TV, studying, all at the same time. Many people have the mental capacity to manage all that input and perform effectively in a world that often seems to overload us with stimuli. And yet, we noted that we all need a



balance in our lives. Many young people relish the opportunity for silence and meditation.

We acknowledged that the traditional Quaker message of simplicity and inwardness seems to conflict with contemporary culture, especially contemporary youth culture. But we also acknowledged that Friends' testimonies on peace and nonviolence, social justice, environmentalism, and communalism have always resonated with youth and their idealism.

In the end, we were left to wonder about and challenge ourselves with much the same question that we began with: How do we make our beliefs and values more widely known?

## **2006**

We do encourage intervisitation with other meetings and Friends groups, but have not found a satisfactory way of following through. We greatly appreciate the visitors we have had who have shared with us -- the Quaker Youth Weekend and others -- but few from our meeting have found or made time for a similar visit to other meetings.

A brochure explaining Quaker beliefs and practices and our monthly meeting in particular continues to be used in Welcome Wagon packets, and we have recently updated the information in it. We appreciate a recent gift of a new all-weather sign for the roadside from one of our members. We still host an occasional quilt show and luncheon that give us the opportunity to share in detail with groups who attend.

Sharing our beliefs with others often poses problems of explaining what we believe in terms others understand. In today's political climate with so much acrimony and bias couched in religious terms, it is difficult to reach out to those with whom we disagree. We search for ways of emphasizing the idea that moral values begin within the home and family rather than in the public domain. We are reminded that finding a way

to declare our 'truth' in a non-threatening way is important. We recognize the importance of asking others 'how' and 'why' they believe rather than challenging their beliefs. This means we have to be quiet ourselves and listen carefully to what they are saying. As in so many areas, listening carefully seems to be key to real communication.

### **3. MEETING FOR BUSINESS**

#### **ADVICE**

In our Meeting for Business, Friends seek divine guidance in handling the affairs of the meeting. By opening the meeting with a period of worship, Friends can more easily wait patiently upon the will of the Divine Spirit while conducting business. This assists our Meetings for Business in finding the loving unity that might never be achieved through discussion alone. The right conduct of Meetings for Business, even in routine matters, is important to the life of the meeting.

Friends are encouraged to prepare for and attend Meetings for Business just as they would other Meetings for Worship. Participating in Meetings for Business and acceptance of responsibilities within the Meeting should not be taken lightly. When filling positions within our meetings, it is important to consider the suitability of individuals for specific tasks. Although the clerk is particularly charged with gathering the sense of the meeting, all Friends can assist the process by committing themselves to be faithful in opening their hearts and minds to wait upon the Divine Spirit.

## **QUERY**

- How can we hold our Meetings for Business in the spirit of love, understanding and patient search for unity without becoming frustrated by differences of opinion or the pressures of time?
- How do we respond when no one else in the meeting seems to hold the views that we do on an issue? How do we respond to a dissenting minority?
- How do we share responsibilities among Friends in our meeting? How do we serve our meetings?

## **SELECTED RESPONSES**

### **1998**

The assumption of an ideal Quaker Business session is that everyone is led by the same Spirit and therefore there is only one decision that is correct. Trying to reconcile one another's interpretation of the Truth is often time consuming and uncomfortable. We sense that in our meeting Friends are reluctant to express a view that seems contrary to the majority. This hesitation often leads to a sense of being unheard and uncomfortable with a decision. It seems we have either not listened well enough, or have failed to create an atmosphere of trust for everyone. We hope we respond in love whenever there is a differing view expressed, but it is difficult to judge when nothing is said.

When a meeting is small, responsibilities are necessarily shared. However, there have been times when some have felt pressured to accept a responsibility with which they are not comfortable. It seems this may be a problem with Quaker process in general which produces a sense of guilt that is very unhealthy. We

struggle with doing what we are truly capable of and what is merely traditional. We need to be aware that people join Friends for different reasons and may not be comfortable with some of the traditions.

## **2000**

We heard the Advice reminding us that in business meeting we should always be in a worshipful attitude, trying to relate our plans and decisions, even in small things, to what the spirit might have us do. The Advice suggests that a period of worship at the beginning of the business meeting helps us to be more patient in waiting for the unity which might develop when we listen to each other and labor together to reach clarity in the light. The Advice emphasizes that this experience together in business meeting is important to the life of the Meeting. In examining our own action in this regard, we confessed that there were among us those who, though they disagree with what is perceived as the majority opinion, are afraid to speak out. We thought together that to remove this barrier we should be careful neither to feel nor express in words, tones or gestures disdain for another when opening his or her heart and mind to the group. We should also make sure new members or attenders feel their contributions to the business meeting are valued. Sometimes we feel that to give the importance of worship to the kind of details that matter in the routine affairs of the meeting is not possible and that there is either a casual disregard of the advice or a rather hypocritical show. Once one has felt the power of a group truly practicing Quaker process, however, its loveliness and reality become believable. We all recognize the importance of good clerking in making Quaker process happen, though it can't be the only requisite. We feel that we do have a gifted clerk who conducts a well ordered meeting so time is not squandered, while giving a sense that there is plenty of time for everyone to speak and business to be seriously considered.

## **2001**

It is the practice in our meetings for business to proceed in a cooperative spirit to reach unity. We are enriched by the variety of experiences and opinions of all who participate. We are grateful for the care of our clerks in reading the sense of the meeting.

Our meeting may sometimes be slow, but inclusive, at reaching decisions on issues we consider, bridging major differences of opinion. In reaching out for clarity and unity, a topic may be set aside for consideration at a future time. The matter may or may not rise again. We also have had success naming a committee to research an issue and gather information and opinions to be reported back to business meeting.

We share responsibility in our meeting by including members and attenders, both adults and children, on the various standing committees. We are blessed with a variety of skills and interests that serve our meeting well. Using fourth Sunday post-meeting time as a regular time for committee meetings has increased attendance at committee meetings and attention to the business of the committees.

## **2002**

One Friend said that Penn Valley does a good job of holding meetings for business. Another Friend suggested that by always referring to such meetings as “meetings for worship with attention to business” adds meaning and clarity to the purpose and process of the time together. The avoidance of judgmental attitudes can invoke a “paradox of integrity,” another person claimed. John Woolman was cited as a person who was not willing to withhold his personal judgment around slavery but was willing to be with those with whom he disagreed. Perhaps, we could do more to focus on the aspect of worship in the considerations of business by giving time for all people to hear, sit with, and respond to

ideas or suggestions that arise in the meeting. The notions of harmony and inclusion were also mentioned.

One Friend mentioned that the impetus to speak in meeting, even in business meetings, is dependent on a leading of Spirit. Because it is more than just one's personal opinion, speaking to an issue calls for each person attending the meeting to listen responsively to whatever leading may come in connection with the issue at hand. If no leading comes, then there is nothing to say. Therefore, one Friend explained, a leading for the larger group may come from the most unlikely among us. Likewise, there may be tasks or services that will go undone if no person senses a leading to perform them or take them on. Several friends spoke to this possibility. Most indicated that if that happened, it was better than forcing or coercing people to serve who didn't feel led to do so. Speaking in meeting, like serving in the meeting, is a responsibility for every Friend as they are led. Personal views and opinions are secondary to this sense of leading in a Quaker meeting. One Friend added that struggling with differing opinions can be seen as a gift.

Currently, it was noted, our meeting has people to serve on committees but some committees lack clerks. Many of the meeting's activities and responsibilities are formalized by the presence of committees, sing-up sheets, and monthly meetings. There are many responsibilities, however, that remain informal. These are tasks or services that are taken care of by people in our meeting for which there is no written schedule or list. One Friend suggested that these responsibilities be formalized to the extent that they can. Another Friend commented that our meeting elicits service from those new to Meeting and from the younger Friends as well. This was seen by many as a positive aspect of our meeting.

### **2003**

We are fortunate in this meeting that we seem to share common views on important matters and therefore

do not face the frustration of strong dissent. Probably the most often occurring point of contention is over when the lawn needs mowing or the buildings need cleaning mainly because of personal schedules. Working together on projects for the care of our facilities is, however, a service of joy for us as we share a common expectation that when something needs to be done, everyone will be involved.

We try to be open and listen to a dissenting opinion whenever it is expressed, but the challenge seems to be more how we respond after we have heard what another has said. We find that faith in and use of Quaker process helps keep the level of frustration at a minimum.

Most accept committee responsibilities willingly recognizing that as a small group everyone must share in the care and support of the meeting. Although we are cautioned to keep in mind an individual's strengths in appointments, we are aware of times when a person finds an opportunity to develop an unexpected ability or to grow into a responsibility when given a new appointment.

## **2004**

The key to a good business meeting stems from answers to the questions: How do we dissent? How do we respond to Friends who express dissent? It's important to speak up about a topic so that we all know how people feel. It's also important for us to respond openly to those opinions. The ability for someone to express disagreement about an issue without feeling defensive is very important. We need to foster this environment.

How do we attain a "sense of the meeting" regarding decisions? Sometimes it comes readily. Sometimes we wait; postponing a decision until resolution becomes clear. Sometimes a third option is created (instead of the original opposing two options) and agreement is attained. For decisions we wait on, we need to continue to work on the issue, not just ignore it. Sometimes a



statement can be made that gets people thinking about different approaches to the problem and leads the discussion in different directions.

The “worshipful” part of the business meeting experience often comes from the way we treat each other during the meeting.

When two or more Friends disagree how does the meeting proceed and accomplish its goals? Friends use the word clearness as a way of reaching an agreement or even a compromise. Sometimes clearness is attained simply by those in dissent saying nothing. Yet some argue simply because they enjoy the emotion of a good debate. If this Friendly? If God had wanted us to always agree He would have made us all alike. Strength and clearness come from diversity. God can speak to all of us at the same time. The problem is we all don't listen in the same way. But that is as it should be. The line between being right and being wrong is often blurred, and not always there. It is much more important to nurture that of God in everyone than to always be on what is considered the right side of every question. One example is when the meeting first turned aside my request to be a member. The time was not yet right so that was the right answer then, just as the next time the request was made saying yes was the right answer then, for me and for all, I believe. The worshipfulness of this example is that in the time between the two opposite decisions, true spiritual growth took place and continues even now.

## **2005**

We recognize we have difficulty in achieving the goal stated in this query. Pressures of time especially affect our deliberations. However, having much of the work of the meeting processed by committees helps to bring focus to our discussions. And, in the Meeting for Business, items needing processing are often referred to standing and/or special committees. For example,

dissatisfaction with having a workday to care for the meetinghouse and grounds was referred to the house committee, which offered an alternative approach which seems to be working better.

Our meetings for business follow worship. After a rich and deep experience in worship it sometimes is a bit difficult to move into a “business mode.” The feeling was expressed that having more periods during Meeting for Business for silence/centering might help to make that transition smoother. Our smallness may lead to being a bit “chatty” during conduct of business rather than thoughtful listening with silence between expressions of views. We recognize that, desirably, one is speaking (with respect to business) as prompted by the Spirit. We need to be aware of the need to assist newcomers to learn the purpose of silence during Meeting for Business and that we are doing business out of an attitude of worship. We experience some conflict at times between the method of accomplishing the business of the meeting in a Quaker way contrasted with secular experience in business meetings. We reminded ourselves of the need for patience, listening, focus in the conduct of the business of the meeting.

One person paraphrased Sister Wendy to the effect “Silence helps to break the hold that time has on us” with the thought that it may be helpful to us. Another felt the industrial revolution had betrayed us in that, rather than time being freed up by the marvels of the industrial revolution, we seem to feel busier than ever, contributing to our frustration in dealing with time in general and, in particular, our attitude about time in Meeting for Business.

Since we seem not to have a lot of dissension, the question was raised, “Is that because we are not doing enough (on difficult issues)?” It was pointed out that attendance at Meeting may have an element of self selection, which minimizes likelihood of differences of views. Sometimes we may feel that facing up to differences of views isn’t worth the effort, yet when we

reflect more fully we recognize that it is essential to confront differences for the care and health of the Meeting. That calls for honest acknowledgment of differences of view when they exist, patience in dealing with them, and keeping judgment at bay, always acting out of love.

## **2006**

Meeting for business does not *begin* with worship as recommended in the Advice; it *is* worship. Sometimes we descend into mere conversation, but we are drawn back into a state of worship by pauses for reflection after serious things are said by joining in silence as the clerk composes each minute, and by considering each minute before proceeding to the next matter on the agenda. Occasional and appropriate emergence of humor in our sessions helps us maintain our humility, lest we take ourselves too seriously. The worshipful nature of attending to business is difficult to explain to persons new to Friends, but it is an important part of the manner of Friends.

Individuals in the meeting feel strongly, and sometimes speak passionately, about particular issues. We seek to be aware of the sense of the meeting, speaking our piece and then holding our peace rather than unduly pressing personal agendas if our personal concerns are not shared by the meeting at large. We need to communicate more effectively that although the meeting as a whole may not take up individual concerns, we accept that differences exist among us, and we support individuals in their own work on concerns important to them. We are reminded that the role of the individual in a Friends meeting for business is not to strike out on one's own, but an opportunity to share one's insights, toward clarifying and completing the group's understanding of Truth.

## **4. HARMONY WITHIN THE MEETING**

"This is my commandment: Love one another as I have loved you."      John 15:12

### **ADVICE**

It is sometimes difficult to remember that love is a gift of the Divine Spirit and not simply a human emotion. As imperfect human beings, it is not always possible for us to feel loving toward one another, but by opening ourselves to the Light Within, we can receive and give love beyond our human abilities.

Relationships among meeting members take time to evolve. Sometimes misunderstandings develop. When differences arise, they should not be ignored for the sake of superficial unity. We believe disagreements which might divide or disrupt a meeting can be resolved through human effort and divine grace, and may result in a stronger and more creative meeting. True harmony depends upon each persons deep respect of and faithful attention to the Divine Spirit within us all. We endeavor to practice humility, attempting to understand positions of others and being aware of the possibility that we may be mistaken.

It is the responsibility of the Ministry and Oversight Committee to be sensitive to needs which may arise. Others in the meeting may be equally concerned, and because of greater understanding in certain cases, be able to give counsel. In reconciliation of differences, a position not previously considered may prove mutually beneficial. At times it may be necessary to confront individuals whose behavior is disruptive. A clearness committee or professional help may be suggested in some situations. We must always remember the power of holding one another in the Light, and the healing that comes from forgiving ourselves as well as others.

## **QUERY**

- What can we do to deepen our relationships with one another? How does gender affect the way we relate to each other?
- How does our meeting balance the needs for honesty and kindness? What topics do we avoid for the sake of "unity"?
- When in conflict with others, do we cultivate a forgiving spirit? Do we look to that of God in ourselves and seek to address that of God in those with whom we disagree?

## **SELECTED RESPONSES**

### **1998**

This is a pertinent query in light of our anticipated discussion of same gender partnerships. To enhance harmony in our meeting, we have at times distinguished between official acts of the meeting and strongly held positions of individuals within the meeting. We recognize, however, that we sometimes avoid discussion of controversial topics for the sake of perceived unity. Should we maintain our sense of unity at the expense of not speaking strongly held beliefs?

When differences arise, we try to resolve them in an environment that is non-threatening and that encourages broad and open participation. On particularly divisive issues, we may change our approach or develop a different structure to address the issue, such as small group discussions or a meeting for worship on a purpose. Regardless of the format, discussion is based on listening to each other, attempting to understand

diverse positions, and not rebutting expressed opinions. We deepen and expand relationships with one another by recognizing the "Light" within each member of the community.

It is important to recognize the strength created by diversity within the Meeting. We have the opportunity for learning, growth and understanding in situations that present challenge and diversity of opinion by attempting to understand positions that differ from ours. We are made aware of the possibility that we may be mistaken. It has been said that for things to reveal themselves to us, we need to be ready to abandon our views about them.

## **2000**

Make opportunities for conversation and companionship outside the meeting, both more formal (for example, our Frugal Meals) and informal. Friends present agreed that they do not find consideration of gender important in any obvious ways bearing on harmony within the meeting. On the topic "balance" we spent the most time. There was agreement among Friends present that there have been occasions in the past where conflicts in the meeting were not addressed or resolved effectively, and so the hurt feelings or distress may continue into the present. The conflicts had mostly to do with "what is the proper way" to do something or other. The pattern is, when a Friend expresses unhappiness or consternation about the way something is handled, the issue is not discussed and resolved within the Meeting, but avoided from then on. Consensus is effectively blocked by what appears to be general anxiety about confrontation and conflict. Some Friends either feel, or observe, a general reluctance to speak in Meeting. It is as though there may be a set of unspoken "shoulds" or "should nots" about when it is appropriate to speak or what is appropriate to say. Perhaps one should only speak about grave spiritual matters, an important "message." Perhaps it

should only be Biblically related. Some Friends are perceived as judgmental, when in truth they may only be opinionated. Without more open discussion about our differences, we will never know which. A suggestion was made that we should educate ourselves about Quaker decision-making and the processes and options that Quakers have to resolve differences.

There was agreement that the Queries are one of the few formal ways that Friends have to share among themselves their thoughts and feelings about their faith and how it is lived. We do not have sermons, hymns, group prayers, chants or sacraments, only Queries. There was agreement that we "should" find a way to increase attendance at Query discussions, or change their format to increase attendance. On the "conflict" topic, generally, this was agreed to be difficult. Forgiveness is hard when dealing with pig-headed people. Of course, we are never the pig-headed ones! From the Albuquerque, New Mexico Meeting Newsletter: "Our vision of the truth has to be broad enough to include other people's truth as well as our own. We have to learn to love difficult unlovable people. Accepting each other, and each other's relationship to God, let us continue to hold together at our deepest level . . . Part of the cost of discipleship is living with the other disciples."

## **2001**

We discussed how to have a forgiving spirit where conflict exists. One way is to make a serious effort to see both sides of all issues—reflecting on an issue from "his/her" point of view, not just from "my" point of view. Another approach is to pray for the other person in an effort to resolve conflict.

When conflict exists, acknowledge your anger—don't suppress it—then move on. Don't let another person's negativity affect your life. Try to realize the other person is unhappy about something; then accept it. Remember, "There but for the grace of God, go I."

How is Divinity involved? It is difficult to acknowledge your love for someone without letting his/her life issues turn your life upside down. We must try to remember that we are here to love one another. We have to believe and accept that there is that of God in each person—even though that person may drive you nuts!

Continuing with response of Harold Wilson from Nebraska State Penitentiary:

“When I read the Meeting’s discussion of this query my first thought was this applies to everyone, doesn’t it not just those who join with us for Meeting in a harmonious way? Which applies also even to people outside the fellowship of Meeting that drive us nuts. Everyone has at least one person on the planet that brings them to the brink of insanity at one time or another, the challenge in living a life of harmony is in how each one of us handles the craziness of life and living peacefully as possible with everyone.

“In my own life I am being put to the test in how to live in harmony right in the same room where I live. The administration of the prison decided to increase the size of the hole resulting in several men being forced to move to different cells. One was a man who has been here over 20 years and never had to share a cell with anyone in all that time. So I offered him a place in my cell, not realizing that he had never had to share such a small, cramped space with anyone, especially anyone in prison. I have to keep reminding myself that there is that of God in everyone, even him. There is such a fine line between standing up for oneself, and by doing so keeping one’s sanity, and being overly aggressive and hurting the other person by our actions and words. For me, I used to think myself a very patient and tolerant person, but if I am as patient as I would like then should I be so bothered by what someone else does that in my eyes intrudes on my space? Isn’t that very selfish of me? In mental health they call this ‘stuffing one’s emotions,’ and say it is not healthy, but it is also



unhealthy to let them all out in one big explosion. Better to drown the fire with peaceful water than to let it simmer on forever.”

## **2002**

Relationships can deepen as we work together for common goals, as we face diversity together and as we laugh and cry together.

Gender issues are still important, and necessary work needs to continue, but we celebrate the advances of the last 40 years.

The recent terrorism in our country has polarized people. Anger and fear create strong emotional responses around the world. We try to speak our concerns in loving ways and continue to be open to learning from the viewpoints of others. When people with minority opinions speak out, others may be given the strength to speak, too.

We are grateful for newspaper and television personalities who provide opportunities for dissent. As we seek the way of Light and Love we are reminded that God is present in all things. At times our best effort is the strength of prayers.

As a symphony that blends the music of a variety of instruments, the harmony we seek is created when all the different and diverse voices are allowed to be heard.

## **2003**

We think we should have harmony, yet we often don't. Instead of expressing honest feelings of disagreement, it is easier to avoid touchy issues. Meeting should be a place where we can express differences and strong feelings with honesty. Dealing with conflict and differences can help deepen relationships. One member works to own her feelings of non-charity toward others. She knows that she can change her own feelings and reactions and not those of the other person. Many of us have been raised to be polite and not stir up conflict or mention differences. If

we are honest, our honesty should be tempered with kindness. We must hold one another in tenderness and acknowledge others' feelings and opinions. It is much harder to listen to criticism from those who don't seem to care for us. Love and trust must be present in a relationship before honest disagreement can be successful.

Shared activities bring people closer. It is important for us to get together for social times such as potluck after meeting one Sunday a month, soup night, or an open house night with board games and food. We seem united in our wish to spend more time together.

Our meeting does a good job of sharing chores such as washing dishes, cleaning, and yard work between men and women. We should all be aware of and sensitive to personal preferences and boundaries of touch and topics of conversation when interacting with persons of either gender.

Several people have left meeting recently. Some here feel that they may have said or done the wrong thing and offended someone. There are many reasons why people leave, and often they have little to do with us.

It is good to remember that a clearness committee can help people deal with sensitive issues. Healthy meetings do not let one or two people control the tone of the meeting and make others crazy or guilty. When the harmony of the meeting is threatened, the Ministry and Oversight Committee can act as "choir director" to help restore health and harmony. Harmony within our group is not an easy goal. When we are able to express ourselves honestly in an environment of love and trust, become closer through shared activities, respect each other's differences and see "That of God" in each person, even those with whom we disagree, we will have taken important steps toward achieving harmony in our meeting.

## **2004**

It is painful to reflect on past divisions that tore this meeting apart.

Jesus never equivocated. "Love others as I have loved you." That is the way he lived: thieves on both his right and left, while saying "tonight you shall be with me in heaven."

We struggle to find the love that can heal the ruptures between us. Issues of identity are the most difficult to resolve by thought. Perhaps the answer lies in cultivating a forgiving spirit, and looking to that of God in ourselves and seeking to address that of God in those with whom we disagree.

We seek to know what it truly means to "hold someone in the light." How is this different from simply praying for them? Perhaps when we endeavor to hold someone in the light, we are also praying for ourselves to be illuminated by the love and grace of God.

## **2005**

Although some Friends have felt very well supported by the meeting in difficult times and some have not, all agreed that we need to remember to follow up when someone lets us know that they are experiencing a difficult time. Often just seeking that person out during social time can let them know of our caring is helpful. E-mails and phone calls give us a way to find out if more help is needed.

In our meeting, both men and women participate in care giving; it is a joy to see the men playing with the children as well as leading them in activities. The children see men in roles not always associated with fathers.

Lately we have been paying particular attention to drawing the children into the life of the meeting. A recent suggestion to invite the children to the first few minutes of some programs has already borne fruit. The

children especially enjoyed seeing pictures of the stories they were hearing, and this fact reminded us that everyone likes pictures. There is no reason why people planning programs, even if only adults are expected to attend, should not consider adding visuals or interactive components. The query discussion, for instance, could be conducted in a different format if the reader so chooses.

When it's not appropriate for the children to share their First Day School projects at the beginning of the program, perhaps they could be invited to do that during announcement time.

We are often reluctant to stay in touch with inactive (local) members. They receive the newsletter but often don't get enough personal messages to be assured that we care about them. Ministry and Oversight can lead the way by asking those best connected to contact absent Friends, but we can also encourage other individuals to call and send e-mails.

## **2006**

The second paragraph of the Advice states that "We endeavor to practice humility, attempting to understand positions of others and being aware of the possibility that we may be mistaken." Being aware that we may be mistaken is probably the most difficult task among people.

We found it interesting that the query asks us to name topics that we avoid. Right away we named one of those topics and got distracted from the harmony theme as it was briefly discussed.

In our group we seem to have unanimity of feeling on politics, so we don't often discuss it. In some groups of people, certain topics aren't worth discussing when each side knows the other side will not change its view.

We looked at how we have dealt with conflict historically. There have been several issues over the past years that have been difficult, among them

qualifications for clerk, support of same-sex relationships, and membership of prisoners.

We need to be aware that there are lots of gray areas, not just black and white. As we get closer and closer to an issue, we tend to see more and more of the other side. Having a high regard for each other helps us to deal with problems more easily.

How do we deal with irrational behavior? What we might consider irrational can be very rational in someone else's mind. Quakers believe that controversy and conflict can be mediated by discussion and understanding. To obtain resolution, this must go in two directions: give and take. What if neither one understands the other? It is very difficult.

## **5. MUTUAL CARE**

### **ADVICE**

Friends consider the meeting to be a family in which the welfare of each individual is of utmost concern. For some, the meeting may be the only family in the community. In mutual caring we seek greater wisdom than our own. We listen to the silence within ourselves and to one another with openness of heart. Sharing our pain as well as our joy can bring us closer together, making it easier to ask for help when we need it. Each of us is both giver and receiver, ready to help and to accept help.

Friends try to be aware of those who require special attention within the meeting community. We believe friendly interaction benefits both adults and children. It is the responsibility of adults to recognize and give voice to the needs of children in the meeting. Inactive and absent members require the care of the meeting; those who do not currently attend meeting may be contacted by mail or by personal visit. We need also to minister with sensitivity to those in transition and to support caregivers and those requiring care within the meeting community. It is important to be responsive to the needs and gifts of newcomers and seekers who may attend our meetings for a short time.

We endeavor to be conscious of how differing gender role expectations may affect the quality of our relationships and influence how we empower ourselves in the home, meeting, community, school, workplace and government. We envision a society that provides opportunities for all people to reach their potentials, to share similar expectations, reap comparable rewards and contribute equally to society.

## **QUERY**

- How do we respond to each other's personal needs and difficulties in sensitive and useful ways? Do we encourage both men and women to share in caregiving?
- What are we doing to welcome and draw members and attenders of all ages into the fellowship of the meeting?
- How do we help our children feel the loving care of the meeting? What do the children contribute to the meeting?
- How do we keep in touch with inactive and distant members and attenders?

## **SELECTED RESPONSES**

### **1998**

Most of the discussion centered on the questions of what are we doing to attract and welcome members and attenders, including children? Some of us feel a strong need to attract and keep new people. When we first began (the meeting) grew quickly and there was much enthusiasm about involving others. The question arose, how can we recover that sort of enthusiasm and see our current small size as an opportunity for a new beginning instead of fearing it as an end? And how can we do this without feeling uncomfortable about proselytizing? We do want to continue outreach efforts such as the recent article in the newspaper, but can we also find ways as individuals to care more about the meeting as a whole? Can we encourage more of the people we know to attend? When people do attend, can we make them feel more welcome?

Similarly, we do show mutual care for individuals when the need is obvious and whenever someone asks, but do we too often hold back because we fear intruding? Can we provide more that will benefit children among us? We feel we need to consider these questions again, and more deeply, with more of us involved in the discussion.

## **2000**

One attender spoke in meeting about having been welcomed, but not pushed. Helping within the limit of our experience is important. Being willing to share, but not to advise, is part of being sensitive to others' needs. A Friend, now gone, was an especially good listening ear. Others who don't have this gift can help in other ways.

There is an expectation that men and women will share in care giving. One spoke of not responding without being asked, because of not wanting to be presumptuous. However, acknowledging a problem is showing sensitivity. A few people aware of a problem could discuss it with the person who has the problem. It's easier for some to give than to receive; some have difficulty admitting they can't handle everything, and end up rebuffing offers of help. Sharing joys and sorrows is easier in a smaller group than ours. We rely on the circle after meeting for a way to keep in touch, and lose touch when we're not here. We hope the children feel the loving care of the meeting. Adults do all they can to relate to them. The activities of the older children generate enthusiasm. We send the Friendly Line to inactive and distant members, and occasionally they respond. Sometimes we visit them if we're where they now live. People's needs change over time, and sometimes we have to accept that. Churches with ministers rely on them to provide pastoral care. We have only each other to follow up on concerns. We may be guilty of sins of omission. There's value in



acknowledging that taking care of each other is everybody's responsibility.

## **2001**

We have contacted distant members with both our sporadic meeting newsletter and by personal letter composed and sent by the Ministry and Council Committee in the past year.

Presently there are no children attending our meeting on a regular basis but whenever they are present they are welcomed with loving care.

The reluctance to let one another know when help is needed is hard to overcome, especially spiritual or emotional help. Often we view such a need within ourselves as a sign of weakness. At the same time we are more prone to err on the side of allowing people their privacy rather than reaching out to them. So far we have not found ways to break down this reluctance effectively. Some are good at reaching out both for help and to offer it, while others hold back for fear of interfering.

We seem so reticent about evangelizing that we do not actually invite people to attend our meeting much. If someone comes on their own, they are made welcome but we need to recognize that there are people who might be interested in our meeting if we would exert ourselves. It is suggested that Ministry and Council consider how we might more effectively follow up with casual visitors who come to our meeting. We also sense that without an active children's Sunday School program it will be difficult to draw families to our meeting.

## **2002**

We have no ready answer to the first question. Meeting has responded to personal needs in sensitive and useful ways, and yet we wish that we could do this better. Many times all that is required is active listening. Overall we give ourselves high marks. Both men and

women share in caregiving in our meeting, and this includes childcare.

A regular attender reflected that when she first came to meeting she was drawn in by the friendliness she experienced here. We had a community open house, which attracted neighbors and other community members, some of whom wanted information on Friends. We intend to make this a yearly event and to be more intentional in inviting Iowa State University students.

Having built a meetinghouse this past year has opened new possibilities for children's participation and continuity in our children's program. Parents are grateful to have their beliefs and teachings reinforced by others in meeting. Children like to see their friends at meeting. Children add liveliness, spontaneity, insights and joy to the meeting. They are our future. Listening to them is important.

We have been able to maintain close relations with a number of far-flung members and welcome them into our community when they are able to return to Ames. E-mail has been helpful in this.

## **2003**

Our community is blessed with a sensitivity that responds to the needs and challenges of members and friends-in-need in compassionate, appropriate, and thoughtful ways.

We cherish the example of a caring commitment that one member has shown for the past fourteen years. By caring for his elderly mother, he has allowed her to remain in her home and continue as a close part of our meeting family. Her recent passing has saddened us all and our community feels truly diminished.

Although we do not now have children who regularly attend Meeting, we have concerns and commitments within the community that exhibit loving care for all children. Members are involved with Crisis Intervention,

child abuse issues, the court advocate CASA program, and a children's art group.

The outreach events that we sponsor such as a rummage sale, ice cream social, and quilt show are opportunities to include attenders and new members in affairs of the Meeting and to give those outside our community a glimpse into the Quaker experience.

## **2004**

We have no program in place for the small number of teenagers who attend our meeting. We are seeking creative ways in which the meeting can help to meet their needs. We are exploring ways to spend more one-on-one time with them since there are so few of them. We look at the fine example of Iowa Yearly Meeting as they provide youth retreats and youth week-ends which take place throughout the year. The children in our meeting are very important to us; they contribute to the richness of our meeting. First Day School provides an opportunity for adults in the meeting to become better acquainted with children. One person suggested that the children might enjoy taking turns hosting an adult during First Day School.

As individuals, we need to be mindful and ready to be called into difficult situations that arise when people in our meeting need attention during illness or when they would like visitation from Friends. Meeting individuals are also sometimes in a position to ease difficult transitions that members and attenders may have in their living or working situations.

Because we are a small meeting, there are more leadership possibilities. Gender sharing has always been strong in our meeting.

## **2005**

We're open to requests for support, including requests for prayers. Prayer is one form of action, because it can lead to one's own action. People from

the meeting supported Sherry Hutchison and others, who were on trial last spring for crossing the line at the National Guard headquarters, by attending their trial.

Not having a paid minister, sometimes we don't do as well as we should, or may not know about a need. We need to reach out to people in crisis more than we do. We assume the Ministry and Oversight Committee knows everything!

We try to be a network.

Different adults from the meeting could be called on to work with the children. Quiet activity helps them learn ways of Friends. Two children new to our First Day school are a resource to others about the Bible.

The *Friendly Line* is our outreach to distant members and infrequent attenders.

## **2006**

The meeting feels that in general we do provide for the mutual care of children, absent or inactive members, and newcomers, and that over time we will continue to share our inner lives with openness in order to bring us closer together with the goal of creating true heartfelt connections and mutual care among all members.

## **6. EDUCATION**

### **ADVICE**

Friends seek an education which integrates our intellectual, emotional and spiritual dimensions and enables us to face difficult moral issues with courage.

While the religious education of our children is primarily the concern of parents, everyone benefits when the entire meeting is concerned with nurturing them. If a spirit of common concern is present, children will gain a sense of belonging to the larger community, and, knowing they are loved and respected, will be able to face the mysteries of life with trust.

Friends promote learning throughout life and encourage freedom of thought and inquiry in all educational pursuits. Our complex and changing world demands that we learn to think and act creatively to meet its challenges.

### **QUERY**

- How can we most effectively foster a spirit of inquiry and a loving and understanding attitude toward life?
- What effort are we making to become better acquainted with the Bible, the teachings of Jesus, our Judeo-Christian heritage, the history and principles of Friends, and the contributions of other religions and philosophies to our spiritual heritage?

- In what ways can we encourage an educational process that is consistent with the values Friends cherish? How do gender-based expectations affect the goals we set and the way we learn?
- Do we take an active and supportive interest in schools, libraries and other educational resources in our communities and elsewhere?
- How do we prepare ourselves and our children to play active roles in a changing world?

## **SELECTED RESPONSES**

### **1998**

Friends identify themselves as seekers. We are drawn to books, magazines, newspapers, and media that express broad and diverse points of view. We believe we teach openness to new ideas by example, and support each other in a thoughtful search for meaning and truth in the events of our time. Our meeting's diversity in age, gender, class, background, experience, and beliefs is a gift we greatly appreciate.

No one present was involved in regular Bible study. Several Friends agreed that the truth as found in scripture might have great personal value to a seeker, but it is difficult to quote scripture without getting tangled in arguments about interpretation. Rufus Jones' description of George Fox as "one who translated scripture into daily life" prompted one Friend to observe Friends' actions are more convincing arguments for spiritual truths than learned pronouncements.

We are heartened to have so many successful young adults who were once children of the meeting visiting this holiday season. The parents of the meeting

are doing something right. There is also a concern that our religious education program is haphazard.

One Friend pointed out that the convinced Friends of our meeting are often well versed in the Bible because they had the advantage of strong religious upbringing in other denominations. There is concern that the meeting's children are being short-changed. Regardless of your philosophical stance on the Bible, you can not deny its importance in our culture and the need to know what the Bible says when evaluating appeals based on scripture. There is a feeling of urgency on the need to move ahead with religious education.

On the question of gender-based expectations, a Friend expressed tongue-in-cheek concern that the children may believe males do not clerk Quaker meetings. On a more serious note, a member of the Religious Education Committee noted that it is very difficult to find teachers for our early elementary children; she felt one reason is that they are all very active little boys. The phrase "active roles in a changing world" seemed very appropriate to how we see ourselves as honoring the truth we seek. We put a high premium on being involved in the changing world in accordance with our values.

## **2000**

There is a fine line between sharing knowledge and being able to still foster inquiry. Keeping this in mind will help the process of education within the Meeting, especially with the young Friends. To grow spiritually and intellectually, an exchange of ideas is welcome but can be difficult. Our small size tends to lend itself to a sense of limitation in this process of exchange since diversity could lead to unwanted conflict or a sense of alienation.

Recognizing the need for establishing a foundation in religious study, we see the Meeting lacking success in this area. An attempt was made for some time to hold a worship sharing midweek, but there was a lack of

commitment by attendees. The Bible, while not the only religious text worth study, is the foundation of Christian-Judeo teachings, central to our culture. Understanding the Bible's teachings would be an appropriate tool by which to improve our religious education studies. Educational outreach goals could include approaching the schools where our young Friends attend to see if books about Quakers are in the libraries. The same can be done at local public schools.

## **2001**

Realizing that teaching by example is an effective way in which individuals learn, it is important for us to be constantly aware of the many questions of our children. We feel there is an over-emphasis in our schools on the intellectual side of learning causing the emotional and spiritual sides of our children's natures to often be neglected. Schools sometimes instill a lack of trust in children when teaching safety to them in situations where they may potentially be confronted by people who would abuse them. We need to nurture within them a healthy balance of trust and common sense. It is important for everyone to help children cultivate curiosity, compassion, and caring for other people and for the world of nature.

## **2002**

One person pointed out that the word education comes from a Latin word meaning draw forth, *bring out*. He understands education as a challenge to draw forth what is already in the student, to help develop the ability to ask questions, find answers within themselves. He suggested that we seek to educate, to connect that of God in us with that of God in the other and draw forth that light. Thinking in either/or terms, labeling, thinking within closed boxes does not lead us to walk in that light of God.

Another person suggested that we must learn to face moral issues with courage and creativity. What do



we “pour in” to “draw forth”? As teachers, parents, adults, we inform and introduce possibilities to our young people. He finds this a stimulating and difficult balancing act. We are examples to/for our children in our homes and at meeting; our own efforts to understand, inquire will teach our children. The query also makes clear the importance of children and adults sharing experiences, getting to know one another through such activities as leaf-raking, canoe trips, and washing dishes together. We might benefit from more of such activities.

We are aware that our meeting has been strongly influenced by our relationship and geographical proximity to Scattergood Friends School, in that many of our members and attenders have been or are part of that community. We are grateful for this on-going influence among us.

That of God within each person is central to the spirit of inquiry and reverence for life. Equally central is the belief that Truth exists, that we can know that Truth, and commit ourselves to seeking it out. Determination to seek that Truth drives our spirit of inquiry. To know that what we are doing is right, true, that it is in harmony with the will of God is central to integrity in education. At the same time, someone suggested the difficulty of knowing the difference between our own occasional stubborn adherence to ideas that may not in fact be related to the divine Truth that we seek. For this reason, it is important at times that the meeting consider such ideas in the spirit of worship and seeking the Light.

### **2003**

Our First Day School regularly studies Quakerism and the Bible, and we are pleased that some of our grade school children are standing up at school as Friends and against war. It would be a good idea to donate books in which Quakerism is explained to public and/or school libraries.

We recognize that our kids are still exposed to gender and sexual preference prejudice in society, and

we need to provide an alternate view, especially for young teens who are forming their gender identities. Some of our children are concerned about homosexuality and not wanting to appear to be gay. We need to be aware of our children's adult role models, of the attitudes they're exposed to and taught in school.

We do encourage our children to question the status quo, in First Day School and in discussions at home. We talk to our kids about what we, and those we admire, have done. We ask questions and challenge authority in front of and with our children. Our children participate with us in service projects such as Brush Up Nebraska, directly learning that we value giving of ourselves.

Some of us remember rebelling against our parents and their churches when we were young. Often the problem was hypocrisy or inconsistency. When we discuss our ideals and admit our shortcomings it might be easier for children to understand and accept both our religious principles and our human flaws.

Second selected response: We feel the need to nurture within our children a wholesome balance of trust and common sense in this sometimes unsafe world. One of our members mentioned seeing a T-shirt that read, "children need to be seen, heard and listened to." We support programs in the school that teach conflict resolution and mediation skills. A law student in our group raised a concern that higher, as it exists today, often promotes hierarchical rather than democratic values. Children need to have a healthy balance in their lives of activities that nurture their bodies, minds, and spirits. In order for children to gain self-esteem, they need to experience success. We feel the public education frequently places too much emphasis on competitive athletics, causing children who aren't skilled in athletics to experience rejection. We were reminded that meeting First Day School needs is the responsibility of everyone in the meeting. A suggested learning experience would be to have children interview adults in the meeting in order to learn what adults do in the world.

## 2004

We assume our second hour discussions foster a spirit of inquiry among adults. Children in religious education classes seem eager to learn. A spirit of loving and understanding is learned by example.

Several times religious education classes from other churches have attended meeting. We wondered whether we've missed an opportunity to ask them about their beliefs.

Quakerism 101 classes were held last year in pre-meeting sessions, and are being continued once a month this year. One recently was about the book of Thomas, which is not in the Bible. People who read about other religions sometimes share in meeting.

We're struggling with providing an education process consisted with Friends' values for our young Friends, and in decisions about the educational needs of our children.

One of our members was elected to the school board and exposed the school system to Friends' values, but decided not to run for re-election.

We spoke to the issue of gay and lesbian youth at a special meeting of the Des Moines School Board several years ago. Several members teach in the schools and bring values with them.

None of our students attend Scattergood at present. Quite a few attend Camp Woodbrooke, where they're exposed to Quaker values. We ordered Quaker book covers for our students to use at school instead of the ones the military services provide.

Friends whose children are grown serve as role models - perhaps unconsciously - for young parents. The activism of some Friends also provides a role model. Preparation for a changing world requires prayer.

## 2005

We moved slowly into the discussion of the Advice and Query on Education, considering various ways in which we try to live our values in this area. It was not difficult to see that many of us are active as parents and citizens in our local public schools, that we are working to strengthen our relationship with Scattergood Friends School (a process, we noted, which results in their giving to us also), and that some of us have been active with the local television program, "Conversations," which focuses on issues of peace and justice and involves high school students in the production of the show. The Library Committee is glad to report that the library is being well used.

We recognized that the spirit of inquiry that the advice suggests we foster is a natural trait in our young children. Early in their development, our work may largely be to step out of the way to effectively enjoy, and avoid squelching that natural inquisitiveness. As children grow, we ruefully agreed, their spirit of inquiry can lead them to places we prefer them not to go. Guidance always has its place. We remember that, not uncommonly, adults too can use guidance.

As we considered how central it is to our Quaker beliefs to teach by living our testimonies, we encountered the tension that exists between teaching by example and the need to sometimes articulate our values to our young people. Friends shared doubts about not having been clear enough with their children about the reasons behind their decision to live simply. We are perhaps reticent about talking about why we choose the way we live. We also remembered that our young people are astute in their understanding of our values, spoken or not, and that we respect and trust them as they move into adulthood. Implicit Quaker values may teach our young people how to consider who they wish to become. We must release them with grace as they find their own ways with the world, remembering that as we have found our own paths, so shall they.

It became apparent in our discussion that we especially search for ways to teach simplicity, and that we are not sure we have been successful. It helped us when a Friend reminded us that the complications in our lives can interfere with our awareness of the presence of God. A simple life better enables us to be in harmony with the Spirit. We were grateful also for the reminder of one Friend that God's love and generosity are in great abundance everywhere around us, and that our search for simplicity needs to focus on that very abundance, not simply on our response to materialism. We strive for simplicity within the experience of God's abundance.

## **2006**

Education continues throughout life. People here are always investigating some topic. We share things we read. This encourages others to keep growing.

Some worry that our children don't get the biblical background they did. We have a small number of children and struggle with the challenge of exposing them to the love of God.

Other churches can go to a religious bookstore and pick up a packet for the semester. There are Quaker curricula about various subjects, and for different lengths of time.

One told of having rejected Sunday school because of dogma. Teachings of Jesus on loving kindness, connected to experiences each week, could be discussed and could stimulate curiosity.

Two of our members attended divinity school, where students get involved in studies about Jesus. One of them said that answering queries helps his spiritual development.

A member who transferred from another meeting said people there shared their spiritual journeys. We've had new people do that, but then they want to hear ours. We used to take turns doing that with the children.

Doing this kind of sharing was suggested. We do some of it as a by-product of discussing sections of the Faith and Practice revisions.

## 7. HOME AND FAMILY

### ADVICE

We seek an atmosphere within our homes and within our families which nurtures the many physical, social, spiritual and emotional needs of each of us. This is true whether we live alone or with others.

A family, whatever its composition, is a unique and sometimes fragile bonding of people. At its best, it is concerned with the welfare of the whole and each of its constituents.

Children bring gifts to the families that nurture them. Our children's earliest encounters with the principles of Friends usually occur within our homes. Examples we set are often more effective than verbal guidance. The loving support of the meeting is needed as children learn to understand and practice Quaker principles in their lives.

While we try to make our homes centers of love, we sometimes feel anger and hostility. Part of the challenge of being human is to learn to constructively channel the energy of anger, relying on the Divine Spirit for love and guidance., Worship in the home can enable us to hold ourselves and one another in the Light. Respect for truth, as each discerns it, is essential to the happiness and spiritual growth of a persons within the home. Clear communication, patience and a sense of humor are vital to family relationships.

We value setting aside time for rest, recreation and creative activities. Offering hospitality can foster mutual bonds of friendship and love and can enrich our own lives and the lives of others.

## QUERY

- How can we make our homes places of love and hospitality?
- What different expectations do we hold for women and men, boys and girls? How can we bring more equality into our relationships?
- How do we develop and maintain lines of communication?
- In what ways do we share -our deepest experiences, struggles, -concerns and beliefs with our children and others, yet encourage them to develop their potential as the Spirit leads them?
- What place do we make in our daily lives for meditation, spiritual renewal and reading of inspiring literature, such as the Bible?
- How does our Meeting support families of all kinds?

## SELECTED RESPONSES

### 1998

One thing we can do to deepen caring within the home is to limit the time we give to TV or other activities which do not encourage sharing. In order to develop hospitality within our homes, we may need to practice being hospitable. Often we would like to be hospitable and to encourage people to drop in, but sometimes this is hard when we don't feel organized. While we feel the need to relax and be ourselves around family, it is important to be respectful of other family members at the



same time. One person said she feels the meeting is her family.

Regarding male/female expectations, our conditioning makes it hard to attain equality in our relationships. One person recalled how different expectations there were in her family when she was in high school. The males were expected to give money they earned toward support of the family while she was able to keep what she earned.

Sometimes the high ideals we seek for ourselves and expect for our children become stumbling blocks when we find we and they don't live up to them. An important aspect in helping children and others to develop their spiritual lives is the presence of tender love around them.

A number of those present spoke of how they incorporated worship into their daily lives. Suggestions for daily spiritual renewal included: the Cherokee "Feast of Days" and the Unity daily meditation booklet. There are other books which have daily thoughts to be read for meditation. Some books include space for daily journal writing. One person talked of centering prayers, perhaps something first to help enrich the time spent in quietness. A "left brain" person said for a time she read one chapter a day from the Bible to help enhance the "right brain." Music also can help one get in touch with the Spirit.

Perhaps we can in our families encourage one another to do a daily reading. The question was asked, "Do we do these activities because we enjoy them or because we think we have to?" One person said it was something like walking, it helped integrate his life. There is something to be said for the discipline of daily practices.

We feel quite positive about meeting support of families of all kinds. We enjoy our meeting children. It feels good when we care enough to ask one another about an absent partner or extended family. It is important to be especially sensitive when people live

alone. One person commented feeling that “meeting is always for me.”

## **2000**

Some of us have difficulty finding time to be together as families let alone reaching out to others, but we recognize the importance of both activities. Being comfortable with ourselves makes our homes places of love and hospitality. Also being aware that when someone comes to visit, what is important is the visit itself, not the condition of our house. Learning about others' interests helps us relate to each one's expectations whether they are men or women, boys or girls.

In a farming community gender roles seem more defined by the traditions of the past, but this is changing. Some commented that it depended on the gender make-up of the family as to whether boys were expected to help in the house and girls have chores outside. Those that went to Scattergood Friends School learned skills they might not have if they had stayed in their home community. Some families make a concerted effort to see that life skills are learned regardless of gender, but natural aptitude also determines what role an individual will choose. There is a difficulty in knowing when we are sharing too much and giving too much advice which does not allow for our children's individual growth and discovery. Some have found that too much stress on particular social concerns can bring about a contrary reaction in children. However, when one is excited about an issue or feels it is especially important, it is hard not to want others to join in that concern. We recognize that our children cannot be sounding boards for all our issues. We also are aware that at times the issue is too painful to share with another and each one has to work things out in a way with which they feel comfortable. We all struggle with the on-going problem of too little time for everything we want to do. Unfortunately sometimes meditation and spiritual nurture get crowded

out by busy lives. We cherish our times after meeting for worship and at Fourth Sunday Dinner when we are at leisure to enjoy visiting with one another.

## **2001**

We seldom know how we influence our children, or what things they either learn or they know. One parent told of a story of their child at vacation bible school. The teacher was talking about how when people die, they may go to heaven, and live with God there; this child responded that when someone dies, if you carry part of them in your heart, they still live with you. The parents did not specifically teach this idea, but the child somehow synthesized it, or felt sure enough about understanding it to bring it up to this teacher.

The meeting family and its loving support is also important for our children; the willingness of adults to provide supervision for play time, or to provide guidance for First Day School are acts which are noticed by the children.

How do we share our experience of God and life with our children, and yet allow them to develop their full potential? We know that it is a gift to not have all of the answers. We believe that we can share what we understand of the basics and of other religious traditions. Mealtimes are a place where many beliefs can be shared and explored. It is the case that children learn from us by our actions as much or more than they do from our words. They pick things up by osmosis, by grace, and by example, and are very good at catching us in our inconsistencies. Living a life of integrity is a much better tool of teaching than is only speaking words of integrity. One Friend noted that the "family" time he most valued was the time he spent working with his father in partnership. He noted how freely his father gave of his time and talent, whether for his immediate family, or for the neighborhood kids that he helped.

It was considered that the home is the central place for providing hospitality . . . is there a unique Quaker

concept of this word? We considered that hospitality means welcoming thoroughly, meeting the guest's needs, having time to linger and spend, welcoming each person as Christ, and attending in a simple, meaningful way to the needs of others.

## **2002**

We open our homes for special occasions and gatherings of friends and relatives. This winter, the 102nd birthday celebration of our beloved long-time attendee, Mildred Standing, was just such a time of love and fellowship.

Our expectations of gender roles should include the realization that the nature and biology of boys and girls is different. Each child needs support and encouragement to blossom to her/his fullest potential. Realizing that the first three years of a child's life are critical to healthy emotional and physical growth, it is imperative that working families have more interaction and bonding opportunities during early childhood development. The examples set by members of the family are a real influence on other members.

As a result of the drug culture, materialism, and violence throughout society, school staff are dealing with many children whose basic physical and/or emotional needs are not being met. Unhealthy family matters recycle generation after generation. Our meeting members support local programs which teach parenting skills and give assistance to troubled and homeless families. Grandparents and other caring adults contribute to providing stability in children's lives.

Rural and small town communities tend to provide an atmosphere where people know each other and can support each other. We are challenged to be good listeners, to know the underlying desires and needs of those close to us, in order to understand, comfort and support them.

Families come in many forms. The most important component of any family is a caring and respectful

relationship. We all can work on being better communicators.

### **2003**

One opinion was quoted to the effect that “a home is a place you go out from,” not a place you retreat to.

More than one person observed that the nature of the physical plant of the home has real importance.

It was noted that children often display opinions regarding gender roles that do not derive from parental influence.

It is true that “rest, recreation and creative activities” are important. It is also true that it can require real effort and planning to make sure that we have these.

A sense of humor is a vital asset.

It was observed that our “friendly suppers” contribute to making our homes “places of love and hospitality.”

Some published responses in Iowa Conservative minutes were read and considered helpful. These included saying that (1) one should not consider other people to come from the same framework that one has one’s self; and (2) one should not expect the very young to have the same maturity of decision-making capacity that their elders have; i.e. a home is not a democracy. Nevertheless, one person reported growing up in a family in which there was a surprising amount of equality between the parents and the children. The children were trusted without special scrutiny, there were no curfews and the children could join in the adult discussions of such things as family finances as if they were adults. This atmosphere worked out all right, without calamity.

Although admiration was expressed for some families’ practice of scheduling regular family meetings to discuss important issues of living together, some people reported that attempts to do this had fallen through, as they had turned out to be embarrassingly artificial.

Games can provide a good opportunity for communication. So can other activities that are performed together.

For meditation, spiritual renewal, etc. a person may prefer setting aside a certain time of the day (e.g. very early or very late) or a certain day of the week.

Offspring can desire greater closeness to their parents, to be let in on the workings of the parents' inner lives. Fathers are sometimes aloof, frustrating this desire.

## **2004**

We asked ourselves the question: What constitutes a "family" or "families?" We feel this would include the extended family, even though few extended families in our society live under the same roof. It would also include blended families arising from more than one marriage. It would include gay families. We realize that a family is sometimes a fragile bonding of people. This fragility makes it vital that we keep lines of communication open, and keep our own minds open, to a variety of ways of viewing the world. For instance, being a vegetarian may seem right for one member of the family and not for another. Our meeting doesn't put a heavy emphasis on Bible training; however, we realize it plays an important role in art, literature, and religions in our culture, and should not be neglected. We suggested different ways in which spiritual renewal can occur. This can happen individually or in groups as we seek recreation and relaxation. Meditation or simply taking a walk may accomplish this for us. Making our homes places of hospitality is a special, yet important, challenge in our busy world.

## 2005

Relationships with those closest to us can often be a dance between sharing ourselves with, and imposing ourselves on, a person. It is not always easy to find ways to help a person to follow his or her own leadings. Being open about letting a person know they can follow their own instincts can help a lot, but may be just a start.

As we move from childhood to being adults, then parents, and eventually seniors, role reversals take place. We have the full range of generations in our meeting. Those of us who are parents worry over our teens and our own parents, neither of whom want to be worried over quite so much. How do we balance between reaching out and intruding in our intergenerational relationships?

Separations can occur within families. There are many reasons for this, including missed opportunities and misunderstandings in our expressions of concern for one another. Other issues can arise within families. Two that we spoke of include difficulties with mental health and differences in faith choices within families. Dealing with family members who have chosen fundamentalist views on faith raises difficult issues that are often easiest to simply avoid speaking about.

Openness is a key to any relationship, and within families we need to be aware of the need to ask questions that can encourage sharing of our joys and apprehensions. These do not always have to be initiated in face-to-face conversations, but e-mails and writing things down for later sharing can be helpful, allowing one to respond (or not respond) in a way and a timing of his/her choosing.

Family does not have to have a narrow definition. Jesus encourages us to look at the wider world as being more important than family. In our own experience we know that the kindness of a stranger can sometimes have more meaning than that of a family member. A

society or community focused on family can become closed to newcomers. So it is healthier to have a broader definition of family. Family can be a source of considerable pain, especially when relationships and/or health falter. These issues can make it difficult to embrace a wider world view at times. The opportunity to share our personal issues can help us keep them in perspective with the wider world.

Communication is critical to recognizing the needs of others and responding to them. We discussed how we might create greater opportunities for this in the life of our meeting. Making time in the face of schedules and busy-ness is difficult, but what choice do we have if we are to provide opportunities to discuss things that are most important and/or difficult? We will make an effort to have a mutual sharing during our frugals, allowing each person in attendance an opportunity to discuss what is happening in their life. More frequent frugals and reading groups were also suggested, and we will hope to move in this direction in the life of our meeting.

***Children's response:***

We are influenced by our families. They are always there for us, no matter what. We get our ideas from our family. How they raise us shapes us. Our names come from our family and we learn language from them too.

We like being a part of our family. We laugh with our families. They care about us. They provide food, shelter, give us advice and accept us for who we are. We are happy to be part of each other. Sometimes things are so busy we would like to be a bigger part of their lives.

Sometimes we do not appreciate our family though. They can embarrass us. Sometimes they care too much. There are rules and things seem too controlling sometimes. Not all the advice we get is welcome, and we are not always understood. Siblings can get annoying sometimes too.



We learn to help people by being in a family. These lessons can be chores, giving advice, caring for our family and going to them with our problems. We help people communicate and learn to explain things to people that are not always easy to talk about.

Being in a Quaker family is different from other families. We do not stress out about what we wear to worship. There is an emphasis on peace. Our prayers before meals are silent, not spoken. We learn to respect each other as equals and are sure not to be violent.

There is love in our families. We know this because they care for and take care of us. We laugh together. We have things explained to us. We get treats and privileges from our parents. We are told we are loved. We are comforted. Someone is always asking for a hug.

God speaks to us about our family from the silence. Our family is important to us. Our siblings and parents are people just like us. We can be relaxed around our families because they accept us. Even though you wonder what they are thinking sometimes, you realize how much you love them. Our family is a part of us. We are most grateful for them.

## **2006**

Working, playing and worshipping together bond our families and communities. The patterns of these activities create moments that instill values, often when we are unaware of them. These events are important to our growth and development. When we value doing nothing, taking walks, watching birds, and enjoying nature we create spaces to nurture.

While there have been changes to the roles of men and women, many women still feel the final responsibility of the home. Even with all the labor saving appliances and husbands more willing to help, many women come home from a job outside the home and do the household

chores of cooking and childcare. Men who have lived on their own are more self-reliant.

Computers and cell phones seem to discourage personal communication. Parents can encourage communication by limiting computer, TV, and phone time, and by using opportunities while riding in the car, doing chores, etc., to respectfully listen and engage in conversation. It is important to share deeply held values and feelings, writings, journals and family stories.

Some young people seem to be in conflict. On the one hand, there is an attitude of entitlement; of dropping out if they don't like what is happening. But on the other side, there is fear. They are afraid to challenge authority--teacher or boss--for fear of not getting the grades they need or fear of losing their jobs.

We welcome others and are interested in them and their beliefs. We are happy to see how the New Horizons Center has enhanced the family feeling for those who attend. We feel a strong sense of family in our meeting. We know we can depend on each other.

## **8. PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY**

"Life is meant to be lived from a Center, a divine Center-- a life of unhurried peace and power. It is serene. It takes not time, but it occupies all our time." Thomas Kelly

### **ADVICE**

Historic testimonies of the Society of Friends against taking oaths, joining secret organizations, gambling and using addictive substances grew out of efforts of Friends to live with integrity and consistency. To swear an oath implied that one is obliged to be truthful only under oath. Joining secret organizations, gambling and using addictive and/or consciousness-altering substances were recognized as practices which diverted resources from useful purposes, distracted attention from the Inner Light, and placed obstacles in the way of Friends seeking to lead lives of integrity. We recognize the spirit of these testimonies and endeavor to apply the same principles in our lives today.

Honesty and simplicity are essential parts of personal responsibility. We manifest our commitment to Truth in all we do. We can have joy and beauty in our lives without allowing material things to dominate them. We need to free ourselves from distractions that interfere with our search for inner peace, and accept with thanksgiving all that promotes fullness and aids in service to the divine Center.

## QUERY

- How do we center our lives in the awareness of God the' Spirit, so that all things may take their rightful places?
- How do we structure our individual lives in order to keep them uncluttered with things and activities? How does Meeting help us examine our personal lives for simplicity?
- Do we choose recreational activities which foster mental, physical and spiritual health?
- How are our lives affected by tobacco, alcohol and drug use? What can we do to deal with problems resulting from their use? What can we do to recognize and deal with unhealthy ways we treat ourselves?
- How do we ensure that we act with fairness and integrity?
- Are we sensitive to our own use of language which may be offensive or oppressive to others?

## **SELECTED RESPONSES**

### **1998**

In a society that tends toward over-abundance and many choices, we find it difficult to pare down our activities. It is hard to know which of the many opportunities to do worthwhile things to choose. It is helpful to set a certain time and place for daily devotions. We have to try to resist distractions. Actually, if we could stay in tune with God's will, other things would take care of themselves.

### **2000**

We seek to center our lives on the awareness of God in a variety of ways. Some recite a simple prayer which, over time, becomes second nature and helps one center. Others allow themselves to surrender often to wonder and awe, which promotes an ongoing awareness of God. Meeting helps by providing quiet time and place for reflection, by considering the Advices and Queries, and by providing contact and fellowship with inspiring people. When the question of keeping lives uncluttered was re-read in discussion, one participant's spontaneous response of "Hpfff!" succinctly summarized the gap the group perceived between our awareness of the problem and our success at dealing with it. As another observed, regarding unhealthy ways we treat ourselves, it is one thing to recognize a problem and quite another to maintain the discipline necessary to solve it. Things, activities, and surroundings can be either a help or a hindrance to our spirituality: the key is to recognize which is which and to deal with them accordingly. We recognize that clutter relates more to the nature of the activity than to the level of activity. A day planner and spirituality are not necessarily mutually exclusive. A flurry of activity organized around a clear spiritual center might add up to a simple, coherent life. Friends seek to live according to what has been known as "Gospel order," which implies a generally orderly

arrangement of one's life and conscientious discharge of one's responsibilities, all according to spiritual priorities. Keeping everything in its rightful place in life requires constant, honest assessment of what is important. A balance must be struck between identifying and addressing problems on one hand and beating ourselves up when problems are found on the other.

## 2001

The Spiritual Formation group has been reading Thomas Kelly and Brother Lawrence. The group also is reading *Listening Spirituality*, which lays out various kinds of spiritual discipline to choose from. But having spiritual discipline only during parts of the day brings no sense that everything comes from the right motives. Doing simple chores is an opportunity to be mindful, and we don't always take advantage of it. Trying to see that of God in everybody all the time is the spiritual practice of one in the group; it can be exhausting.

Doing all this reading has been helpful in focusing on the spiritual. We have to keep trying to do what we think is right, and to help others. It's too easy to go from task to task without even thinking about that of God in others.

In thinking about structuring our individual lives for simplicity, one was reminded of the words of a Beatles song: "Life goes on within you and without you." Also, Walter Wink said that we're called to engage principalities and powers, but each one is called to do specific things, and by doing too much, one denies someone else a chance to fulfill their role. The chore is figuring out what your calling is.

The spiritual discipline of one member of the group is to unclutter her house. We, not some outside force, create chaos, even though it takes a very small amount of time to bring order.

One family feels closer when they go away to a simple place like a cabin. How far do you have to go with simplicity? Sometimes we have to go away to

escape from the pattern of not allowing ourselves time to relax.

One remarked that in choosing recreational activities, football doesn't foster mental, physical, and spiritual health, and wondered what to do with an 11-year-old who feels peer pressure to play it. In a basketball audience, she was embarrassed to find herself calling for her daughter to be aggressive.

Another appreciated the example of a Friend telling his small daughter, "This is not negotiable"—a firm stand with a reason given.

With the question of tobacco and other addictive substances, a father hopes his children will see that as an issue of health consequences.

One said that coming to Meeting makes her a better person; she is nice to people who were mean to her in the past.

It helps to be part of a group striving for simplicity in a world full of the opposite

## **2002**

Several Friends spoke of a concern to lead lives of simplicity. We initially spoke of simplicity in terms of abstinence from using complex technology and from engaging in excessive activity, but we were reminded that simplicity is more an attitude toward material things. What is in one's heart and soul counts most. Presence or absence of material wealth matters less than the manner in which one's resources were gained and applied.

It is important to acknowledge and to take responsibility for the costs and hidden impacts of seductive "simplifying conveniences" such as disposable consumer goods and air travel.

Pursuing an ever greater level of activity, drama, and stimulation is regarded as a problem, especially in others. We recognize that that pursuit may reflect a reluctance to encounter God and one's self in quietness. We also recognize that it is easier to spot

weaknesses of others than to spot weaknesses of our own, and to assign rather than to assume responsibility for making the world a better place.

### 2003

"A life of unhurried peace and power takes no time, but occupies all our time"—*Thomas Kelly*. Time should not be set aside for peace, power, and living from the center. These should permeate all life.

Our meeting does not have an example of someone living extreme simplicity. Sometimes living low tech is not simple. Having a low impact on the environment, having a low income to avoid taxes or taking a vow of poverty are not testimonies of simplicity but they can be motivated by a wish to live with integrity and consistency. Affirming instead of swearing in legal matters represents the tradition of Quakers living with integrity and consistency.

The intent of the soul is important. The same item or activity may be chosen by one for its function and spiritual import while another may choose the same item or activity to impress others or some other spiritually irresponsible reason. Personal Responsibility involves making choices to act in ways that promote, and refraining from acting in ways that will inhibit, the spiritual growth of yourself and those you are with at the time. Discussions in Meeting of personal responsibility give us ideas of how others live this out and remind us to continue to work towards it.

Clutter and activity can get in the way of peace. It takes time to find things in clutter. One attendee spoke of the many cards given to frequent shoppers. She has quit carrying cards for places where they can look up her purchases on a computer. We need to keep only what we use frequently so we spend less time maintaining things we rarely use.

Personal responsibility involves trust. We can show our trust of others and the workings of the Spirit on our jobs by sharing information and physical resources.



Is the Pledge of Allegiance a pledge to the kind of personal responsibility we aspire to? Casinos in Nebraska are a legislative topic. What stand should the meeting take on this issue to promote the kind of personal responsibility we believe in? Can investing in stocks be personally responsible if the businesses are socially responsible, or is this gambling?

## **2004**

It is difficult to feel serene knowing our country is contributing heavily to the violent chaos in the world. It is important to find time to be quiet and reflect on what is happening. A walk in the woods, worshiping together at meeting, gathering in small discussion groups can help us be centered by divine guidance and help us to live our lives in the light.

During Mid-Year Meeting Richard Johnson spoke to us about his use of the queries in his classroom. This is a very good tool to use in discussions with those who disagree with us. By asking questions we can try to understand their viewpoints and share our share our concerns with them. The queries have always been valuable to our Meeting and to each of us personally as we evaluate our faith and practice.

Dealing with the clutter in our lives is an ever present challenge.

Several families in our meeting have moved to smaller homes and have recycled through the rummage sale, sold and given away items and still have more than needed. Letters, photos, diaries etc. are an important part of our personal history and are precious to us.

Families are too busy with sports, TV, computers etc. Many are overweight and living unhealthy lifestyles. We are not always tuned into ourselves, often denying our sadness or hurt feelings. Our society offers band aid solutions take a pill and get over it. We need to recognize the signs that create the need for self medication in the form of alcohol and drugs. There are

tools and skills available to help people process these emotional needs and challenges.

We need to try to find a balance between the activities of living a responsible life and finding quiet times to be open to guidance by the Divine Spirit that nurtures us.

## **2005**

The meaning of simplicity is reflected in our desire to reduce our attraction to, and dependence on, modern technology such as computers, cell phones, and other aspects of mass media culture. We strive to disconnect with external distractions and connect with the inner peace and light that we have come to cherish within our meeting community.

Although many of us acknowledge the usefulness of setting priorities and creating daily lists, the importance and desire to leave the time and space for life to flow naturally allows us the awareness and recognition of that preciousness of each moment.

We often feel a hopelessness and dismay when we confront the entrenched power of corporate, military, or political interests. The use of humor, satire or irony is often the most effective means of speaking truth to power. We affirm the gift of laughter as a means to lighten the spirit and as a reminder that the source of joy can be found in our continual seeking along our personal and corporate journey.

## **2005**

Several folks spoke of the need to simplify physical aspects of living by removing clutter that no longer has meaning from their homes. Sometimes we wait until renting out our homes or moving out before we let go of things no longer essential to our lives. Giving these

items to others who are in real need, we believe, is a form of personal responsibility.

One member spoke of her recent stay in Mexico as a time of learning how to slow down in a culture that moves at a slower pace than we do in the U.S. She felt that she had to re-shift gears to the faster pace of the United States upon returning to this country.

Sometimes we fill our minds with unproductive thoughts and worry, a non-tangible form of clutter. This prevents us from being fully present in each moment. Someone expressed the idea that meeting can be a touchstone, a place where we share support for each other, where we share ideas, where we can set life-affirming priorities and where we can become more centered in our lives.

## **9. CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY**

### **ADVICE**

Because Friends believe there is that of God in all people, we strive for a world of freedom, justice and equality for everyone. Believing that progress toward these ideals is advanced by those who devote themselves to the shaping of a just society, we urge Friends to be active and conscientious citizens. This means staying informed on social issues, and on the opinions and activities of our elected representatives and of those seeking office. It is important that Friends speak truth to those in power. We recognize that, in our world, power in government and private sectors lies disproportionately with those of economic means. Speaking out on a personal level in our communities may be difficult, even dangerous, yet by doing so we may encourage others to work for justice.

Our first allegiance is to the Holy Spirit. In general, Friends support the laws of the State; but if those laws directly violate our religious convictions, we may be led to oppose them. When contemplating civil disobedience or unpopular personal testimony, we must carefully consider the spiritual basis for, and honestly face the consequences of our actions.

## QUERY

- What conflicts do we perceive between the laws of the State and our religious convictions? How do we resolve those conflicts in our lives? In what ways do we assume responsibility for the government of our community, state, nation and world?
- How do we share our convictions with others? Do we express our opinions with courage, yet with love, mindful of the Divine Spirit within everyone?
- How do we maintain our integrity when we find ourselves in a position of power? How do we respond when we feel powerless? Do we really respect and help those we seek to serve?
- Are we careful to reach our decisions through prayer and strengthen our actions with worship? Are we open to divine leadings?

## SELECTED RESPONSES

### 1998

Our discussion seemed to center on the spirituality of civic responsibility rather on specific issues and strategies. Several in the group shared how events in their lives had come to shape their convictions. These events were sometimes viewed as “seeds” for the soul, often nurtured by love, compassion, and understanding; or remaining dormant until further leading had “sprouted” a call to action or a renewed commitment to a cause or injustice.

Also were considered the specific feelings and processes that are perceived in a spiritual or divine leading. The power of prayer was recognized as an

essential ingredient to understanding the nature and effect of these leanings.

## **2000**

We agreed that there are a number of civic issues where laws are not in harmony with Friends' convictions, e.g., military spending, and capital punishment in the state of Missouri. Another example: for many of us, registration for draft is contrary to our principles. In addition to being a law favorable to the military, it is presently only enforced if the person who registers applies for financial aid for school, making it discriminatory to those of limited incomes. We find it helpful to have an organization such as FCNL to speak for us. Moreover, we can be part of the decision making process as to what issues the organization works on. We appreciate the approach of focusing on critical issues, rather than side issues. We are often conflicted by who runs for office and who gets elected. Sometimes people are elected whose lives are not exemplary and whose leadership does not seem sound. For some of us, writing letters to those in office feels non-productive when we doubt they will listen to our views. When dialogue opportunities with legislators open up, it is important for us to speak our truths. We try to share our convictions with others. It is an art to speak one's own truth while respecting others' values. Sometimes our courage wavers and sometimes we find it hard to love persons with whom we disagree. Special care and concern is needed in dealing with differences in convictions within our families. In sharing it is important to listen to those of an opposing viewpoint and make an effort to understand. For some of us, it is hard to communicate with people who engage in argument on issues. It is good to know when to disengage ourselves from such discussion and recognize times and issues where arousing argument may be counter-productive. People have different ways of expressing civic interest. Some of us wonder if there is a lack within us because

we are not "doing something" on issues others find crucial. We believe we can often do small things that make a difference. The challenge is to live our lives in ways consistent with what we deeply believe. Should we try to influence others to do something about a given issue? We need to consider taking this kind of action with care. It is important to be "up on" candidates for office so that we can vote intelligently. Some of us have power in the workplace, or as parents, or as teachers. All of us have power of some sort or other. Often we don't understand that power. We need to take responsibility for our own power. It is a challenge to own up to our power and to treat it with integrity. We believe in respecting those we try to help. We recognize the hazard of being engrossed in "doing good," to the extent that we sometimes lose the sense of respect for those in need. We agreed that the process of sitting together in worship affects the decisions we make during the week. While some feel prayer guides them in decisions, others were uncertain. We need to be cautious when we think God speaks to us regarding others. One person commented that she had hoped to some time feel certain of God's voice, but she had come to believe being certain may be undesirable. We need to live out uncertainties. A telling question to ask oneself is, "What are you thinking about as you consider your decision?" Money, power, others, the good, etc.?

## **2001**

It is important that we keep up with events and speak out in the interests of peace and justice to those in power.

Should a Friend feel led to protest or even consider civil disobedience when his/her religious convictions are directly violated, it is helpful for the meeting to appoint a clearness committee for assistance in determining whether the concern comes from the Holy Spirit.

The changing policies of the new national administration may cause increasing concerns among Friends.

## 2002

We make comments to our member of the Iowa Senate, who has to deal with the issues. He reminded us that he's in the minority. He commented that absolute power corrupts absolutely, and he's seen abuses. One almost needs to be wealthy to run for Congress or the legislature, and this tends to lead to candidates who are retired, or young people. Farmers and lawyers used to be the ones who could fit it into their schedules.

There was an expression of conflict of conscience about paying taxes that finance war. Two didn't pay the telephone tax during the Vietnam War; another told about mail having been withheld during the McCarthy era.

Sharing opinions with courtesy and respect can be a challenge. Wearing a plowshare pin, or peace buttons and jewelry, helps start conversations about peace issues.

A state government employee commented that cuts in the state budget pit different interests against each other, with each trying to protect their own area and jobs.

One Friend told of having conversations with an extreme conservative who distrusts government. The latter's solution is to have little government; the Friend's is to make government accountable by being involved. She wonders how to bridge the polarization gap.

Turning to civic engagement outside of government, one person referred to a book, *Bowling Alone*, which speaks of the decline of social interaction and ways it can be rebuilt—by engaging in organizations and getting to know people of different opinions, and working with them, talking about issues, voting, being active with schools, and knowing they can achieve things together.



One couple started coming to meeting because they kept running into some of us at meetings of peace and justice groups.

Speaking of a feeling of powerlessness, one said it's more meaningful to focus on the lower rungs of the ladder to make any changes, and cautioned against falling into the win-lose trap. We're not called to be successful, but to be faithful, another reminded us. Results of efforts may not come till much later. A religious coalition was responsible for stopping the death penalty in Iowa.

Social progress is described as two steps forward and one step back, though sometimes it seems like one forward and two back. English as Iowa's official language was a step back. But in the long view, we never go all the way back to the previous condition, we were reminded. Religious groups can go backward, too, *i.e.*, a flag in every classroom, and an attempt to eliminate multicultural education.

## **2003**

We had a thoughtful query discussion about civic responsibility, with many sharing comments and, especially, challenges we find in the query. One person noticed that some of the speakers at the Peace March in Washington, DC were contentious and directed anger at certain political leaders. He finds the Query's suggestion that we be "mindful of the Divine Spirit in everyone" a challenge for him, one that is important to keep in mind.

Another member commented on the importance of maintaining integrity when in a position of power. He believes he has little power, but realizes he has chosen to give up power in his life twice. He gave up the career of pastor and also decided later not to pursue a Master's Degree in counseling. In both instances he was uncomfortable that people asked his advice, and often did what he said. He wonders now how we can help those in power and is recently aware that much of his protest has consisted of complaints, something he would

like to change; he would like to help people in power grow in their integrity.

Another observed that the more successful people in elected positions are those who do not take strong stands, and therefore do not risk losing their positions. He finds himself challenged to express his opinion without browbeating, how to listen to others in such a way that he might expand his own thinking. Someone else shared how difficult she finds it to share her thoughts in her workplace, that she is sorry still about an exchange she had during the Vietnam War with a Native American who had been drinking for three days, that she now wants to understand those who disagree with her, to listen to their guilt and fears. She sees new possibilities in asking questions of her co-workers, to think of them, rather than attack them.

One person expressed his difficulty with this query, in that he is not interested in, nor trusts politics. Someone else agreed that she struggles with discouragement and the apathy of hopelessness. She had been in San Francisco during the Peace March, told how fun the experience had been, the delight, for instance, of seeing a child carrying a sign that read, "Another 3<sup>rd</sup> grader for peace." She compared this experience to the account of someone from our meeting who went to the march in Cedar Rapids, which was much smaller, in frigid and windy weather, and how the responses from the public to the march were mixed, some of them being angry and negative. She sees the real challenge in working closer to home, where the work may be less fun and exhilarating, but where real need exists.

Again, someone expressed how she hates being in vigils, and how a small group is planning future vigils in West Branch. She struggles with carrying signs that only serve to antagonize. She does not want to participate in making George Bush or Saddam Hussein the focal points of hatred. She likes the 3<sup>rd</sup> grader's sign and thinks hers may say, "Another grandmother for peace."

She finds she is afraid of mobs and of the possibility of mob action, even when the groups are very small. One has, she concluded, no idea how to measure the results or consequences of a vigil.

Another member spoke of a sign she saw years ago in Connecticut that said "Seek Peace and it will find you." She hopes her standing up for peace can be a support to a passerby, who, for instance, may be tending toward such beliefs, but has not clarified them yet.

Others commented on the Cedar Rapids vigil, one saying she found positive responses outnumbered negative ones, another pointing out the vast majority did not respond. Someone wondered which is harder for the protester, a negative response or none at all.

Finally, someone spoke to the words in the advice, "staying informed." He is aware of how in the Vietnam War we were concerned with the same struggles, and how frightening and appalling it is to be in the same place again today. Those who want power and wealth do not ever cease in pursuing those goals, but enjoy the fruits such as their yachts and fancy homes. He concluded that those who desire peace may want to reap the harvest of peace and do not stay the course so steadily, which may be at the root of our difficulties.

## **2004**

We find it difficult being a member of a larger society when things are going on that we do not agree with. At the present, terrorism and religious differences are issues that are creating conflicts. We must find the solutions to these problems in order to have peace in the world. In a democracy we hope that the best things will rise to the top and find dominance, and that by careful thought and deliberation, this will be what occurs in our society. Our faith wavers when we see that things that are bothersome rise to the top. It is important to express our opinions in ways that will be heard. We are grateful to have alternatives to demonstrate our disagreements. There are many options to voice our concerns such as

writing letters or talking to our elected representatives. These avenues give us the ability to let our voices be heard.

Someone mentioned a bumper sticker saying “If you believe in peace, work for justice.” No matter how much money is spent on a problem, if justice is not achieved, society will not be benefitted.

We have often used the phrase “Speak truth to those in power,” but sometimes we wonder what, or whose, truth is correct. Although God’s truth is absolute, our understanding of it is a searching process. A big challenge today is deciding what “truth” is as a nation, community or society. A lot of decisions we need to make are not always black and white. An example of this is when we pay taxes. Our money is used for programs that we support and some that we definitely do not support.

Most of us don’t feel powerful, but sometimes we are in positions of power, such as clerking meeting or being president of an organization. We should not avoid these positions for fear of being the one in power. When we go to see our elected representatives, they are the ones in power, but when they go to their governing bodies they may feel powerless also.

Power in itself is not a bad thing. It is what activates society’s agenda. There is an equilibrium between being active and passive, similar to forces in nature which includes the power of regeneration in the spring and the power of reflection in the fall. If we are open to what is divine we will have the strength to stand up to power that is unjust.

There are several things we do at school to help in our community and solve conflicts.

Emily’s class volunteers on the fourth Wednesday each month to help with the free lunch program held at the Wesley Center. Four students go to help serve food and clean up.

Grades 3-6 have a student council. The representatives are elected from each class. Thomas

served this school year. The adults set the rules and student council only decides a few things. This year they decided how to raise money for homeless people in Iowa City. They also voted to raise money to adopt a raptor.

There are also conflict managers to supervise grades K-4 at recess. It's a good idea but doesn't always work. Some kids with a problem don't want to solve it.

## **2005**

We are deeply concerned about our national government's emphasis on a military response to many forms of terrorism and international issues. We find it difficult to truly find the truth about many situations when the administration seems to declare lies or misinterpretations as fact and the media seems to only promote false impressions through their reporting. The emphasis on spinning the facts of a situation to suit a specific agenda pervades our society today in many areas besides the government, although it seems to be most often used in that context. There are so many areas with which we feel alarm and concern because of state and national policy decisions that we often feel overwhelmed and discouraged. We struggle to find constructive ways of speaking our truths that will be understood by both the public and our legislators. Many of us seek alternative sources of information to the popular press in order to try to discern the truth of a situation. Some of us contact legislators and contribute editorials and letters to the editor on a regular basis, while others call or e-mail on specific issues of concern which arise when alerted by FCNL and other organizations.

We are concerned about the lack of trust in our fellow citizens and the unwillingness to work together with those who hold different points of view in order to find a truth both can support. The pervasive atmosphere of mistrust and confrontation keeps individuals polarized and fearful. We regret that there is no orderly public debate of issues that concern all of us, including the rest

of the world, but only acrimony and dispute, with no recognition that there are as many different truths as there are individuals. It is up to all of us to find reconciliation of those differing truths.

## **2006**

We feel numerous conflicts between the laws or at least actions of the state and our religious convictions. Primarily this has to do with the conduct of war, and we all continue to try to make ourselves clear on this point. We try to influence the government through non-registration, voting (although it is rare to find a non-war candidate to vote for), choosing our purchases, lobbying and writing letters to the editor.

We are distressed when we see people advocating peace angrily. We try to share our convictions with others in ways that make them more receptive. Asking questions can be more effective than confrontation. Speaking from our own experience and trusting that we will be heard sometimes works when we least expect it.

We have power in teaching and in management. Handling that power responsibly requires us to listen, to ask others to help us understand them, and by honestly acknowledging the ways in which we do not have control of a situation.

Often we feel powerless when we are writing letters to elected officials who do not seem to be paying attention. Sometimes they too are powerless, being subject to their peers and constituents. The issues on which they have the strongest convictions may not even come to their attention.

In sum, we felt that being responsible citizens and people of faith is not easy. We intend to strive to communicate with others, even those with whom we disagree or over whom we have power, with respect and out of our own experience. We must have faith in our convictions and our own way of expressing them, even when the outcome is not clear.

## **10. ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY**

### **ADVICE**

All of creation is divine and interdependent: air, water, soil, and all that lives and grows. Since human beings are part of this fragile and mysterious web, whenever we pollute or neglect the earth we pollute and neglect our own wellsprings. Developing a keen awareness of our role in the universe is essential if we are to live peacefully within creation.

The way we choose to live each day--as we manufacture, package, purchase and recycle goods, use resources, dispose of water, -design homes, plan families and travel-affects the present and future of life on the planet. The thought and effort we give to replenishing what we receive from the earth, to keeping informed and promoting beneficial legislation on issues which affect the earth, to envisioning community with environmental conscience, are ways in which we contribute to the ongoing health of the planet we inhabit.

Preserving the quality of life on Earth calls forth all of our spiritual resources. Listening to and heeding the leadings of the Holy Spirit can help us develop qualities which enable us to become more sensitive to all life

## QUERY

- What are we doing about our disproportionate use of the world's resources?
- Do we see unreasonable exploitation in our relationship -with the rest of creation?
- How can we nurture reverence and respect for life? How I can we become more fully aware of our interdependent relationship with the rest of creation?
- To what extent are we aware of all life and the role we play? What can we do in our own lives and communities to address environmental concerns?

## SELECTED RESPONSES

### 1998

We do what we are able toward recycling. Although there is no organized pick-up program for rural areas so that we are personally responsible for getting items to the recycling centers, we feel this is important enough that we take the time to do it.

We considered the question as farmers; do we use a disproportionate amount of resources compared to what we produce from those resources? We find ourselves trying to balance uses with production. Not all technology is harmful, and we are grateful for the advantages, which have resulted in helping farmers provide food for an increasing population.

Our direct association with food production seems to make us more concerned about the environment because abuse affects us directly. However, we recognize that some decisions we make are based on



economic reasons rather than solely on environmental concern. It is difficult to truly see how we can make dramatic changes because of the threat to our livelihood. Being involved with environmentally concerned community action groups and organizations such as Practical Farmers of Iowa provide us with information on ways to be better stewards of our soils and threatened resources.

We try to be aware of our role in Divine creation, recognizing that no other creature has had the effect on the planet than has humankind. Technology now seems to be advancing so swiftly that we do not have time to consider the consequences for all of creation. We feel this often keeps us from recognizing our own spiritual needs and from seeking the divine Source of life. Moderation seems to be the key to all forms of consumption from fossil fuels to animal protein.

## **2000**

Questions of renewing the earth's resources are more on the minds of our young people than we might realize. We recognize the critical importance of bringing attention to these issues, difficult as they are to address. We discussed ramifications of the philosophy that we are somehow superior to other life forms. Perhaps we need to give up the idea of having "dominion" over the things of the earth. Thinking in terms of having a relationship with all of life based on mutual respect and autonomy, and recognizing God not just in humanity, but in all things, helps to foster reverence for all life and brings us to a stewardship relationship. We need to give careful thought to exercising responsible use of our power as human beings on an over-crowded planet. Reinhold Niebuhr has written that in many respects, it is pure luck that we were born in a country with rich natural resources. We're very well off; this leads to complacency and arrogance. There is a real danger in this. It is difficult to even begin to address the question of disproportionate use of the world's resources. While we

take hot showers and all of our many luxuries for granted, people in other parts of the world scrape clay walls with their hands to collect enough water to drink for the day. It is very difficult to address these vast lifestyle discrepancies.

Projects were discussed that bring solutions to people in third world countries, such as setting up solar panels to power medical clinics, renewable energy sources to provide refrigeration to keep vaccines cold, and installing wind generators. These projects aren't without problems as people with different cultural perspectives work together. While solar box cookers are a great alternative for people with lots of sun and diminishing fuel sources, it is difficult for people to make this kind of radical change who have tended a fire for cooking for thousands of years. Respect and reverence for other cultures is an important part of environmental responsibility. One person who has been involved in animal research for 40 years sees a strong relationship between how we treat animals, and how we treat people. If we can disregard animals, it is much more likely that we will disregard people. We recognize that reverence for life goes all the way down the scale, though we all have our boundaries or limits when it comes to sharing our homes with flies and mosquitoes! While it seems like a feeble response, many of us try to address these issues through lifestyle choices. Many drive efficient vehicles, minimize unnecessary travel, and try to be responsible about the resources we consume and the waste that we generate. We try to set a good example in the workplace and community. Beautifying our spaces is an indication of reverence for life. We talked about the miracle of food production and plant life; the generation of beautiful and delicious vegetables and fruits from hard crusted seeds or scrawny shoots. It is important to stay in touch with these miracles, and a sense of wonder and awareness of the beauty around us. We talked about the importance of raising our young people with an awareness of environmental responsibility. We need

more focus on renewable energy in the schools. We wondered if the schools have recycling projects in place. We recognize that young people are pulled in many directions in this increasingly complex world. However, they will inherit responsibility for these problems and will need tools to solve them. Developing models that outlive us is an important legacy to leave, models that can be used by people in future generations. While the problems and issues are overwhelming, we recognize that each person does make a difference. The woman who set up residence in a California tree confronted major corporate interests, and ultimately attained a settlement that protected forest land in the area. Albert Schweitzer's philosophy of reverence for all life has inspired many over time. While we may not be able to alleviate the problem, we can be a small part of the solution. May we each, in our own way, sincerely attempt to do so, to "let our lives speak" as we reside on this beautiful, struggling, constantly regenerating planet.

## **2001**

The increasing demands for energy are currently causing power outages in many parts of our country. The resulting national debate about consumption as it relates to the environment, is an opportunity for us to speak out and to be living examples in the effort to preserve our delicate ecosystem.

We discussed the seemingly insatiable desire of some people to possess things, which is a burden that negatively impacts the environment through consumption. Thomas Moore has an essay on this topic in *The Care of the Soul*.

We support research and use of alternative renewable energy sources. Each of us seeks ways to simplify our lives and reduce our use of finite resources, such as burning wood for heat, buying pre-used items, recycling, using canvas rather than plastic shopping bags, walking and bicycling.

Our location in rural Iowa gives us the opportunity to spend time in nature—not to possess it, but to know it and feel part of it. We are also aware of urban sprawl as it comes our way from Des Moines. We appreciate State Representative Ed Fallon and the organization “1000 Friends of Iowa,” who are working to reduce this problem.

The Native American Ceremony and Celebration which is held annually at Kuehn Conservation Area near us is supported by our meeting. It speaks clearly to the concerns of this query in its efforts to restore lands to their native condition and celebrate the cultural history of the earth.

Living mindfully in the environment is a balance. We can consider more our use of resources and our spiritual connections to the earth and the Divine Creator.

## **2002**

The call to environmental stewardship is often deafened by other voices. Rather than being conservative with our purchases and analyzing what truly are needs, often we buy things due to cultural pressure.

Currently, there is a call to spend money as a way to boost the national economy, a patriotic action. Acquiring things can be a sign to others of accomplishment. Buying things we don't really need is a waste of resources whose long-range impact is exponential as others fall prey to those influences after emulating us.

Many of the actions we can take that are healthy to the environment seem insignificant. Reusing shopping bags for later purchases is such an example. Composting our kitchen food refuse seems small, as well. But when you add these efforts to recycling, there is a noticeable reduction in the amount of garbage at curbside each week. Buying used items would be another thing everyone could do. Eating food and using products produced in this region cuts down on shipping and packaging costs.

Turning the heat down or not having air conditioning so low is another small conservative action. Drying clothes outside or hanging clothes up inside can conserve energy, also. Sometimes healthy eating is just for that reason, but eating lower on the food chain, which is often healthier, is an environmental benefit. All these small actions add up and can have a major impact, especially if many of us are participating in them.

Some larger efforts to conserve energy and preserve the environment would include conscientious architecture. It would help if our federal government would implement tax credits again for energy conservation additions to buildings; this could have a large impact on the country's environmental state. Apartment dwelling also could be encouraged by tax credits as a means to combat urban sprawl. Population control could be encouraged with tax credits only given for two children at most. Our nation needs to develop better mass transportation systems in communities. In communities where this has not been available, there may be resistance to such an idea. In the meantime people can walk more, ride bikes, carpool, or stay home to make a minor dent in waste in the area of transportation.

The primary effort we can make is to nurture reverence and respect for life. Educating those in our lives about the disproportionate use of natural resources may inspire them to change some of their actions that ultimately will help the world around us.

### **2003**

Balancing the need of work to support one's family and concerns for the environment was a serious concern voiced by one friend but experienced by all. Many friends spoke to this concern. As a nation, we use far more resources than other nations. There is a wide gulf between our country's priorities and those of particularly poor or underdeveloped countries. The term "American way of life" seems to be a diplomatic way of referencing

our culture of consumerism. Individually, and as a community, we can learn more about public policy on the environment, speak out on issues, and discuss our concern about the environment with each other. Awareness of the disparity and the misuse of resources would be helpful programs for our meeting.

One friend pointed out that if the military spending in this country for one year were spent on food production and water disbursement, we could just about feed and bring drinkable water to almost all of the earth's population. The current relationship of humanity to the earth is spiritually unhealthy. While one friend thought that we should feel a little healthy guilt because of our role in the environmental problems, another friend questioned whether guilt is a very good motivator. A sense of disappointment was expressed because although 15-20 years ago it seemed that we were on the edge of a new enlightenment, now it seems as though we are far from it. Another perspective was shared concerning progress. We now have an EPA in the government and the term "environmentalist" is now a part of our lexicon when it wasn't much heard 20 years or so ago. Vegetarianism was suggested by a friend as a more environmentally friendly approach. An analogy that seemed to speak to many friends was a description of a beach resort for the wealthy with beautiful vistas and luxurious accommodations separated from a poor village of shacks by a line of trees and hills. Awareness of the "beach" around us and the "village" around us deepens our understanding of and action on behalf of environmental concerns. Another friend shared that many Americans follow the idea of "rugged individualism" without realizing that there is no distinct individual separated from everyone else. We are a part of each other and we carry in us, from our past and present, teachers, leaders, friends, antagonists and parents. We are physical expressions of the chemical, intellectual, spiritual, and biological connections that continue to transform who we are and link us to each

other. Because we are not separated from either the "beach" or the "village," we are wounded as much by the poverty of one as by the negligence of the other.

## **2004**

Locally, the proposed new mall will promote increased consumption of the earth's resources and affect the environment and citizens within miles of the site. We want to stop the proposed mall from being built and will work individually to oppose it. We are concerned that our community is following an environmentally irresponsible path that will not bring us the tax revenue promised.

The natural cycles on earth are delicately balanced. Our interference in these cycles can cause great damage to us and other creatures. For instance, trace amounts of the most common drugs we take are found in our drinking water and that in turn negatively affects our reproduction and overall health.

When "obsolete" computers are thrown away the toxic substances in them pollute the water. In some poor countries where our computers are dumped, the people who take them apart for scrap suffer ill health effects. We are, in effect, exporting our pollution problems for others to deal with.

We can help by keeping trash to a minimum, buy things we can use up, recycle or give away. In Kenya, everything is used, from empty cans, newspapers, plastic, used clothing, etc. Here people have so much, it's hard to give things away.

Sometimes it seems futile to conserve energy, because others will come along and waste it without thinking. People who walk are commented on as strange in a culture where many drive everywhere they go. Walking is seen as an inconvenience. Many towns are built around vehicles, not people, so we are forced to be dependent on our cars. This disconnects us from nature and the environment, divides people by class, and

contributes to obesity. Walking or biking helps us have time to think quietly and reconnects us with nature.

Where are the positives? Effective environmental protections include a peaceful world, as war causes many environmental disasters. Our peace efforts are also clean earth efforts. We can all join and help the smart growth group here in town.

When thinking of ourselves as part of the world around us, one young Friend wondered, "What if I were a tree growing in an oil spill?" Our own pollution may be poisoning us and hurting other creatures. Some forms of plastic can choke fish or birds.

Some suggestions to ease pollution and littering include solar cars and Earth Day clean ups. We can use ethanol, recycle all kinds of waste, ride a bike or walk instead of driving, plant trees, use resources without wasting, and buy locally produced food and other products.

Quaker ideas such as simplicity help us be less wasteful and rely on each other more. War is destructive to the environment, and working for peace, another Quaker ideal, helps both the environment and other people.

## **2005**

We have the challenge of endeavoring to live in tune with all of creation and to endeavor to be kind and considerate of all creatures.

Credit cards make us concerned about the increased spending and materialism that they encourage. We are concerned about fuel economy for our vehicles and the need for new alternatives. Determining the best type of energy for transportation is a puzzle for those of us in rural areas. The food packaging currently being used tends to waste lots of materials. We find it helpful when friends share their knowledge and ideas on how to lower our contribution to



the waste problems. Global warming raises questions as to what one can do individually.

We believe it best to think before we act. Sharing information and resources can cut down our disproportionate use of resources. It is helpful to pay attention to legislation being proposed and being voted on.

The problems and challenges that confront our environment often result in a forlorn or cynical outlook. Perhaps this cynicism can be overcome with a more spiritual or saintly passion that counters being naive with education and awareness. The balance that we seek can only be measured by the depth of our love for the environment and our capacity for hope.

## **2006**

Our meeting cares deeply about environmental responsibility. One member recently attended the steering committee of Quaker Earthcare Witness in Chicago. Someone there spoke to the need for Quakers to consider whether there is something we can no longer do because we care about the earth. In the past, Quakers decided to no longer purchase things produced by slave labor. Regarding the environment, our efforts are almost entirely personal. We are vegetarian, or we don't dye our hair. We need a public symbol that expresses the level of our concern. What is it we can no longer do? If we no longer drove cars, we would be moved toward closer community. How long can we continue to drive cars?

In Genesis we learn that God created the plants and animals and it was good. Then God created humans and that was also good. We save the earth because we are equal to it in its goodness.

What is our responsibility? We believe it is not to improve our individual lives but to bear a public witness for our concern.

## **11. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE**

"For when I was hungry you gave me food, when thirsty you gave me drink, when I was a stranger you took me into your home, when naked you clothed me, when in prison you visited me." Matthew 25:35-36

### **ADVICE**

We are part of an economic system characterized by inequality and exploitation. Such a society is defended and perpetuated by entrenched power.

Friends can help relieve social and economic oppression and injustice by first seeking spiritual guidance in our own lives. We envision a system of social and economic justice that ensures the right of every individual to be loved and cared for; to receive a sound education; to find useful employment; to receive appropriate health care; to secure adequate housing; to obtain redress through the legal system; and to live and die in dignity. Friends maintain historic concern for the fair and humane treatment of persons in penal and mental institutions.

Wide disparities in economic and social conditions exist among groups in our society and among nations of the world. While most of us are able to be responsible for our own economic circumstances, we must not overlook the effects of unequal opportunities among people. Friends' belief in the Divine within everyone leads us to support institutions which meet human needs and to seek to change institutions which fail to meet human needs. We strengthen community when we work with others to help promote justice for all.

## **QUERY**

- How are we beneficiaries of inequity and exploitation? How are we victims of inequity and exploitation? In what ways can we address these problems?
- What can we do to improve the conditions in our correctional institutions and to address the mental and social problems of those confined there?
- How can we improve our understanding of those who are driven to violence by subjection to racial, economic or political injustice? In what ways do we oppose prejudice and injustice based on gender, sexual orientation, class, race, age, and physical, mental and emotional conditions? How would individuals benefit from a society that values everyone? How would society benefit?

## **SELECTED RESPONSES**

### **1998**

This query generated a thoughtful discussion about the power of the choices we make every day. They influence our spiritual lives, and often the lives of others. We need to carefully consider our choices, including the causes involved and the resources consumed. Living in a small rural community creates awareness about the power of what is purchased. Many businesses are locally operated and depend upon local trade to survive. The grocery store is struggling, and we talked about ways to support them, through shopping, and a letter of appreciation for the service they provide to the

community. We learned about an employer who hires prisoners, giving them skills, and job references later. Work can be a worthy healer, and rehabilitation is more important than isolated punishment. This is balanced by the idea that the low wages offered to the prisoners may be unfair to others in the community who need work. The gun culture today is of concern, especially when young people are involved in crimes and don't feel accountable for their actions. More attention needs to be given to raising children, and helping them shape good and caring lives. The diversity of choices, and staying informed about important issues sometimes feels overwhelming. We can seek each day to do the best we can, with Divine guidance.

## **2000**

Our facilitator, Carol Spaulding, asked Friends to share a story illustrating how a particular belief in social and economic justice was formed. A Friend of Asian American descent shared that she identifies with her American roots and often feels disconnected from her Asian heritage. In college she found herself standing in line in a check-cashing place with many Asian immigrants who did not speak English. It was hot. The lines were long, and people were impatient with delays. A brusque teller was rude to the customers trying to understand her instructions with their limited English. In that moment the Friend identified with those powerless, confused workers, the targets of people's impatience with delays. A life-long Quaker's childhood imperative to see the good in everyone was put to the test when her helpful attempt to correct a student's error provoked an angry reaction in a colleague who felt his privacy had been violated. Despite her apologies, the incident caused a rift in their friendship. Trying to see it from her co-worker's perspective helped the Friend to realize that everyone sees the world through their own past experience. If past experience has proved the world to be untrustworthy, even a well-intentioned helpful act may

be viewed with hostility. A Friend shared the folk tale of the sun and the wind. The sun and the wind wager over who can remove a traveler's cloak. The wind rages and howls, but the traveler pulls his cloak tighter. The sun shines brightly, and traveler removes his cloak. This story became a reminder that much can be accomplished with gentleness, persuasion and love. A Friend remembered feeling powerless and voiceless as she was growing up. She has become a voice for children who cannot speak for themselves. This feels like a calling, but it is very difficult for a shy person who is frightened by confrontation. She often wonders that the universe could not have found a more effective spokesperson for the disenfranchised. A Friend who was a student at Kent State in Ohio in the late sixties remembers the idealism and the hatred. It developed into a life-long commitment to make things better. On reflection, it is discouraging that so little has changed. Injustice marches on. A life-long Iowa Friend brought up to believe that race should not be used to judge a person's worth had the opportunity to make black friends as a college student at William Penn. The pervasiveness of prejudice was brought home to him when a black student asked for a ride to visit a Quaker farm family living near Oskaloosa. The young man went there to get his hair cut because the barbers in town would not cut a black man's hair. This incident made a lasting impression of the power of prejudice and the ways it affects human relationships.

## **2001**

Education determines how one's life turns out because it affects the ability to function in society, and education is not evenly distributed. One Friend, speaking from her educational experience, believed that the question of how to influence young people to take "getting an education seriously" was of primary importance. Another person suggested that this inequality was an example of a beneficiary also being a

victim. Once again, we were reminded of the Quaker testimony of simplicity. We can consciously refuse to participate in rabid consumerism by wisely making our purchasing and investment decisions. Another Friend faulted the power of multinational corporations. We are becoming more aware and need to continue to call for the corporations to act with justice and to be environmentally responsible. The American Friends Service Committee continues its work in rectifying inequalities. We must remember, as Margaret Mead suggested, the power of one person working for good.

Our nation must get over its “superiority complex” and improve education, especially multi-cultural studies and the teaching of non-violent conflict resolution. Our punitive system is counterproductive. The criminalization of drugs has crowded the prisons with non-violent offenders which has led to the building of new prisons (rather than schools, for example). We need new methods of dealing with non-violent offenders. One person mentioned that the reform going on in California, with a shift from incarceration to treatment, was a hopeful sign. Another person cited a study showing that the prison population had been through the foster care system which points out the need to improve families. Quakers need to speak out on abuses in the system such as the privatization of prisons which makes prisoners a commodity.

One Friend quoted George Fox's admonition, “. . . walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone.” We should remember to be fearless since prejudice is based on fear. One individual pointed out the dichotomy of our benefiting from global violence, e.g., the Gulf war and low gas prices. Another admitted to the difficulty of embracing those with an opposing political view. An individual has the power to replace hate with respect and to celebrate the progress brought about by dialogue. One person summed it all up by quoting John Gallery (*Friends Journal*). “We are called to

love them all—supporters, opponents, interested, disinterested, wealthy, poor, all.”

## **2002**

This query is especially timely due to recent events in our country. One person told of witnessing a Trident submarine launching at Kings Bay Naval Base in Georgia after the September 11 attacks, an example of how fear prompts humans to prepare to retaliate. Reacting in fear makes a peaceful response more difficult. This situation makes us feel demoralized and makes it difficult to envision a world that values everyone. George Fox said that the best way to prevent war is to remove the causes for war. This makes the bringing about of social and economic justice very important. Presently, injustice and inequality run rampant in our world. We need to become centered within ourselves so that we can listen to our own truth about what action to take. We need to educate ourselves and others about what is really going on in the world, and we must be able to demonstrate the long-range effectiveness of using non-violent methods in solving the world's problems, showing how non-violent methods will be most effective in achieving our country's own goals while benefiting the rest of the world.

We have a responsibility to educate our children by setting good examples for them in preventing pollution, helping them to appreciate nature, helping them to understand the intricate web we live in where all living things are interdependent.

## **2003**

Economic disparity by those in the U.S. continues to increase; disparity between countries in the western world continues to increase, and third world countries continue to fall behind. How do we, as a government, as religious bodies and NGOs respond?

Except for the power of prayer and giving donations, sometimes we may feel helpless. The advice about



spiritual nurture speaks to our condition; the need to seek spiritual guidance is necessary on a continuous basis. The power of prayer is very active; one Friend has found a Buddhist prayer and practice—which brings negative force in on the inhalation, and exhales love—helps to clarify prayer. Beyond prayer, how much can we do? It is important to support people who are victims of the system. Sometimes it helps people to realize they are not alone.

How are we victims? Because we live in the U.S. and are surrounded by benefits based on exploitation, we tend to think that these benefits are all right. We can address problems by what we choose to read, by the decisions we make, by being intentional, and reminding ourselves that our comfort is based on exploitation.

We are victims of the benefits we enjoy because we ultimately pay for them. We pay for benefits through legislation making basic minimum tax for corporations zero retroactive for fifteen years and by allowing corporations to put the money in offshore banks. One approach to changing these corporate practices could rest with states. The attorneys general of the states are allowed to remove the charters of these corporations if they fail to meet the conditions of the charters. Sierra Club suggests that one can fight every violation of the charter. Our soldiers have been willing to die to protect this type of system. In the state of Iowa, the “new world order” is hog confinements.

## **2004**

There are many, many social and economic injustices in the world.

Most clothing we wear is not made in this country, but has been made by people in other countries. Generally those people have been exploited by the system, have poor working conditions, and are not being paid a living wage. We can avoid contributing further to this problem by buying second hand clothing or buying

from catalogues and stores that specifically carry clothing made by unexploited workers.

Agriculture is another area where the United States makes things more difficult for economies of other countries. We dump our surplus crops, selling to others below the cost of production, which drives down world price of these crops. Struggling countries can't get a fair price for their crops. Countries should try to produce at least some of their own food so they are less dependent upon others.

Correctional facilities need to improve educational opportunities for inmates, otherwise they will just return to prison after release. We also need to provide incentives to companies so they will be willing to hire released inmates. Such a high number of people are incarcerated now, hiring practices will have to change or employers won't be able to find workers. This won't happen until there is a worker shortage.

The correctional system focuses on punishment, not rehabilitation. This discourages education. The system is perverse. The inmates have no power, so there is no accountability for the treatment they receive.

Writing letters to people in power DOES sometimes have an effect, even though it may seem like a fruitless effort. Socially responsible retirement investing, while a noble idea, is very, very difficult to accomplish these days. Everything is so complex; it is impossible to be pure. We do our best and keep asking questions!

I wish to take issue with one statement in the discussion of this query. "The inmates have no power, so there is no accountability for the treatment they receive." Ah but inmates do have power. Sometimes we feel like we don't have any, but yes we do. For instance, just this Saturday morning an inmate friend and I decided to go around and pick up the trash on the yard. Now there are inmates that are assigned to do this work and be paid a low wage, \$1.21 a day to do it, and as a punishment inmates are often given "extra duty" and forced to go out and pick trash under escort of an

officer. But today for an hour we two decided just to do it. It was within our power to do so. We asked no one's permission save our own. Many stopped by and asked what we had done to get extra duty, as a punishment, and were shocked to learn we were doing this just to take care of our own limited environment. One even decided to help us. But we had the power to effect change within our world all on our own.

If a prisoner wanted to be educated, NOTHING can stop him. Lack of school opportunities hurts. That is true, but it will never stop that prisoner from writing off for courses, or reading every book in our limited library, or from being befriended by someone of knowledge who will visit them and share some of what they have learned in life and in school. I now have a degree from Maggie and Barney which no school could ever issue to me! But it is one I value a lot. One I chose to undertake by meeting with them and visiting and sharing silence together.

One friend helping to educate one friend can go a long ways to bringing about social justice. The GED book purchased for David Traxler is more than just a book. It was and is an incentive that says you believe in him and a trust that he will honor your trust in him.

It is a well known policy that Kawasaki is a great employer of men on parole, just out of prison. Why? Because they realize that a man on parole will show up to work because his parole officer will be checking up on him. Plus Kawasaki receives tax incentives for hiring ex-convicts that are on parole. Some have stayed on after their parole is over and stayed employed there for some time. Sadly they are the exception and not the rule in Lincoln. The half-way houses available to new releases limit your stay to thirty days, barely enough time to find an adequate job, and earn enough to get an apartment and transportation. Who can bridge the gap between prison and the outside so that no one ever need return here? Not more government programs! Not the right sort of governor, not the community corrections

programs. It ought to be the basis of all we do, alas it is not, and this is not Eden. But a perfect world begins with perfecting a friendship with just one person who has none.

## 2005

In a wealthy country like the United States, we benefit from the cheap labor provided by the world's poor, who manufacture much of our clothing and other products. We noted a particular concern with the importation of raw materials, including and especially, oil from abroad, a situation that puts the greatest burden of work on citizens of those countries for the least portion of the profit. Most of us in this meeting could find no specific ways in which we were the victims of inequity.

We felt that we could address some of these problems by paying attention to our purchases. We can purchase products such as coffee and clothing from fair trade companies, and buy the bulk of our groceries from local suppliers. We can also purchase clothing and household goods from thrift shops that use their proceeds to help others.

One note that grew out of our discussion was many people's lack of health insurance, which often causes them to use expensive services such as ambulances and emergency rooms because they do not have to pay in advance of treatment, and often because they wait until they are *in extremis* to seek health care. We noted that a consequence of this is more expensive health care for everyone, and wondered if a charitable fund to pay for rides for indigent patients to see doctors and hospitals might help alleviate some of this problem.

We noted that one big problem with people in prison is that they often have difficulty returning to life on the outside. People may get out of prison only to be called back in for crimes committed prior to their entering prison, but which have remained tangled in the courts. As a society we also tend to continue to punish ex-

prisoners, as though we are not content that they have paid their debts. It is difficult for ex-prisoners to find homes and employment. Programs designed to support people while they return to society will help.

With prisons, we noted the extreme inequity and cruelty of the death penalty in all of the different ways it is practiced. We also noted that prison guards are often both the victims and perpetrators of violence in the prison system. Guards who are treated badly by their bosses and other guards will tend to take out their frustration on prisoners.

One way we can oppose prejudice and injustice is by making sure that our leaders know we don't approve of treating people like they are less than people. Any of us can write a letter to the editor or write our local congresspersons. This is especially important if we live where the prevailing opinion seems to be one that supports unjust attitudes. We can support legislation that prevents discrimination against our GLBT neighbors in areas like housing, employment, and family life.

People benefit from a society that values everyone in many ways. One of the most important is that each of us is, or potentially will be, in a category that gets short shrift. Any of us could become disabled or have a GLBT family member, and all of us, if we live long enough, will grow old. Society benefits from equity because it keeps us from wasting people's gifts, and it prevents the kind of resentment that builds until it can lead to violence.

## **2006**

The meeting expresses some discouragement and much concern about our role as individuals and as a nation in contributing to the inequity among nations in the areas of social and economic justice. It is easy to be lost in a swirl of that discouragement, which we acknowledged is driven both by the complexity of the

crisis and by our worry and fear. We noted that we tend to think about the “haves” and “have-nots” in our discussion, which leads us to a discussion of material goods rather than gifts of the spirit. Is the growth of spiritual gifts hindered by our material goods? Is our joy limited by them?

While recognizing that simple solutions are not efficacious, we determined, in an effort to lift our gloom, to be cognizant of all small steps we take to lighten our environmental footprint on the planet, and to note them down to post on the bulletin board or gather in a box on the table in the lobby.

## **12. PEACE AND NONVIOLENCE**

"[We] seek to live in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars." George Fox

### **ADVICE**

We seek peace within our own lives. Sometimes there are barriers to peace within families and meetings, and among individuals. Anger and frustration may result in hurtfulness which leaves physical, sexual or emotional wounds. Healing and forgiveness are possible when our hearts are opened to the transforming love that comes from the Spirit Within. The violence we oppose is not only war, but all unloving acts.

Friends seek peaceful resolution to conflicts among nations and peoples. Wars can easily erupt when nations depend upon armed forces as an option for defense and order. To oppose war is not enough if we fail to deal with the injustices and inequalities that often lead to violence. We need to address the causes of war, such as aggression, revenge, overpopulation, greed, and religious and ethnic differences.

## QUERY

- What are we doing to educate ourselves and others about the causes of conflict in our own lives, our families and our meetings? Do we provide refuge and assistance, including advocacy, for spouses, children, or elderly persons who are victims of violence or neglect?
- Do we recognize that we can be perpetrators as well as victims of violence? How do we deal with this? How can we support one another so that healing may take place?
- What are we doing to understand the causes of war and violence and to work toward peaceful settlement of differences locally, nationally, and internationally? How do we support institutions and organizations that promote peace?
- Do we faithfully maintain our testimony against preparation for and participation in war?



## **SELECTED RESPONSES**

### **1998**

Friends who work or volunteer in the school systems are especially aware of many neglective and disruptive home situations even in our bucolic, rural area. They try to bring a special loving concern to the students they work with. Our schools are trying to provide services which address these situations, but we are alarmed by cuts that are made for these types of services because of budget pressures. It seems with the emphasis on teaching more technology the human contact classes are the ones being cut.

Most of us try to keep informed about international and national situations that lead to violence and conflict. Through our financial support, contacting legislators on issues of concern, working with like-minded organizations, and our annual Combread Day for support of the UN and local social services, we try to turn our concerns into positive actions.

With the current national tax structure it is difficult to maintain a complete testimony against preparation for and participation in war. There is strong support for the World Peace Tax Fund within the meeting as an alternative to having our taxes go for military expenditures. We are also concerned for the bright young men and women who choose to go into the military to further their education because of lack of financial resources to pursue career development. We wish there were other alternatives for them that are as well financed as the military seems to be.

### **2000**

We are dismayed that our military budget continues to grow, while our education budget continues to shrink. The schools have to deal with violence in our culture that is fostered by disruptive family situations, abuse, violent TV shows, etc. We need to work for more school and media attention on conflict resolution. Several in our

meeting are very active in working as advocates for the mentally ill and for families in crisis. Governor Vilsack, and Sally Peterson, Lt. Governor, are concerned about domestic violence. Sally is to head an effort to call attention to all forms of abuse and seek solutions. There is abuse of the elderly. We talked about how some care centers use restraints on patients. What is the best way to keep patients from harming themselves? As we live in harmony with the Spirit that nurtures us perhaps we will be more prepared to accept the process of dying even if it means suffering a lengthy illness or time in a care center. Our meeting members are actively supporting AFSC, FCNL, Iowa Peace Network, and other organizations working for peace. We follow the political activities of the various candidates and support those with whom we most agree. We strive to find a balance in conflicting situations: to listen to and emphasize, yet hold people accountable, to expect our right to be respected, yet at the same time respect the rights of others, to live our lives responsibly, yet have freedom to choose what we want. Many times by being careful not to offend those whose culture is different from ours, or by being kind and thoughtful, we can defuse troublesome situations. The words of George Fox come to mind, "Let your lives speak."

## **2001**

The media has done a good job of making us aware of domestic violence issues, but as a meeting we have not been active in local assistance programs. At one time some of us were listed as available to provide transportation to the local safe house. We tend to focus on international conflicts and legislative issues with our activities and give monetary support to local social service organizations that deal with problems directly. Having one of our members serving as the current clerk for Friends Committee on National Legislation helps us be aware of important issues that need to be addressed. There is strong support for both the FCNL

and American Friends Service Committee projects both by the meeting and individuals.

Income tax time always presents a quandary when we consider resistance to war preparations. Many continue to make our objections known through contact with legislators and to urge support for the World Peace Tax Fund. While the WPTF is not the total answer, it is one way for us to register our objections and, if it was available, perhaps others would use it as a tool for encouraging our government toward better use of our tax money.

## **2002**

Our nation is involved in aggression and revenge, and our resources are being tilted toward that and away from people's needs. At the same time, public schools are being attacked by the religious right.

We can educate ourselves and others about the causes of conflict. The message of Walter Wink, who will speak at FGC, is that if people who do evil can be reformed, so can institutions. To have a part in changing them, we need the spiritual grounding of early Friends—by opposing evil with loving acts; forgiveness rather than retaliation.

It's too easy to become part of the system we're trying to fix. The continuing Spiritual Formation Program helps to address this problem. We have to force ourselves to face injustices. If we do what our heart calls us to do, we can feel free not to worry about consequences.

Not speaking very much can keep one out of trouble, but we should speak out in the face of injustice.

A member who doesn't feel like a peacemaker is trying to practice more peaceful and constructive approaches. Personal differences provide an opportunity to practice rapprochement. The challenge then is how to adapt that on a larger scale, to international problems.

Things being done by our country are being done out of revenge. Revenge may satisfy egotism without solving anything.

Anger is important in being the root of compassion. Anger has to move a person to love, before taking any action. A teacher leads her kindergarteners in acknowledging what they did, which usually leads the other party to accept an apology. "If we poured 90% of our resources into the early years, we could solve all problems," she said.

## **2003**

This is a topic of great concern to members of this meeting. The following ways in which we are trying to meet the challenge of peace and nonviolence were gathered from the discussion.

Peace begins with the Spirit within each of us. It requires us to follow the lines of love and forgiveness in our own lives. Then we must reach out to others in the same spirit. We have to recognize that we are not always right and be willing to listen carefully to others and weigh the issues. John Woolman's personal life is a good example of not compromising with wrong-doing, while working tirelessly and with patience to change the beliefs and actions of many around him. Protesting violence is not enough. We must practice nonviolence in our own lives.

We cannot really change government policies, but we can contribute to change by supporting good legislation, by voting carefully, and by supporting such organizations as FCNL and AFSC both financially and by word of mouth. Some of our members have attended peace rallies. We have contacted our government representatives repeatedly on various issues and should do more. We recognize that money raised by taxes is being used as a military weapon. We support a peace tax.

We are going through a period when both government and big business seem to base their policies

on greed without thought of the cost in human lives. Some of us try to use smaller businesses who seem to honor their employees.

We try not to be overwhelmed by conditions in the world at the present time, and are grateful for the reports from Quaker and other concerned organizations who give us relatively unbiased views and propose ways in which we can work for nonviolence and peace.

## **2004**

We tend to educate ourselves well about international and national areas of conflict by using different news sources other than the popular media. There do not seem to be areas of personal conflict within our meeting, but these are more difficult to see and evaluate. We are less sure of our response to them when they do occur.

We are conscious of sounds of inter-family conflict in our neighbors adjacent to the meetinghouse but puzzled as to how to counter this for the sake of the children within the families. We try to be courteous and warm when we do have opportunities to interact with these children and perhaps these small personal contacts can make a difference. We are reminded that it is necessary to forget about our own emotions and hesitations and respond to needs we see with faith that we will be led. "God doesn't call those who are qualified, but qualifies those who are called." Although we tend to feel that our system of social services is more capable of dealing with the needs we see, we also recognize that in spite of the best intentions it can be an obstruction to constructive aid.

Our faith in the long history of the Quaker peace testimony is strong and we try to do what we can to support institutions and organizations that promote peace. The current media reports that keep pointing out the misrepresentations that has been used by our administration for the Iraqi war hopefully will encourage recognition of the real goals for the invasion. Because

the majority of Americans seem to support current policy, in a sense we are all perpetrators of violence in spite of ourselves. We are aware of how closely linked violence is to economic opportunities and exploitation. Other than protesting to our legislators, there seems little we can do to counter this.

## **2005**

It is always reassuring to get together with people of like mind, who need the support of each other. In particular when we represent a minority point of view. There was a Friends Journal article that spoke about non-violence training, suggesting that if you are able to get your attacker to help you, enlist their help, it can transform the situation. None of us has had the intense kind of experience that the woman spoke of in the article.

It can be a difficult thing to maintain a consistent testimony against war, since we live in such a violent country—there is so much anger and polarization, related to various cultural, religious, economic ways of thinking and being. War tax resistance is not an easy choice since it involves putting oneself at risk financially and in a social sense. It is also a difficult choice to live in such a way that one does not pay taxes, meaning living “closer to the edge”, but there is also satisfaction in not having to pay money for war making.

Bumper stickers are not enough. One parent spoke about their child having conflicts with another sixth grader, and picking out the good things about that person, to remember when the inevitable difficult time to be around them occurred. With our youth, we talk about not using words that hurt.

It seems clear that, in this country and the world, we will eventually have conflicts over water and food. It is not clear why decision makers think they are providing a safer, more stable, more secure country.

Even the poorest of the poor in this country are not as impoverished as in much of the rest of the world.

Conditions of this kind of economic disparity promote much anger and result in many conflicts.

At the college, there is a wide range of economic backgrounds; no negative connotations (with any particular economic class) that one student has observed. At one time or another, many of the issues bubble up in the form of chalk wars (on the sidewalks). We think it is a good idea to change consumer habits, but aren't sure if it is possible to change so that we don't purchase or consume things made by sweatshops or slave labor. Buying locally grown food supports local growers. It takes time and effort to send a letter to someone to let them know that you didn't buy their product because of their labor practices.

## **2006**

Peace has not only a global, but also local and home life meanings. These are tied together seamlessly.

As a meeting, we have an annual Tax Day protest. We have supported one of our members in documenting himself as a conscientious objector. We participated in an annual community peace march. We support Iowa Peace Network and local peace groups. We have signs in our yard supporting peace.

Reconciliation is a real need in our community. The meeting has seen some people leave, but those who are here are committed to working together and working through differences with an attitude of love.

We need to question our pride and be aware of it. When we speak, we need to be aware of how we are received and how we are heard, in order to promote peace in our homes, meeting and our community. When we listen, we often need to look past the words to hear the person and understand that person's situation and feelings. We all make mistakes, both in speaking and listening, and need to keep this in mind as we communicate.

The leaders (such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King) who promoted peace have had compassion for victims and perpetrators of violence. How do we keep from being desensitized to news of war and news of violent crime in our communities? We are not sure.

Mediation is becoming an alternative to judicial solutions to conflict. We encourage, support, and participate in this. Being open about our position is critical to resolving conflict. As a nation we are not doing this in Iraq. Being committed to gaining an understanding of someone else's position is equally important.

We are dissatisfied with our ability to oppose war, which would require us to quit our jobs, turn off our furnaces, sell our cars, and refuse to pay war taxes, were we fully committed.