

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

WITH SELECTED RESPONSES FROM ANNUAL SESSIONS

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ADVICES AND QUERIES

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 reading 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.

2007

As we endeavor to gain clarity with the concept of the Divine, we realize that our choice of words and definitions inevitably become limited and inadequate. Our silence and expectant waiting reflect an awareness of these mysteries and keep us humble in our search for the Truth. We acknowledge that gender language can influence perceptions and disquiet the search for a

meaningful relationship with historic spiritual sources, such as the Bible. We seek to create an environment that nurtures the many paths that that we are seeking. Although vocal ministry is the most noticeable form of Ministry in our meeting for worship, we also recognize and celebrate that other ministries exist beyond the vocal worship. As we discuss the concepts of recorded ministers and traveling ministry, we are mindful of our expectations in silence and careful to be aware of prepared agendas as we settle into Meeting for Worship. The ministry of the Meeting should be “in the life.” It should speak to the heart-felt needs of those in the Meeting.

2008

We all look forward to meeting for worship. It is an —uncluttered|| time when we can start to unclutter our lives. We find that walking or biking to Meeting helps us to prepare for worship. We often think of our poster, —Be still and cool in your own mind and spirit from your own thoughts, and then you will feel the principle of God|| by George Fox, 1658. We are glad for a diversity of people in our group. Diversity helps in decision-making—people from different backgrounds may see things from a different perspective, so someone in the group will be able to solve a problem from their own experience. We generally have the appropriate amount of vocal messages. When someone brings

a message which doesn't appeal to us personally, we realize it may be just right for someone else, and we don't let it disturb our meditation. After meeting, we try to mention to the person who spoke that we appreciate their message. We wondered whether we should adopt the system (used in some Friends Meetings) of going around the circle after Worship with everyone giving their name and any afterthoughts or announcements they have. This way, everyone feels included in the group.

2009

We seek to walk in the mystic way to find unity with the Eternal and with one another. Our meetings for worship are held in expectant waiting for the leadings of the Holy Spirit. We experience a familiar sense of spiritual presence in our meeting house and a spiritual bond among those present and with our members away. For many of us worship is seeking to be fully aware of God. We recognize that for each of us, individually, meeting for worship reflects our personal journey, which can include praise, gratitude, and —connection|| with the Holy Spirit. Preparing for worship is a growing process that may begin in the evening of seventh day. We seek to simplify our lives and thoughts so we come to know the workings of the Holy Spirit within our heart and are better able to hear what it is that God would have us know. We

seek to remove the things that are distraction to our presence with God, to —remove that which is not of God.|| Vocal ministry occasionally adds to the experience but seems to have another purpose of connection to the wider community, of minds and hearts in purposeful waiting. We need to recognize spiritual gifts. It seems that we sometimes hide our candle beneath a bushel. We ponder how worship is useful in our daily lives? The mysteries of life create questions. Answers can be received during meditative silence. We are frequently challenged to express our experience of silent worship to others, so we seek descriptions and queries that help us share our understanding of the worship process.

2010

The approach and impact of meeting for worship touches members of our meeting in many unique ways. Vocal ministry is particularly very powerful and helpful. We all get different meaning from vocal ministry and bring different images with us that help enrich our worship. The nature and imagery of the Spirit seems to be engrained in ones upbringing and what each one of us brings to meeting in the morning. Some members believe that meeting for worship allows them to reflect on the week just concluded or the upcoming week. It is time to look at the positives and negatives, as well as a chance to reflect on what to do to

improve or do better. It is a time for grounding, calming and centering, which is sometimes challenging but once achieved, one tends to be sealed from all the clutter and spin in the world, as well as all things uncomfortable. Worship is an opportunity to decompress and seek guidance from the spirit and other worshipers. Members of the meeting are moved by the spirit to think, act in certain ways, or pray for other members of the meeting. It allows us the opportunity to lift others in the light before focusing on self. The Holy Spirit takes many different forms and functions. It is this majestic and powerful force, a floating light or totally infinite and eternal—of which we are minute particles. It is gender neutral and bigger than any of us or any church. It is like a sea that we are walking through in silence with worship serving as an avenue that opens the door for the spirit to come through. The Holy Spirit allows us to do many of the things that we do on a regular basis in our lives. In silence, old prayers come back which some members spent time reciting.

2011

We all try to prepare for worship with quiet activities or stillness, even when our family lives don't always make it easy. Drinking coffee and reading the paper can be part of our preparation. We can also consider First Day a traditional Sabbath by taking care of practical chores ahead,

so we're not distracted by everyday duties. We thought that Quakers no longer needed to grapple with the gender of the divine, but in fact it is an old issue that is so deep in traditional religion that it continues to haunt us. For many of us the proliferation of good writing on feminist spirituality that flourished in the 80's was an essential step; as we found biblical and other references to the feminine side of God, we could break away from the patriarchal view. Now in places like our meeting chances abound for us to hear new metaphors from each other. We are skeptical of putting God into any box, but since "God" cannot be described in words, metaphors are necessary and may be mistaken for boxes. We may interpret these through our own lenses; for example, the idea of God as parent may seem repressive to one person but to another it may be a softer term than God as judge. We can have fun with common metaphors for the divine, looking at them in new ways. For a surprising number of us, doing routine chores with a back ground of religious or other music can become a kind of worship. Short moments of meditation before a hectic activity or before meals are effective as well. Others aspire to longer periods of meditation. We carry with us from meeting for worship a piece of the divine that we may have experienced there. As a native American said to John Woolman, whose words he did not understand, "I love to feel the place where

words come from.” Our actions or words, “right speech” to the Buddhists, when they come from the place of silence we have experienced in worship, speak of our values. We are bringing into our daily lives the heightened awareness that we have experienced together.

2012

We feel the presence of Quakers who have passed on as we worship together and read their words. During meeting for worship we are able to tune in to the spirit and in this way learn to hear the leadings we are given. This helps us shape our lives and find clarity for our purpose. We feel a sense of duty to our family members and the larger world to follow these leadings. Many times they involve change that is not easy for anyone involved. Meeting for worship helps us find the power in ourselves to do what needs to be done. All who attend meeting for worship regularly seem to integrate it into their daily lives. We can't help but be changed by the presence of the spirit. We are blessed when someone is moved to speak. Vocal ministry does contribute to the spiritual life of the meeting and gives us a chance to enlarge our discussions as it furthers our growth. Being faithful to our leadings to speak teaches us to express ourselves truthfully in other areas of life. Our meeting is strengthened by our gifts as long as we are faithful to what we've been given.

2013

There is a spirit within the meeting that seems to provide an important connection for all of us – a sense of missing something important if we don't attend. One person who is not in the community any longer shared that he could stay in the Spirit on his own because of the grounding he had received growing up in the meeting. We all sense that our lives are integrated in the Spirit often in unconscious, subtle ways. Most of us don't really think about gender in relation to our spiritual lives. Many of us grew up with male gender terms being used to refer to God, but are now comfortable using different terms. There is a feeling that God is the same no matter how we describe our experiences and the key is to be sensitive to others' beliefs and comfort. . . . We have 22 heard criticism of this meeting that we seem to be spiritual, but not verbal. In studying the history of the meeting this seems to have been a deliberate decision by the founders of the meeting because of their experiences with the many splits that occurred among Friends in the past and also because of persecution in Norway for not conforming with the state church teachings. Vocal ministry is welcomed when it is shared, but we are sometimes aware of a deep spiritual connection even without a spoken message.

2014

Friends agreed that the best preparation for Meeting for Worship is twofold: a period of silence on the way to meeting or before, and a few minutes of fellowship on arriving at the meeting house. How we refer to what some may call God depends on our own histories and associations. We use gender as it is relevant and appropriate to us; most of us would not be uncomfortable with terms such as “Spirit,” “Mother/Father God,” or many others. It might make us more comfortable, expressing ourselves in worship, if we worried less about others’ connotations behind the terms we use and trusted more that they would accept our terms as being significant to us.

2015

We all feel we really need to approach Meeting for Worship peacefully with a sense of anticipation for the blessed silence and preparing our hearts and minds to listen for God's leadings. Our silence is not like the absolute vacuum of outer space, but is actually filled with natural sounds and those bleeding into our worship space. Meditation is not the same, but can be helpful in reaching our prayerful state. Some of us listen to NPR discussion on the way to meeting and that can get us into thoughtful contemplation that can lead to the prayerful listening. Others find it helpful to listen to classical music before meeting. Our meeting does

not have much vocal ministry during Meeting for Worship and we wish there were more sharing. Perhaps we are doing too much self-censoring and feeling that our words are not important. However, when someone does share it is amazing how often those words come back to us at later times and other situations. Perhaps we could consider going back to having Meeting for Discussion before Meeting for Worship to get our minds 'charged up'. Also, there seems to be more sharing when there are more attending.

2016

While we all experience moments of expectant waiting on our own, we agreed that the feeling of specialness in silent meeting helps us center and feel more aware of the spirit. As one Friend put it, "this is a great time for a meet-up [with God]." On the days when many feel expectancy among us, we may refer to that as a "blanketed meeting." Some meetings have designated people who help others settle for worship. We don't do that, but we have people like John Griffith who do anchor the meeting even without doing so intentionally. Thinking about preparing for meeting for worship led to thoughts of what we wear. Mormons traditionally change clothes into white clothes that are only used at this time. And in the Bible story about someone giving a party to which no one

came, and then going out to find guests, those who weren't dressed right were rejected. Perhaps this referred to inward preparation more than outward. In any case, Quakers nowadays tend to more casual clothing, not necessarily their grubbies but clothes that feel right. We prepare for meeting in a more inward fashion than an outer one. The quality of our vocal ministry varies. Do we speak from the spirit rather than our heads? Reva Griffith used to say that if we are too sure that our message is spirit-led, we may be deceiving ourselves. It is difficult to discern where our urge to speak comes from. Is it God or is it NPR? However, we need to be slow to judge others' messages as inappropriate, because they may inspire us anyway. Nor do we know what kind of inspiration others have had. It is possible, however, that announcements from the news or of a political nature may be better shared at announcement time. A useful byway in the query discussion concerned the theology of Quakers, or perhaps we should say our various views of the divine. Even though our practice centers on our openness to messages from the spirit, there are Quakers who call themselves non-theists. While no one present uses that term for themselves, there are those who don't believe that there is an "old man in the sky," or a personified deity. And those of us who have talked to "non-theists" have the impression that they, like many of us, seek a sense of divinity while

rejecting the traditional views that they were taught. We don't know much about each other's' views on God, and some are hesitant to share that in silent worship, although it might be just right. It might be productive to have a program on this topic.

2017

Quakers are stubbornly different from one another as well as from the rest of the world. For instance, many like coming into a room where the earlier arrivals have already settled into silence; it helps them settle in quickly as well. In fact, it seems that getting to Meeting very early to set up alone is an inspirational time as well. However, there are those who are so pleased to see other Friends after a week that they treasure the time before Meeting as a precious time for catching up, There are other ways to help us come to Meeting for Worship ready to center ourselves. Those who attend Bible study before Meeting report having a rich fund of inspiration to help them go on to worship and indeed to the rest of the week, and those whose daily lives include moments or 54 longer spells of quiet also find these practices to carry over into their First Day experience. There are words that can help up connect with our spiritual selves, and there are words that divide us. Sometimes they are the same words. Asked if we all believe that there is a divine Spirit, many nodded, but others thought

of it as meaning “God” and found uncomfortable associations with it. Similarly, “Sacred” was a term that most could apply to spaces as well as beings and that they found comfortable, whereas “Holy” had more overtly religious connotations. All seemed to feel that the “still, small voice within” was something they hoped to find in their quiet moments. No matter what words we use, we agree that we want our worship to feel to old timers and newcomers alike to be a welcoming place and time where something out of the ordinary warms and guides us.

2018

We talked about what the word worship means to us, and what we do during worship time. Some spend the time in reflection or introspection, some in meditation. Bowing down to or praising a King or Lord doesn't seem to describe what we do in worship, but bowing our selves (our thoughts, will, self-centeredness) down in deference to the Spirit does. We don't have special individual practices for First Day mornings, but some do have practices throughout the week that support worship. Bible reading and conscious orientation to God and Christ were mentioned. In theory we know that Spirit and God must exist way beyond gender, but we have to admit that gender is a powerful force in our thoughts and emotions. We notice that when we meet a person whose gender is ambig 91 uous

it gives us pause, because we're so used to categorizing people immediately. So thinking of God with a male or female pronoun attached may indeed affect our worship. One person suggested "if this throws us off our stride, let us recall that we are not coming to worship to have a stride of our own, but to learn to walk as God teaches us." We find the advice with this query full of good wisdom, good stuff. We considered the question of how to recognize that we have a message that is meant to be shared in worship. We recognize the gradual movement within Quakerism from a traditional Christian basis to the present time when we refer to that which is Ultimate in a variety of ways and may experience that reality differently. ... Pronouns referring to that which is Ultimate make a difference to many of us; ascribing gender to God may feel very limiting and the transgender community can bring new challenges to this issue. Silence following a vocal message is important to us and we find it hard to communicate this to others who come for special events, such as memorials or weddings. Some of us experience a sense of a message developing over time, moving into maturity over perhaps days or weeks until it is ready to be shared. Possibly an opposite of that is a message that comes in fragments over a few minutes during a single meeting for worship. Finally, we know we need to learn to love those

with whom we differ and to experience love in our worship.

2019

Sometimes it is very obvious that you should be giving vocal ministry, there is a physical feeling, like quaking, that makes you feel like you should be talking. If you're feeling like you need to say it, you don't have to understand why, or who the message might be for. When I first started attending there were many more who spoke out in meeting, and sometimes the message would become more meaningful or important to me later, even months or years later. Practices at home, such as a moment of silence before eating, help us in many ways, including living with a feeling of gratitude, and bringing centered worship more easily. Practice over the years has made it easy for us to enter that frame of mind on Sunday mornings, and even other times during the week, and in times of trouble or when something needs to be put "in God's hands" because we don't have control over it. Even a minute or two of worship can provide a sense of God's presence throughout the day. Some use simple words like "thank you", "wow", "help me". When I am angry with someone, if I wait patiently I will be taught ways to empathize with the person and learn something about myself from the situation. I find that the older I get, the more I am aware of the gifts I have been given and grateful

for the experiences I've had. I am trusting God more than I did when I was younger. Life is often a learning that our personal power is not as great as we once thought it was. Regarding the gender of God, you don't know how powerful the pronoun is until you switch it and notice the different images or feelings that are invoked within you. Of course, God is really both and neither, and there is no way to know or define God entirely; the images we use are only reflections of our needs, not of God itself.

2020

As we considered this query, we were in unity that we need

moments of quiet centering, calming and gratitude on a daily

basis. We need to pause when things are going too fast; to be

grateful for moments of goodness and beauty as they come to us.

We need to recognize that we can experience God in a flower, a

cool breeze, an act of loving kindness. So, yes, we do experience

worship outside of Sunday morning and know it helps prepare us

for Sunday's worship.

...

The question of gender in "that which is divine" troubles some

of us. For some God is experienced as male and this seems to be confirmed in the Bible. For others, a sense of a male God is experienced as oppressive. Language has limitations in reference to God, who many see as beyond gender. We may experience the Divine as an energy rather than a noun, so a gender label is not needed. We know God to be Love. We know we are asked to be kind, merciful, compassionate, loving. Kindness may involve saying “no” or speaking a difficult truth. Some of Jesus’ actions did not seem kind, but came, perhaps, from a sense of a larger good. We hope to live in this God of Love.

...

The majority of our monthly meetings are totally silent. When messages from the Spirit come they are all the more precious. We remember when we were small children, some adults would give the same message each week. The personality of a meeting changes over the years. We also remember learning

how others really enjoy messages that we have been perplexed by. We are blessed to still have communications with some of the elders of our past, and we note how they continue to have serious and well thought out comments and observations about life.

2021

Sometimes in receiving vocal ministry we need to “listen in tongues,” or translate in our own minds words that may trouble us into terms with which we are comfortable. We do nurture gifts of hospitality and maintaining community, but it is not clear that we nurture gifts of vocal ministry. And what would such nurture look like? We would like to nurture such ministry as a gift of the Holy Spirit and not as something to reward an ego.

When considering how to prepare for worship, one must think about what is needed throughout the week to create an attitude of worship on First Day. With everything demanding attention, it is helpful to create some quiet each day. This practice is preparation for worship.

There is something powerful about the juxtaposition of us being alone in our own worship and yet altogether on the video conferencing

screen. We can go about our day imagining we are still altogether. To us, worship means opening ourselves to what the Spirit might reveal, to the Voice within us that tells us what is right, and wrong. To do this we need to allow time together to wait expectantly and with tenderness of heart, which includes tenderness toward one another, and toward other inhabitants of the planet. It is better for us to focus on how we can follow God better, than for us to focus on defining God more precisely. One test for whether something comes from God is whether it makes us kinder. Sometimes we are afraid to antagonize someone else, other times we fear being disapproved of. However, a diversity of views helps us by challenging us to seek more deeply for the unifying Truth.

2022

2023

The use of words has the potential to bring us closer together, but it can also separate us. If we use words humbly, vulnerably describing our own experience of that which is infinite, that can help us feel connected. If we use words with a sense that we have ultimate truth, that can be divisive. Speaking at great length tends to be received negatively as does arguing with another's message.

Just as some rehearsals for a performance can proceed with a sense of order and grace, some meetings for worship can do likewise and may be called “gathered” meetings. Several refer to reaching for silence in their daily activities, that silence is the touchstone to connecting worship to daily activities. We enjoy comforts from such verses as “Be still and know that I am God” Psalms 46:10 and “Be still my soul: they God doth undertake to guide the future as he has the past. Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake; all now mysterious shall be bright at last” from Finlandia by Jean Sibelius. Solitary practices of reaching for God are also valuable. Ideally, we stay awake to the possibility of God leading us on weekdays as well as on First Days. We find spirituality in art and nature, and in math and science. We want to stay awake to Truth. As we gather for worship to center and wait for the Divine’s presence, in the silence there is a sense of peace and calm that unites those who are present. Meeting can be meaningful in silent worship and when others share their truth as led by the Spirit. Preparation comes in the form of finding ourselves stepping away from the noise of the world around us to see the beauty in nature, to seek discernment within ourselves and connect with others who wait for guidance from the Spirit in their daily lives as well. Friends refer individually to the Divine in their own way, usually not assigning gender, but speak of the Spirit, Holy

Spirit, God, that of God, the still small voice. Respecting the sensitivity of refraining from gender names for the Divine allows individuals to quietly center and listen for the still small voice within. Vocal ministry may speak to some and not always to everyone but sharing appreciation for the ministry shared continues to encourage sharing of the leading of the Spirit within each person. Page 83 The dictionary offers us a definition of the word, "worship." To worship is to honor, revere the Holy Spirit, what we commonly understand as "God." Another way of considering the meaning of worship may be an honoring of the Mystery. We may understand much about our Universe, but we are a small part of God's world. Meeting for Worship gives us the gift of a living silence in which we can open to the "being" of God, open our hearts and minds to the reality of that vast Mystery.

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.

2007

There are several ways in which we are able to share who we are with the local community.

Through the Area Religious Council, we have opportunities to host ecumenical services occasionally, which bring others from the community to the meetinghouse. The Council is putting a brochure together to introduce newcomers to the churches and meetings in the area.

However, the fact remains that it is not easy to articulate Friend's beliefs. We're fairly comfortable with attempting to live our faith. We're clear that we need to share our convictions and to make the testimonies part of our daily lives and practice. But we are less clear about expressing our faith in words.

We are uneasy about the meanings our words can carry, and how they may be received. We shy away from the idea of proselytizing. We are aware of the potential for implied arrogance in attempts to convert others, and sharing our faith in overt ways comes closer to that than is comfortable. We see examples of people using religion as an excuse to hurt others. We are concerned that some may be reluctant to speak in Meeting, not knowing how the message will be received. Some of us may be reluctant to teach First Day School, as we're aware of all that we don't know. Yet when we leave out the words, sometimes we leave out an important part of teaching or sharing with each other, and with our young.

We reflected on our receptivity to the outreach of others. We sometimes find ourselves surprised and touched by the common ground we share with others who walk different paths. People from a great diversity of faith traditions hold the common values of compassion, concern for others, and generosity. We share a common humanity, and in that, we are able to find one another. We are aware that truth has many facets, and we want to remain open to the many ways that the grace of God is present in our lives. Perhaps the heart of Quakerism has to do with valuing and honoring the divinity in every human soul, and then attempting to live from that reality.

We considered the way that Jesus taught his disciples. They had their own feelings and responses to the radical departure from the current norms that His teaching represented. But from that teaching came wonderful examples of how we can live. We need to realize that rich and rewarding results can come from a similar dialogue among ourselves, as well as in the wider world.

2008

Our discussion reveals that our activities and involvement with other groups such as the recent Quaker Women's retreat, the Iowa Peace Network, a Good Grief group, and the Catholic Worker community are meaningful avenues to help us build awareness of our beloved community and

shared experience. As we pursue our wider activities, we are mindful to ask whether the daily witness of our lives truly reflects our core testimonies. Our new small building has created curiosity in our community and seems to be an opportunity to witness and acquaint others to our interests and concerns about green technology for the challenges we face as a culture. We strive to be a light to those seeking refuge from a variety of concerns facing us in these times such as economic oppression, energy, militarism and war. Our gift as Quakers is the recognition that we probably do not have all of the answers, but we are willing to bring forth the questions.

2009

We need to do more intervisitation. Being at another meeting can remind us of what we need to do, give us new ideas, and help us to appreciate our own meeting. Midyear Meeting and Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) are encouraging, as they are great opportunities (to be with Friends). Sharing our thoughts about Quakerism with others is often easy, as many people are curious about Quakerism. Because we feel genuine and unashamed about our beliefs and because these beliefs are very compatible with other faiths, we can share our beliefs with others easily. Many people today are hungry for the spiritual but are put off by the doctrines that they see in many

religions. Our inclusiveness and simplicity are an opening to others. Often it is most important for us to be ready to listen. The diversity we find in our Meeting creates a space for us to interface with people from other backgrounds. Our belief that there is that of God in everyone helps us to listen to each person. We need to listen attentively and respond honestly, without aggression. Finding common ground creates openings to reach out to those with whom we disagree. By trying to live by the Quaker testimonies we make our presence known, if quietly. Our way of worship is designed to encourage inclusiveness. We often find that we do have trouble with socioeconomic and educational class differences.

2010

Mid-Year Meeting both energizes us and wears us out. It is a precious time of sharing, receiving, and giving Spiritual messages and visiting with other Quakers. It is also an opportunity for outreach as visitors come and we can make a greater effort to invite more people. Two of our members have conducted Alternatives to Violence Community workshops, which are opening doors to sharing about conflict resolution. In our increasingly violent society, this message is more important than ever. FWCC, AFSC, FCNL, and other organizations continue to do important outreach work in many areas and we support them. Several

of us go with a group of Methodists to work on homes in Cedar Rapids damaged by the floods each month. The yearly meeting has given needed money also. There are plans underway to have a regional gathering sponsored by Friends World Committee on Consultation this fall or next spring that will include Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative), and Iowa FUM meeting and others for a one or two day event. This may be followed by a larger group including Northern, Illinois, Kansas, and Missouri. We are also interested in a meeting, perhaps a picnic with peace groups near us—Mennonites, Brethren and other groups. Our meeting for years has been involved with Iowa Peace Network and we hope to revive our outreach in this area. We discussed at length our desire to attract more young people to our Meeting. We wonder if our emphasis on questioning and seeking rather than creed and dogma impedes or is an asset? We appreciated those who came to Mid-Year Meeting, and Cheryl will contact one couple she talked with and invite them to come and share some of their ideas about what would make our meeting more appealing. She also plans to develop a web site. We need wider access. As we think about outreach we focus on our new Quaker Cottage. We continue to search for ways to use it.

2011

Our immediate response to what we do to share the message of Friends in the larger community is “not enough.” Then we considered some of the ways we reach out to the community. We recently co-sponsored a book discussion on What’s Right With Islam Is What’s Right With America at the public library. Every April 15, we make a Tax Day witness at the downtown post office. As with our concern about navigating around Ames safely on foot and bicycle throughout the year, we voice our concerns to elected officials and in the newspaper. We contribute money to a number of local organizations, including the Emergency Residence Project, the Assault Care Center, and Good Neighbor. Nationally, we support AFSC and FCNL. It is easier to share the fruits of our faith rather than the roots. Sometimes speaking the truth offends people, but it is still important to speak our truth, even as we know what seems true for us is not what seems true for everyone. It helps if we can find some point of agreement and build on that. No, we are probably not welcoming to people of all creeds. People with some belief systems would probably not be comfortable in our midst. Quakers can get into trouble trying to be accepting of everything. We can be wishy-washy, indirect and false. Someone with beliefs oppo site to Quaker testimonies may still be a good person, even though they might not be happy in meeting. Not everyone is willing to worship with us. It is possible

to love people without agreeing with them. We may be too literate for people who do not read. What if all our books were destroyed? Would our actions speak our faith? Does the faith we live mirror the words we write about ourselves? It is a gift of the spirit to see God in everyone. We can always pray for people—anyone and everyone.

2012

As we contemplate the condition of our meeting, we are mindful of the aspects that contribute to seekers feeling comfortable with us on their spiritual journey. We continue to search for ways to involve others to share with our physical and spiritual abundance. We question what it is about our testimonies and our implicit theology that might be a hindrance to acceptance within our community. We discussed how to overcome some of the myths that might abound about Quakers. Suggestions to expand our circle have included a movie night, a book club and an arts festival. These ideas come with a recognition of our limited numbers, energy and resources, but with a willingness to pursue these endeavors with a generous and accepting spirit.

2013

Several of our members have made visits to Laughing Waters. Their members have also visited our meeting. Two members who spend three

winter months in Alabama are regular attendees of the Fairhope Meeting. One of our distant members was invited to speak to an adult Sunday school in a large Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis about faith and action and art. He had a lot of material related to this from the lives and actions of Iowa Friends and from his photography... Another distant Friend described how he was witness to an accident and able to encourage a frightened woman to call police. She wrote him a thank you and he told her he felt it was no coincidence that he witnessed the accident but that "he had been stationed there precisely for the purpose of being a witness to assist her." Our meeting is very much a part of our community. We have rummage sales, bake sales, ice cream socials, the ministerial alliance has met here; last summer we had an art festival, and a sewing group has met here monthly for 100 years. Recently the daughter of a retired Quaker minister chose to have her wedding here. Midyear Meeting is a valuable outreach event for our meeting and yearly meeting. The programs are spiritually nurturing and often attract new attenders. We are grateful for several distant members participating in the Query discussion. It has increased our sense of community.

2014

The process of discernment for considering outreach presents us with several paths and

opportunities. We are mindful of our smallness as we meet every First Day, but realize that our spiritual community and belongingness extends beyond the physical boundaries of our Meeting for Worship. Several members are considered “Active Participating Members at a Distance.” Suggestions have risen up to further their involvement. Possibilities include holding in the Light individuals in the monthly meeting specifically on First Day worship, centering for worship at the same time, and contributing to the query process with personal responses. As we examine the use of different technologies to further the inclusion of distant members, we strive to balance the unique aspects of our Quaker worship, such as silence, worshipful waiting, and spoken leadings of the Spirit, with the changing landscape of culture and technological advancement.

2015

Individual involvement with different community groups, announcements in local newspapers, our newly created web page, and the internet through quakernet.org are our main efforts for outreach that we currently use. We realize there are opportunities we are missing because we haven’t been deliberate about inviting others to join us for special events. David Zarembka’s visit was a highlight of last year and the suggestion was made that we try to do more of this type of event. We

are often identified in the larger community by our social concerns and activities, and we discussed the benefit that would be gained by contacting other groups in the wider area who share our concerns. Sharing the spiritual base for our social concerns does not come easily for some of us even though we feel that this is often an important part of why we try to address certain issues. We seem to feel more comfortable letting our lives speak to the important issues of the environment, peace and social justice. Intervisitation with other Friends groups is left up to individuals when they have opportunities even though we know we all benefit by these experiences.

2016

Des Moines Valley meeting joined us as we prepared for a funeral. This also helped us to prepare for Mid-year Meeting the next weekend. Mid-year Meeting is a special time of learning, worshipping together, renewing friendships and the richness of vocal ministry. Our rummage sale and the Sunshine Circle - which quilts and ties baby blankets - are some of the ways we are involved with the community. Two of our members serve on the Scattergood School Committee and meeting members support the school financially as does the Yearly Meeting. Yearly Meeting is attended by several from our meeting. They look forward to worshipping together and handling the Business of

Yearly Meeting. In thinking about cooperating with persons we disagree with one member used the term “non-reactive stillness”. We aren’t right and need to actively listen to others. One of our distant members was grateful for our participation with them in prayers for a local child with Leukemia. The Grandfather is a local minister whose “outreach” goes beyond his congregation with ongoing acts of friendships beyond his congregation, with ongoing acts of friendship beyond his Church’s membership, and to anyone who is in need. He notices the “woodbox” and sometimes splits wood before he leaves their home. Another distant member has worked with many more people outside of Quakers. He has joined in social action events with Indiana Moral Mondays, The Keystone pledge of Resistance, The Kheprw Institute and the Quaker Change Ministry Program. He has been writing Blogs on Sustainability Scout Indiana and Facebook. And also has been writing stories on Peacebuilding. With new technology there are many ways for us to take part in outreach.

2017

We try to welcome visitors and other Friends warmly whenever they join us for meeting and find it enriches and deepens our own worship experience. Sharing with others who do not necessarily share our own religious experiences and ideas often brings us gifts we had not

anticipated. Making connections under these circumstances bring opportunities for growth and often leave us with fresh perspectives about our own faith. We continue to experience blessings that came with our 130th anniversary celebration including renewing family connections as well as the interest from the wider community that was demonstrated at that time. Attending IYMC and other Friends meetings when traveling has been an enriching experience for those who have the opportunity.

2018

It seems that whenever we do outreach, "in-reach" occurs as well. Unless we have opportunities to share about issues and questions that are important to us, we can miss the chance to examine and clarify our values. It's notable that the query states the importance of expressing our faith in both words and deeds. We tend to focus on deeds, thinking it's enough to 'let our lives speak', or to 'see what love will do'. This query suggests that expressing our faith in words matters too. Someone who attends a weekly peace vigil wonders if that quiet witness is enough. It may be important to continue to work on expressing in words what our faith is about, and what we stand for.

2019

We have visited with various Friends who travel regularly to other meetings and enjoy hearing about all the things that connect us, as well as passing on our greetings to others. We include visiting faraway meetings during our family vacations, especially meetings that have connections to our own. History comes alive when we are able to discover the seeds that scattered and grew into new meetings all over this country and beyond. We feel the warmth of the community of Friends when we are able to visit these far-flung meetings. On cooperation with those with whom we share concerns: Challenging both sides may be more in keeping with the Spirit than tolerating and forming alliances with the lesser evil. Done in the Spirit of Love it can move both sides toward Truth. An example of challenging both sides was an objection to the letter proposed at IYMC 2018 sessions by the Peace and Social Concerns Committee opposing the Authorization of Use of Military Force. Many wanted to support the bill because it would restrict authority of the US president to go to war, but because it would grant Congress that authority, it fell short. Political lobbying with integrity can bear fruit and bring others to the Light. We seem to be in a phase of focusing on getting the bad guys out and good guys in, and we need to remember to support right action by either side. We are conflicted about whether to compromise and support the person

who is more electable or support the person who is more right. We need to remember that good actions and bad actions have happened regardless of which party is in power. We've never had a pure and perfect political leader, even when they were Quakers. We feel we do well in cooperating with persons and groups with whom we share concerns, but not so well in reaching out to those with whom we disagree. Is this because we fear we would invite rejection? Those of us who vigil in opposition to the death penalty are doing a form of outreach to some who may disagree with us. We feel we welcome all who walk in our door, but we wonder how we can connect with those outside who may want to come but are not aware that we are here, or of who we are. A newcomer shared that she recognized in our group something that resonated, something she could not name—unless perhaps its name is Love. We realize that we put a lot of responsibility on everyone who comes. We expect people to live their beliefs. For us, how we live our lives is what is important, what we do here and now while we are alive, rather than what might happen after death, something we cannot know.

2020

The members of our Meeting tend to do outreach in small nonintrusive ways. One member takes advantage of opportunities to bring up our Friends Meetings in the community during casual

conversations. For example, she says things like “As the Quakers say, I am holding you in the Light.” Then people ask her if she is a Quaker, what that means and then start asking questions that she is happy to answer. Another has often invited individuals to our meeting if he thinks they might benefit by attending. Another starts conversations by giving spiritual reasons why he can’t support a particular politician or policy. Another writes letters to the newspaper and political leaders, trying to speak to That of God in them, trying to bring them to the Light, but not to Meeting. ... One member cautions that even these routine interactions should be done with divine guidance, and shouldn’t become empty traditions. ... To share our enthusiasm about Quakerism with others, it would help us to be clear about how to talk with those who are different; if we feel that they could hurt us, ask ourselves how and why? Then, if they want to know more about us, we may try to move beyond the comfort of telling about our history and practices to sharing our spirituality, which can seem more difficult. We also, of course, need to find practical ways to let people know that we are here. ... Decorah Friends Meeting is very active in our small community. Friends are involved as individuals in many community and inter faith groups that provide services and other assistance to those in our area. These can range from writing a religion column in our local newspaper, growing

food for our local food pantry, and service with others in our area free clinic. Our town is small and many people know us as members of a Quaker Meeting. This involvement gives us a chance to exhibit Friends beliefs in action. Friends also find reading Quaker publications – Friends Journal, AFSC publications, FCNL Newsletter – give us a chance to become aware of global needs and participate financially and in correspondence with groups and leaders. ... We feel that we do not share a lot of the same political beliefs with those outside of Meeting. We continue to express our opinions, even in very conservative circles. It is a blessing to remain friends with those who hold other beliefs, and to communicate with in a civil manner. We have been able to get some of our local Quaker history books into the libraries. We continue to get a lot of comments on Facebook. We run ads in Friends Journal, the Paullina paper and the Northwest Iowa Review. We know these are ways that others have found us and learned about our Meeting. ... We do wonder how to attract others to our faith practice. The wider Ames community doesn't seem to be aware that there is a Quaker meeting here. More diversity among our members would be healthy for our meeting. Quakers tend to be educated, privileged whites. We also question how to make new attenders feel welcome without overwhelming them. Our members are very active in community organizations. We do demonstrate

our faith by the causes we support on the community, state, and national level. We have an open house in the fall. We discussed the possibility of presenting a class and discussion on Quakerism. (Two of our members did give a class through Iowa State University adult education.)

2021

In one Friend's experience Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) this year has seen the greatest amount of intervisitation; we gathered even in a blizzard! Virtual meetings have made this intervisitation possible and for that it can be appreciated.

The clerk used the word "appreciate" when asking us to pause between responses to the query. If one can live as a person of appreciation, it is noticeable to others. Being a person of appreciation has an outreach in and of itself.

Because there is so much stark disagreement in the wider world, we have been thinking about how to reach across the liberal/conservative and other dividing lines. Some of us have been enriched by conversations with people on "the other side" and found common ground (although not agreement) on some social issues. We recognize that people on our side (perhaps even ourselves) can be narrow minded too.

2022

2023

A neighboring family was invited to an informal potluck meal at the Meeting house. A member of the new family asked if they were being recruited, a friend replied “No, but you will likely be adopted.” There are opportunities to share our faith when we participate in groups where there is a diversity of individuals and where there are common concerns and interests as well as activities that grow out of them. One Friend noted how she prioritizes friendships above differences in politics and belief. Speaking truth from a lived experience can allow opportunities to raise difficult topics that bring people into deeper consideration. It can become more powerful to share personal joy than to discuss ideas, opinions, and abstract concepts. Speaking of love rather than principle.... speaking of experience in life, rather than what one was raised to believe, these can lead to an openness to the beloved community with an awareness of the Page 84 implication of what it can mean to preach or proselytize from that same lived experience. Outreach does not result from telling others how to believe or live; it is not based on intellect; it does not judge. We attempt to live our faith, as a reflection of our experience of the Living Teacher, the Inner Light of God, found in all of us.

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.

2007

Might there be a more accurate term than Meeting for Business? If we truly succeed in continuing Meeting for Worship as we conduct Meeting for Business, then the word business, may not express what is really occurring as we search together for truth. In a spirit-led Meeting for Business, differing personal opinions and conflict should become “beside the point.” In some meetings there is a qualitative difference between the worship and business sessions. During business there may not be enough time or silence to allow for thoughtful responses. We appreciate our clerk’s gentle guidance, unhurried manner, and his gift for summarizing. A Business Meeting works because individuals have fulfilled their responsibilities through personal leadings and on committees. It is important that each person be “present”, alert to the business at hand. An old, long established meeting needs to be particularly aware that new and young attenders need to have opportunities to experience the practices (dare we say rituals?) of the group. Our Meeting is small, and we do fairly well at balancing older, younger, and new folks for committee appointments. We are grateful for a Peace and Social Concerns Committee that has kept us informed about important social and political issues. This has led to more active responses in our meeting and among individuals. Individuals and families that are active in groups

and projects, not necessarily Quaker, but compatible with Friends' values, also contribute to the liveliness of our Meeting and Meetings for Business. Meeting for Business doesn't seek majority rule. We remember always that consensus lies at the heart of Quaker decisions. There is some fuzziness in our understanding of this term. It can mean harmony with God and among us, although there may not be full agreement. Sense of the meeting and reaching unity are two other terms frequently used to describe a decision reached in Meeting for Business.

2008

Meeting for business is going well overall; it no longer feels rushed and yet it is often getting done earlier. Committees 22 are doing more work and being trusted in their work, which may be contributing to this change. We recognize, however, that we still have growth to do. For example, we sometimes make small issues into bigger ones. And we need to work on being more patient and work at finding loving ways to express our frustrations. Because people process information differently, such as some who see the small pieces of a situation and others who see the larger picture, this sometimes contributes to conflict. Or sometimes people are appreciating the social interaction meeting for business can provide while others want to follow an agenda, whether an

official or personal one, which can cause tension. While our infrastructure is much like a larger meeting, we wonder if we could simplify the process we practice. Can we do some things as a body rather than a committee, or maybe appoint an ad hoc committee rather than trying to maintain a standing committee? Our pool for committee membership is small, yet most people are on at least one committee. We wonder if those appointed are appropriate for the positions they fill, and we know we need to work on that level of truthfulness individually and in our nominating process, as well. Do we pay attention to the Spirit when called to the tasks we do? Sometimes we may get confused, wondering if the Divine is inspiring us to fill a task we are asked to do or rather providing us a moment to practice knowing ourselves better and saying no. When someone has a minority opinion on the subject, the person often steps aside, and perhaps the issue reappears another month. Time also provides a time to change our minds, to become convinced. We hope we are listening and processing each person's input, recognizing that sometimes it takes a while for this to completely occur. There is a general lack of commitment to the Meeting beyond attending Sundays, though this is not often different than other church bodies. Committee work relies on a commitment by each member, however. Are we asking more of ourselves in our committee

obligations and structure than what we can reasonably attend to? Our care for each other and for the Meeting needs to be from the Spirit and not through social engineering of a committee. Is our work and worship Spirit led? Business meeting is to help us test our leadings with each other. Coming to Meeting in the spirit of Love will decrease the impact of strains on working with each other. Having the intention to be in this spirit with understanding and patience will guide us through difficult times. Good social relationships among us can provide richer ground by which to complete our Meeting agenda.

2009

Meeting for business has become short, sweet, and routine, with no controversy or need for much discussion often. No active committees set this stage. The last large controversy we addressed resulted in losing a few attendees.

2010

Ministry and Counsel discussed ways to encourage attendance and participation at meeting for worship. Two suggestions were made: Invite attenders, individually, to join us; offer to provide childcare so parents can attend. For new Quakers and attenders, meeting for business may seem mysterious. We agreed that this aspect of Quaker is very important and it needs to be experienced. In

an announcement the week prior to meeting for worship, one of the co-clerks will give a short explanation and invitation. We are hopeful that better attendance at our meeting for worship will also encourage more people to attend Yearly Meeting. Appreciation was expressed for the skill of the clerks in conducting meeting for worship with attention to business, including the preparation and timing, and the clear minutes that are read back following action. Dealing with opposing views can be difficult, especially in a small meeting like ours, but we want every voice to be heard, with loving attention, and a will to stand aside when there is not unity.

2011

Because we are a small meeting, we don't seem to suffer under the pressure of time. We are able to spend time following meeting for worship and before meeting for business as a social time and then following meeting for business, we again have a time to relate to one another without feeling frustrated by differences of opinion. We strive to attend meeting for business with the same openness we approach meeting for worship. Part of our responsibility lies in just attending the meeting for business. Discerning clerks are a great help in bringing out the sense of the meeting and the individual feelings. This discernment helps the process of making decisions and the smooth

running of the meeting from being so laborious. It is the duty of clerks to bring forth issues and encouraging discussion on what we should do about them. Sometimes problems don't come to the surface until they are a significant problem. Do we have problems? Do topics come up that cause division? Of course, and it is always easy to find wedge issues. Topics on which we have not easily found consensus include where we are meeting, abortion, homosexual and transgender issues. A sense of respect for each individual's views is demonstrated in the meeting by the fact that we don't actively avoid wedge topics. When someone differs from the rest, often an offer to stand aside is put forward. Individuals should respect the fact that they are getting out of the way of the group and continue to respect the individual and their differing ideas or leanings, while acknowledging their willingness to set aside their wants. In a couple of weeks we are planning to discuss where we are going as a meeting. Everyone has a piece of the truth and they are not all necessarily the same. Our piece leads our individual actions toward the whole. We need to use each person's strengths as we slip into our roles. We tend to act as a family or a small rural meeting rather than a meeting in a size more typical to a larger metropolitan area. In Yearly Meeting for Business it is often harder to attain these concepts, as it is a much bigger meeting.

2012

We appreciate the advice which emphasizes the seriousness of Meeting for Business. We noted that the queries seem to be philosophical rather than practical. If there is philosophical unity will the practical fall into place? Our meetings for business can be unfocused, and we go off on tangents. We appreciate receiving an agenda in advance of the meeting so that we know what is our business for the meeting. More silence, especially holding the clerk in silence while minutes are being written, would be helpful. Silence is about going slow and working out how to deal with our lives. One of the purposes of meeting for business is to create community. When we get off track it is out of hunger to relate to one another. We create community by finding unity together about the things which need to be done, our business. We are respectful of differences of opinion. One Friend remembered an experience of having a strong disagreement with meeting: "The meeting handled it so liberally and patiently that I felt I could let go. I learned something about not pushing. People can be on different sides without being wrong. I felt the gift of being part of a community." We find that people step up to do what needs doing; it happens organically. We are fortunate to have a clerk who is serious about her service.

2013

We conduct our business meetings as an integral part of our worship. We appreciate the process of finding the sense of the meeting. We appreciate the pauses, the moments of silence that deepen our worship during business meetings. Good clerking skills are a great aid in that process. We are aware that conducting business within meeting for worship, allowing silence, helps us listen to each other in ways that we can't during a discussion or conversation. We recognize that alone, as individuals, we do not hold the truth. We appreciate the collective wisdom, understanding that we are not acting alone, but guided by the Spirit. We note how important it is for us all to speak to the issues, doing so from the spiritual base, which is a core belief of Friends. This is no small task. We are reminded that it is important not to hide our wisdom under a bushel, but to let it be visible in the world. Our elders, many of whom are no longer with us, have taught us, quietly and by example, a certain level of discipline in meetings for worship with attention to business. We are grateful for their gentle teachings.

2014

A period of silence is necessary to be able to hear what it is that God intends. Stopping to center helps to hold meeting in a spirit of love,

understanding, and patient search for clarity and truth while we attend to business. Having personal relationships with others in meeting helps us to uphold that spirit of love. Our meetings for business have become simple and direct. The purpose of business meeting seems to be merely financial discussion and planning the next month, but perhaps also encouraging us to avoid extra work.

2015

We strive – and sometimes struggle – to carry the spirit of worship into our business meetings. It feels like a mouthful to say, but there is a good reason why our business sessions are called “Meetings for Worship with Attention to Business”. We are called to remember that we should always consult the Spirit, especially as we consider courses of action and the business of our meeting. We considered the question of how to respond when someone accepts a role but then doesn't fulfill the duties responsibly. How do we support and encourage without nagging? How are we helpful but not pushy? We observed that the more action-oriented people may find it more difficult to patiently search for unity.

2016

When we disagree we can search for unity without frustration. We pay attention to spiritual aspects of

mundane things. Use silence to deal with frustration. During it, we try to discover what we disagree about. Ask others with whom we disagree to help you find out where they are “coming from”. Being alone in viewpoint Listen to your internal voice and do not anticipate what might happen because of speaking out. Have humility and ascertain how important the matter is to you. Be authentic to yourself but also be communal with Spirit standing between these positions.

Shared Responsibility Some people serve Meeting more than others. The amount of service depends on several factors, such as how important Meeting is to the person and, also, the person’s capability (mowing, repairs). Service can be a form of love. It is difficult to always know the needs of Meeting as some are subtle.

2017

There are other questions as a part of this query, but we focused on these, searching for leadings on ways to find a sense of the meeting when there are differences of opinion. As we had someone among us with limited experience with Quaker ways of doing business, it was helpful to remind ourselves of what makes our meetings unique. We envy the sense of peace that often comes with business at Iowa Yearly Meeting Conservative and concluded that a part of that comes of long periods of silence, including during the times when the recording clerk

is creating a minute. Listening to each other is vital at yearly meeting and at successful business meetings at Penn Valley. If we are to find solutions, we must be able to let go of our own expectations and be open to those of others. If we are to avoid having a discontented minority, everyone must feel that they have been heard. Finally, we seek to avoid the pitfalls that come with voting. We try to avoid two opposing sides, with one winning and the other losing. It helps to consider that Spirit is present with us and that residing in it may be a third way that we had not previously considered. To do that requires a worshipful attitude and an open mind and heart

2018

Appreciation was expressed for the clerking as steady, faithful, helpful, peaceful, open and prepared. We recognize that process matters; what it feels like to conduct our business is important. Some feel frustration when something contentious comes to us and two individuals try to resolve it between themselves rather than letting the whole group hold the concern. Some wonder what to do when they feel that no one will agree with them. While the importance of stating one's opinion or feelings was strongly affirmed and encouraged, there remains a reluctance to state something that may not be in agreement with what is generally

being expressed. It was noted that it is important to hold Friends in the Light when they speak, implying a worshipful atmosphere. We do not want to keep people from expressing their opinions and wonder how we can support people in speaking up. While we recognize that dissent is healthy in principle, we may not fully allow for it by our attitudes and our haste to express ourselves. We may need to hear that different voice as it can bring a new perspective to the issue.

We understand that the Quaker decision-making process can be time consuming. It has been expressed that some members find this frustrating especially during Quarterly and Yearly Meeting business sessions. Generally, within our small group this has not been an issue as our members have a feeling of comfort with the group. We are free to discuss and ask the necessary questions so that we more fully understand the issues before the Meeting and can make informed decisions more easily. We feel that we have arrived at decisions expediently when possible and have had the patience to wait for a sense of the meeting concerning other issues when more time is required.

2019

Many of us feel comfortable expressing our views here, and do not feel that we will be judged for doing so. Some of us DO feel stressed about

sharing views that we know others do not share, and it requires some courage and determination to override these fears. We are such a small group that it can be hard to find Friends who share our desire to focus on a particular area of interest, whether it be eliminating nuclear weapons, promoting support for prisoners re entering society, or living a greener, eco-friendly lifestyle. We all benefit when the Spirit assures us that this is a safe place to empty our hearts. The sound system continues to be improved. It is difficult to hear, especially when the heater is running. We are getting used to using the microphone. In the past, some of us have been reluctant to speak when we are unsure of what has been said. Communication is becoming easier and more productive as we use these devices. As well as commonalities, there may be considerable diversity among Friends. It often takes Friends a long time to reach clarity on an issue. This is because great care tends to be taken to listen to and consider all voices. An issue may need seasoning, which may mean a time to process the question outside of business meeting as well as inside. We strongly affirm that we learn more by listening than by talking.

2020

We find that some period of silence during meeting for business can help ground us as we wait for guidance on a question. When a question comes up

there is a difference between thinking of an answer or waiting for an answer. Sometimes it is hard to have faith in the meeting's decision when you do not agree with it. We have had members step aside when the meeting could not come to consensus on their concern. They stayed with us and continued working on this issue outside the meeting. ... We agree that respect for each other and trust in the process is essential. It is not a matter of fighting for one's position in a Friends meeting for business, but rather of offering one's best Page 75 Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) 2020 Minute Book understanding on a given issue and letting it go as one's contribution to the process. Then, trust the process to arrive at the best outcome. ... There are some ways we can do better in keeping us all in the Spirit. We can be sure to use respectful language that still gets the point across. For example, using phrases like "when you do X, I feel Y," or "Please help me understand how you reached this conclusion," or "what I feel led to do is Z." We can also use periods of silent worship to help re-center ourselves. We can look at the other person's feet and remember that they also struggle. ... In our discussion we spoke about: When we don't share a concern in the same way as another Friend, we can encourage them in their efforts and ask "how can we support you in your endeavors and Spirit led concerns?" While each member may not feel led to make a particular issue his or her #1 issue, we can

still support each other in our individual leadings. If there are differences, it may be helpful to share stories of how conflict was resolved in the past. ... We do have some differences of political opinions in our meeting, but these do not interfere with getting business done. We notice that members do well and restrain themselves so the atmosphere doesn't get too acrimonious. No one wants strife. We are aware of some Christian denominations that are splitting because of marriage and gender issues, and are relieved that isn't happening in our meeting.

2021

Response:

One of the foci of our consideration of this query was Quaker process. We do believe it works, but among some it has a bad reputation for taking too much time and discouraging initiative. We need to come to it with a positive attitude. We need to listen and to speak with both respect and humbleness. We need to let the process work. o We do value different perspectives. We think God likes diversity. Working through difference with non-combative dialogue brings us all closer to our true selves and to a greater truth. You can't reach consensus when one person is right. Though there are many schisms in our history, there have also been many differences carefully worked through. Current conversations between different varieties

of Friends point to our yearning to understand each other more deeply. We need to allow ourselves to be guided by something greater than ourselves; centering prayer is good.

In worship with attention to business, there is something of value in a dissenting voice that can help us overall. There is the Still, Small Voice of God in all of us. One of the things we learn as a Quaker community is that our community changes and grows. The last issue of deep concern was gay marriage. Our meeting is currently wonderfully peaceful but there are issues that can rise up. It takes a great deal of discernment to know when to disagree and it runs the risk of separating one person or dividing the entire meeting. But without disagreement we maintain the status quo and perhaps growth is inhibited.

As we each bring our talents and gifts to our beloved community, we cherish the notion and are mindful that, although Friends join in a Spiritual journey without formal clergy, laity or creed, we weave together the tasks that accomplish our leadings. In our manner of decision-making, there is an understanding that the Spirit is at the center, and our job is to determine what the will of that Spirit is. To do this requires some skills on our part. It involves listening to each other and giving weight to all opinions. It also involves listening to our own inner voices and deciding how important our opinions are. Possibly we raise a dissenting voice

mainly to make sure others have considered all options, knowing we will give up our stance if is contrary to the sense of the meeting. Sometimes we feel a need to hold fast to our stance. If we do, it is our responsibility to examine our needs and motives to be sure that it will help the meeting find a spirit-led solution

2022

2023

: We don't vote, which is unique. As you work through the process you find it is effective; however, it can be slow. Tough business meetings are when one individual has a personal gut feeling of being wronged when they believe they are on a righteous course. Being a dissenting minority and standing aside on an issue requires humility and can be very difficult. One clerk wanted Friends to be fully present to help hold the space and encourage faithfulness. We hope that we can be mindful to do the same for our meeting clerk. There is a tension between faithfulness and effectiveness. Friends may find that a rigid formality during Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business could lead us to miss out on something that might emerge in a more casual discussion. We do not wish to exclude Friends who have different life experiences or backgrounds (e.g.

social class). There may be a challenge in carrying out our business without pushing others aside who may not understand our practice. At times we may be unexpectedly moved when we let Friends know that our heart is tender around a matter, and suddenly Way opens for a resolution that we hadn't considered on our own before. Our clerk comments that they struggle with this set of queries the most in that it is difficult to be worshipful when discussing small details, like when to hold a meeting "clean-up" day. They are Page 85 reminded that even about small things, we should maintain the Quaker process of business. More than once the clerk has been helped by another attender to determine the "sense of the meeting" and to remain patient. Another Friend who is a past clerk of our meeting remembers how important it was to look for signals during business meeting – what is said and what is not said. This is made particularly difficult by our current hybrid format, observing both Friends in the meetinghouse and those on the screen.

4. HARMONY WITHIN THE MEETING

"This is my commandment: Love one another as I have loved you." John 15:1

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.

2007

We hope that sending our newsletter to all members and attenders, including folks who moved away years ago but want to keep the connection, helps us all to keep in touch.

We like to go around the circle after Meeting for Worship to share our names, announcements, joys, and concerns. It helps us to get to know each other better and build our community.

We wish that more of our attenders would come to our pre-meeting discussions, but many of them are active in the Meeting in other ways.

We wonder if we are giving enough care to those who are actively giving care to other family members. Sometimes we forget to care for those who are supporting everyone else. We find it easier to give help to others than to ask for help ourselves when we need it. We know that most people want to be independent and do things by themselves even if it takes a lot longer.

We question whether we agree with the "doctor knows best" attitude.

We sometimes have a "second opinion" all on our own and want to direct our treatment and future independently of the ideas of medical

professionals of family. We don't agree with the belief that God gives us what we need and deserve, or that everything that happens is God's will.

When someone needs help, we can be more effective if we work together.

2008

It was observed that making our relationships deeper depends more on the quality of time we spend with one another rather than the amount of time. Currently we don't seem to have issues in the meeting that cause tension between differing ideas or opinions. Maintaining relationships with those outside our group requires more effort. We were reminded that we need to view another's point of view as an opportunity to learn something about ourselves. We understand that Friends as a whole are not free of divisions and conflicts among individuals and different theological branches. We find ourselves guilty of some of the same narrow-mindedness we criticize in others. Most strive to allow others to follow their own paths just as we wish to follow ours, but it is good to be reminded by this query of the ideal. The phrase in the query —cultivate a forgiving spirit|| made one person uneasy as it seems to imply that all that is required is to understand the basis of a conflict rather than dealing with it directly. Again, we are reminded that recognizing that the other may have a portion of the Truth, as do we, can lead to finding a resolution for all. The phrase —give conflict up to God- seems to be an important one to remember in dealing with all disagreements.

2009

The discussion began with silence. Learning to respect each other's opinions is a long step towards harmony. We do not always have to think the same way on an issue. We feel that men and women share equally in the work of our meeting. Jobs are undertaken irrespective of gender. A member stopped attending during the last year. Disagreement had

occurred because of her daughter's experience at Scattergood School. Some of us have kept in touch with the family and hopefully this break will mend. Appreciation of an opponent is very different from an automatic kindness.

2010

One person noted we must take time to truly listen to others. Just like musical harmony, there are many different ideas. It goes beyond tolerance for different ideas. We must respect them. Discussion was held about a previous retreat meeting had and how there are still many fond memories. It was agreed that a committee should be formed to arrange another retreat. Reggie's "sleepout" was a way several adults got a chance to really bond with a number of the youth. An interesting observation was shared by one of our members, who recalled a time when many farmers were losing their farms. While he recalled direct efforts by other religious groups to help members keep their farms, he did not know of any such effort among the Quakers. This led to a broader discussion of how we are often uncomfortable talking with people in our meeting about how they might be struggling in hard economic times. It would seem we are responsible for helping each other in all types of hard times. We still struggle at times with gender roles in our meeting, particularly as they relate to certain responsibilities and committee positions. Some topics that we might tend to avoid were

mentioned: abortion, same-sex marriage (although our meeting did work through this a number of years ago and is generally supportive), and even traditional understandings of the Bible and Jesus. The question was, do we have to have unity on all things to move forward together? We come to meeting for what we do have in common: seekers following a path of how to operate in the world, without necessarily having the same beliefs. We have in common to respect life and love our neighbors as ourselves. Together we are on this path, with specific beliefs somewhat irrelevant. It was noted that sometimes it is a struggle to see that of God in some others, some who may be somewhat disagreeable people. This struggle may be some of why we come together in this group, to walk that path where we are capable of doing that. We are all different people, but at Meeting we strive to be the best that we can be. In the silence we can reflect on how well we have done on the quest to be the best people we can. Perhaps some of our reluctance to speak to hard economic times of fellow members is that people don't like to be told how to make decisions or spend their money. It was mentioned that for a number of years AFSC has had a credit union that has made it possible to quietly assist staff with economic struggles. A quote from Maya Angelou was given to help gain perspective: "You should question a naked person trying to give you a shirt."

2011

The need for individual time with each other is important to the “harmony” of a meeting. Car pooling is not only good for the environment, but to achieve the one-on-one time for talking and listening. There was a discussion of late arrivals at Meetings for Worship, which are common, and disruptive to some people. We could ask late comers to enter through the kitchen door and then enter quietly and enter as a group, say 10–15 minutes into the meeting. We suggest that this be an item for discussion at meeting for business.

2012

The question of harmony brought to mind a member who has not attended for a few years and whether the disharmony of that time contributed to the situation. As a meeting we feel we have become more harmonious in the past few years, and not by keeping our opinions to ourselves. We take more time to share about life events, books, conferences, our jobs – and about how these are shaping our spiritual lives. This sharing has increased our trust in each other, which in turn encourages more sharing. Though it is informal, the sharing really helps us deepen our relationships and examine our actions and opportunities from a spiritual point of view. Some of our best

communication happens during after-worship discussions, especially when we did Bible study which offered chances to explore and voice our personal theologies. There are topics we don't agree on and don't discuss often, such as salvation, resurrection, reincarnation, gay rights, abortion, sex, and extra-terrestrial life. We feel that because we do trust one another, we can and should take more time to talk about these issues. After all, we come together to worship because we believe our corporate discernment of God is more reliable than individual efforts. We believe we help each other to increase the "measure of Light" that is given to us. The meeting is one of the legs of the stool of our understanding of God. If we are not asking the meeting to help us understand really difficult questions, then we are missing that leg and our stool will be wobbly at best.

2013

The smallness of the meeting has probably reduced the amount of disharmony within the meeting. We have less conflict. We know each other well. We respect each other. We have been able to deal with changes as they arise, and not let them become an issue. The times when we have had discord, we have at least found some common ground. By listening to each other, we have learned from it. The smallness can also lead to stress related to the simple chores of running the meeting. One Friend

had earlier talked about the financial burden of being in the yearly meeting. This is a challenge area for us. We need to be creative in order to resist the temptation to get rid of responsibilities. It comes right up to who we are – our identity is that we are part of IYMC. We want to keep that identity.

2014

We do things together and come together often – both in connection with meeting and outside of meeting. We call on each other for help. We trust each other. We disagree on many things – theologically, politically, spiritually -- but it doesn't seem to separate us, at least those who continue coming. There is unequal division of labor in holding the meeting together. We are aware of it. Different people step up and step back in ways that ameliorate this, but the fact of inequality remains. It is unrealistic to expect perfect equality. As far as gender differences, there is nothing overt in what we do. Women weed the grounds; men wash dishes. But women have a certain presence and we approach them with certain feelings and expectations that are different from those of men. It is subtle but real.

2015

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 within ourselves and seek to address that of God in those with whom we disagree? In a Saturday afternoon session, we made a serious effort to use a worship sharing format as described by Patricia Loring in considering this query. No notes were taken until the end of our time together when each of us was asked what we are taking away. We shared a sense that long needed healing was begun during the time of considering this query together. We have recognized our need to be vulnerable in the presence of each other (and of God). Through sharing those parts of our lives in which we feel vulnerable, we become closer and more understanding of each other. We have experienced the importance of being able to speak and to know that we are heard and acknowledged. We believe that working together on some activity that meets a need in our community would bring us closer to each other. Perhaps we can seek such work. We are grateful for this time together during which we experienced the beginning of healing and a new level of closeness.

2016

We talked about how to balance the needs for honesty and kindness. There were concerns

expressed about late comers and children making noise. Someone wondered if we are getting into avoidance in an effort to stay out of conflict. However, sometimes avoidance may be the best thing - way will open later - maybe the time is not right yet. What topics are we avoiding now? Someone said child care and a program for young people. How do we respond to each other's difficulties? We felt that we are doing well on this. Different examples were given. Marshall Rosenberg's suggestions on non-violent communication were recommended.

2017

Since there have been few conflicts in our meeting in recent years, this query is challenging. Are we afraid to speak up? Do we not trust our own options? Are we ignoring differences that should be addressed? We feel there may be strength in finding answers to these questions. If we notice small differences and acknowledge them, then we will be ready for larger issues. Our failings may be in the lack of awareness that there is a concern that requires attention either by Ministry and Counsel or Meeting for Business. As we grow stronger as a spiritual community, we gain personal confidence as well and hope that keeping in touch will be easier and welcome.

Those who have experienced attendance in other meetings expressed noticing that differences, or

perhaps life experiences and educational backgrounds. One example was on the issue of support of the military. Practicing in presenting and supporting ideas is often evident in those more skilled, whereas those who are not gifted in dialog may feel intimidated and less supported. We welcome any message and respect the speaker.

2018

We would like to have the opportunity to have discussions about controversial issues just for the experience of hearing one another and threshing out our own positions. It is valuable to do this before there is a deadline to make a decision. We need to feel free to speak an unpopular opinion. One member recalls, in the past, not feeling free to express an opinion that another disagreed with – having been given the message (not overtly) “we don’t think that in this meeting.” A friend offered to check into whether we could use a second hour to practice this type of discourse. One question we could work on is: “Do we really believe that there is that of God in each person?” We agree that a topic we tend to avoid for the sake of unity is the Divine and our own experience of that. Such experience may well feel tender and so we are reluctant to speak of it for fear that it might be criticized by others. We realize that while speaking of God and/or Jesus is uncomfortable for some of us, we do want all who come to feel comfortable here and

we want to be able to express our spirituality honestly. While we are comfortable as Quakers, feeling this is a good place for us, we tend not to feel that Quakerism is superior to other religions. Conflict is difficult, but if everyone is not in agreement, honesty and kindness can help to maintain harmony. It is important to listen and to voice disagreement respectfully. In our meeting contentious issues do not arise often, but when they do, we have shown that we can respect the views of others through open discussion and dialogue on the topic at hand. It takes courage to speak out when we do not agree with others. Leaving disagreement unexpressed, or avoiding sharing one's thoughts and feelings, are not ways to find a solution or options on difficult issues. We in the meeting must always encourage others to share their views, even if they seem to not agree with the majority. Often it is through disagreement that the best solution is found, and this can create and maintain harmony in the meeting

2019

We reflected on some history among Iowa Friends, when there had been some religious revival going on. We were reminded that there are behaviors among Friends that could turn the focus away from our corporate worship that is to center on God's Love. Conservative Friends traditionally value the

corporate nature of Quakerism, thinking of ourselves as all pieces of a larger cloth, and there is extra concern these days that we take care not to disrupt such cohesiveness, that we are part of the specialness of Iowa Conservative Friends together. There can be pressure not to bring up conflict because of our strong focus on the group's cohesion. On the other hand, there could be an extra level of trust that a conflict can in fact be handled without disconnecting because of the strong focus on the group. Attending worship frequently reminds us that we are in-and-of the meeting together, and that that which one of us may want from the meeting might not be what another Friend wants. When we miss times to worship together on a regular basis, we may miss hearing, seeing, or knowing the larger pattern or evolving character of the meeting that is created by all our experiences and through all Friends of the meeting. Attending worship frequently helps us understand how we are, together. When we misstep and start to be possessive of the meeting—how “my” meeting is or isn't supposed to be—we might need to move into a place of forgiveness for Friends' not wanting the same things. In that forgiveness, there can be a loosening of our grasp of what any of us thought of as "my meeting," and we can remember that God and Love are the center of our relationships and our meetings, not our individual desires set apart from

one another. The questions about harmony within the meeting are particularly salient for us since two members and one long-time attender have fairly recently stepped away. We know our small size makes it difficult for people to find Friends who are like them, but if we are rooted in the Vine, genuine relationships should arise out of the Spirit. We are reminded that we don't come to Meeting simply to find a group of like-minded people, but rather we seek to know and be faithful to God. We do need to speak out more often and more clearly about our faith experiences, including our fears, doubts, and failings. And listen carefully. The relationship that is uniquely Quaker is the one that is about faithfulness. You are my Friends if you do whatsoever I command to you. "How has the Spirit dealt with thee since we last met?" and "What is thy teaching for us this day?" are helpful questions to ask together every week. This sort of question is not included in our Queries.

2020

Response: In considering the balance of kindness and honesty, the use of "I messages" we have found very helpful, and, often difficult to do. We have also learned that avoiding certain topics for the sake of keeping peace does not work; it can be less than honest. ... Some of us have experienced Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) as a nurturing community that responds lovingly to imperfect

people. Some of us feel that our own local gatherings are repressed. Conversation even after Meeting is stilted, with no free laughter or tears. We seem walled off from one another, but don't know what to do about it. ... There are a lot of cultural barriers to effective honesty. One Friend says that her traditionally German upbringing means that she tends to bluntness; another, raised in a family where feelings were rarely expressed, has a hard time being honest where criticism is involved. Words and gestures can be used to mislead. "God is not dead but is entombed in dead language." ... We tend to be cautious about political discussions, unless we feel we know the listener intimately. We monitor our feelings closely, so as not to experience anger as we discuss these possibly divisive issues. At the same time we wonder if we are not sacrificing something important when we do not go deeper

2021

The importance of humility was lifted up in deepening relationships. We need to show up and be vulnerable about ourselves. Meeting is a place to practice loving, treating others as we would like to be treated. It can be difficult for us to be aware of our own weaknesses, to see ourselves as we truly are. Perhaps gender relationships are a place where expectations about roles may keep us from seeing the truth in ourselves.

As we gather to engage the Spirit and each other in our meeting, at times, we are a three-part harmony. Occasionally, the collection of voices includes 12 to 15 among us, striving to find a clear tone and a common melody.

We realize that conflict and disharmony exist beyond our meeting, sometimes with members of groups who are different from ourselves. Similar practices of forgiveness and deep care for one another can be useful beyond Friends circles and communities. At the same time, certain groups who experience tremendous and repeated injustice may assert that care for “them” looks like more action and direct engagement with decision makers, not just words or silent affirmation that we care.

We have had people attend our meeting with more conservative views. We have tried to make them feel welcome, and we have engaged in some good conversations. It is important to come into a discussion with the idea that your views might be changed after listening with an open mind. A person could be “the fertilizer for the plant we are growing into.” Look for God in ourselves and seek it in others with whom we disagree. We hope we can be respectful when we disagree.

2022

2023

A way to deepen our relationships is to come to Meeting. It's hard to cultivate relationships when someone is not there. Love as "opening to the Divine" feels different and invites us to try to stay in that space. We are asked to love our neighbor as ourselves, and we wonder just how well we love ourselves. Showing up with a sense of self-righteousness is probably not loving myself well. We wonder what our negative feeling really is; is it fear or perhaps disappointment when our hopes are not fulfilled? We wonder if we actually experience enough disharmony in our Meeting to adequately address this query. Some of us remember a visitor who seemed disruptive to some as if we couldn't offer the help we thought she needed. Or was it that our job was simply to love, not find a solution. Can we be a community that loves each other into wholeness? We heard about a metaphor used by some groups of creating a web using yarn in a circle of people. At the end of the activity, the circle of people connected by the web of yarn can then physically feel what happens when one person pulls on a part of the web: everyone feels the tightness and tension. This metaphor of the Page 86 interconnection we have across the Divine Web can slow down the human desire to lash out. We instead can remember that what we do to one person, we do to the web and ultimately to ourselves. Getting to know each other can help us work together better and reduce

conflict. One activity the meeting has discussed has been providing opportunities to hear each person share their spiritual journey. These opportunities provide a deeper look into our lives. These stories can satisfy a need for understanding how we or others used to live, which in turn can shed light on how to live during these difficult times and/or in preparation for what is to come. Our Meeting community thrives best when our shared spiritual journeys can reach a level of intimacy in the shelter of openness, forgiveness and love. One Friend expressed that the deepest part of this query, for them, is the words of Jesus: "Love one another as I have loved you." This quote distinguishes the human notion of love from the love that comes from the Divine; this Friend knows something about that love from experience but the words with which to talk about it are elusive. It feels like the efforts made without the emotions behind them are weak compared to those strong emotions, but more and more this Friends trust using their mind. There is always something new that jumps out at one when reading or listening to the queries. For another Friend, this is the phrase: "Do we look to that of God within ourselves . . ." speaks of forgoing pettiness and judgement and act out of that indwelling spirit that God has given each one of us. Another Friend reflected on his growing-up years within a Southern Baptist church. In that church the TRUTH was KNOWN. There is

some comfort in this surety but, in the end, it is problematic, well captured by the phrase in the Query #4 Advice that we must “be aware of the possibility that we may be mistaken.” This idea is much appreciated. In seeking, each of us may find different answers. One topic we sometimes avoid speaking about is the future of our Meeting (due to shrinking membership). What is going to happen to our Meeting, our cemetery, our historic school, and Meetinghouse is too sad and painful for us to envision. As we continue to reduce in size within our small Meeting it will be very Page 87 important to work on keeping unity, be kind and thoughtful listeners and most important remember forgiveness is a gift. Our conflicts can take many shapes and forms. When we see people we love in deep disagreement and hurt, we do not always have the wisdom to know how to help. We need more wisdom, more understanding about how to give credit. We can think of harmony within our meeting as like harmony in music, with multiple voices contributing to the overall sound. And as in music, the whole can be made richer by dissonant voices and their resolution

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.

2007

We are aware that we still carry outdated expectations for gender roles at times, in spite of our best intentions. Attitudes are usually developed in childhood and are sometimes difficult to change, but we try with varying degrees of success. One important way of maintaining lines of communication within families, we have found, is by admitting when we are mistaken in a situation.

Children especially seem to respond to such admissions and hopefully learn by our example rather than always seeking to blame others for their mistakes. This same openness is also helpful in marriages. We have expanded our definition of what constitutes a family over the years to include all types of units, and we seek to be supportive of all. We are aware, however, that there still seems to be a subtle stigma against single parents in the general society, depending on the community. We are thankful that prejudice against divorced parents seems to be less obvious and onerous than in the past. As we considered the changes in communication techniques that are now available in this electronic age and how these affect our children and grandchildren's quality of life and development, we are struck by the complexity of keeping things in balance, especially in dealing with the life of the Spirit. Teaching by example has always been more effective than mere words, but sharing our own experiences and beliefs is also important. Conservative Friends have historically hesitated to provide much formal spiritual guidance through set forms, so that individuals may develop their own understandings of the Divine Light. This hasn't always been helpful in providing a basis for such development, however, as sometimes children have just been left confused and unsure of the roots of our faith. We are

reminded that each generation has gifts of wisdom and knowledge that need to be shared.

2008

It is the culture of Friends to be boldly independent. It can be demeaning to older Friends when they do not know how to reach out for help in time of need. There is a sense, shared by all present, that we don't always do a good job of communicating our personal need for help to others. Sometimes difficulty in communicating our personal needs is literally due to external communication barriers coming from not being able to hear each other when speaking in meeting. Some time was spent in discussing whether a microphone might be useful if available in meeting for worship and business meeting times. Several friends noted appreciation for having the queries read aloud in meeting for worship and felt that this helps overcome some hearing problems. One member asked how any of us seek group or one-on-one help. Another highlighted personal experience of learning the importance of being able to ask others for help, finding that she had been enriched by a —clearness|| process where she found the group members to be loving, without a lot of defined rules and barriers. The member shared many times before feeling the need to be —stoic|| when wrestling with personal decision. She was surprised at realizing that she had missed

some valuable insight and support by trying —to be stoic|| and not sharing problems and getting helpful feedback. A question came forward from the group: Are single people more likely to be —stoic|| due to worrying about whether they might be projecting a sense of —weakness||? This was addressed by another, who reminded all present of the Buddhist teaching of —the importance of generosity.|| Do we prevent others from being generous? We are taught to —Love thy neighbor as thyself.|| Does this teaching not imply compassion for oneself? Not recognizing personal needs could be seen as not being compassionate. It is the sense of those present that we encourage both men and women to share care giving. We make a good effort, through Friendly Eights, the Meeting Circle, Ministry and Oversight et al., to draw members of all ages into the fellowship of the meeting. A question was raised again about addressing ability to hear the messages in meeting. We were reminded that being attentive to the energy under the messages in meeting is important. Hearing spiritually depends a lot on being physically, spiritually present while having the necessary accommodations for hearing. Concern was raised that we still do not have a good handle on how to care for youth and children beyond preschool age in the second hour. A seasoned birthright friend regaled those present with a personal memory 25 of being a young

person and getting —tickled and giggly|| in meeting and being known as a —bench shaker.|| One Friend responded that children contribute entertainment to the meeting. It was roundly affirmed that the children are a very important part of the meeting. A concern was raised that neither the adults nor the children all know each other’s names. It was decided that the meeting would move to develop nametags to address this issue. The Ministry and Oversight Committee periodically writes letters to those that are at a distance from meeting. The Friendly Line is greatly valued for its communication channels to members and attenders who are in other places and unable to attend regularly.

2009

In opening the discussion of this query, we considered whether our meeting is a community or merely a collection of good individuals who gather weekly for worship. In reflecting on this question, we concluded that we are a community with substance, which continues in the face of loss of members through death or members moving away. In maintaining this community, we noted the interesting contrast we encounter every First Day. As Friends, we are a community, which practices silent worship. But, it is the sharing time after meeting that also keeps us connected and helps us form community. This time after meeting for

worship is valuable and needs to be supported and nurtured. Although we acknowledge the importance of sharing, we often find it difficult to share pain or ask for help from other meeting members. Sharing joy comes more easily and seems more natural. While sharing pain is challenging, it is through this sharing that members of the meeting come to help one another. Being able to help other members in times of need allows our community to strengthen and brings a sense of balance to our spiritual lives. We have appreciated the help that members of our meeting community have provided to others who have had difficulty joining us in silent worship because of transportation problems. This has allowed long standing members of our community to continue to join us on First Day. In addition to helping each other as individuals, the community of a meeting is also a source of strength, which allows a meeting to work through and deal with difficult problems. While the small size of many meetings means that all are needed to step forward to help solve meeting problems, the small size also contributes to the willingness of members to support one another as we work together to solve problems. Reflecting on the phrase in the query focusing on the importance that gender not be a limitation in providing help and support to others, we acknowledged that our culture offers contrasting stereotypes for men and women. It is often

suggested that men should be independent, stoic, and should not need help. As a result, men may have more difficulty asking for help or providing help to other members of our community. In addition to gender differences, we considered the complexity of all social groups. Within a group, we often find smaller circles of people who are more connected to each other and more informed about each other. Others remain less well connected, either by deliberate choice or by circumstance, and find it difficult to participate in giving and receiving care.

2010

We began the discussion by talking about a few of the ways we have cared for people recently. We talked about charity, what to do about people who are begging and asking for change; losing jobs; homelessness; divorce; family hardships. There are a lot of needs out there! Many of us found that it is easier to share help than needs. The main ways we care for people are by talking, listening, and offering practical help. Both men and women have shared caregiving roles in the past. We need more fliers for walk-ins and a plan for kids. The meeting is more welcoming now than it has been in the past; it is a more inviting space . . . except for the stairs. People are friendly and inquisitive with new folks, explaining who's who and "Quakerisms", not having inside conversations. There is an Iowa

Yearly Meeting Facebook group—tools like this could be used to draw more people in. Children from the meeting have 27 grown up and moved away, some still attend meetings near their schools. They “feel the love of the meeting.” There is no formal process for keeping in touch with inactive and distant members though that seems to be working out well. People keep in touch on a personal, informal level.

2011

We have a core group of regular attenders who know each other well and often share each other’s concerns, burdens, and joys. We are not sure we do well at following up with visitors and occasional attenders, perhaps feeling that some visitors want to be anonymous. Even for visitors who do not want to bare their souls it might be important that we share more with them, especially about what goes on in the silence. Our sharing time at the end of the worship hour is a good opportunity for this, and reading the book *Listening Spirituality* is helping us to be more conscious of our spiritual practices, and perhaps more able to share. We are reminded that we can be led to a “teaching ministry” which can be helpful to members and visitors alike. For some of us, expressing the spiritual life in words is very important, and for others worship is a distinctly non-verbal activity. We keep ourselves busy and don’t always leave

space in our lives to follow God's leadings, including the basic one: to love each other.

2012

We try to be present to one another in order to create an atmosphere in which friends feel free to share personal needs. However, our heritage is to avoid being intrusive in others' lives and we often wait to be asked before responding in any way. This can lead others to feel their needs will not be addressed. Ministry and Counsel Committee often seems too formal a structure to provide the intimate connection that is needed. At the same time we often find it difficult to be open when we do have needs ourselves. Gathering casually in small groups often gives an opportunity to share in an easier, less formal atmosphere, e.g. working around the quilt, mowing lawn and doing other housekeeping chores together. Absentee members are contacted by the Ministry and Counsel Committee with a letter of greeting, usually about every two years, and sometimes we have received responses from these. Unfortunately we have lost addresses for some former members. Our attempts to let others know who and what we are and that we welcome all to join us have been rather casual. In spite of this, individuals continue to find us either through the internet or our listing in the local newspapers. There are currently only two very young children in the meeting. These two are

definitely cherished and welcomed to the meeting whenever they are with us as are others who come occasionally.

2013

We are a welcoming meeting. We have some sporadic attenders, which is okay. We are accepting of whatever people offer to meeting without generating expectations of something over and above. We do have a core group that holds the meeting together, but it isn't rigidly defined or exclusive. Not very many people come to business meetings or query discussions. We changed the time to accommodate people, but after changing the time we have less involvement. We differ in our willingness to ask for help. Part of belonging to the meeting is being willing to communicate about troubling issues. We welcome all new visitors by e-mail or snail mail, if they leave contact information. We have recently updated our meeting email list, so that everyone is notified about midweek meetings and other events. We plan to set up a web page, and to update the photos of meeting people at the entrance of the meeting room. There is an energetic connection among us during meeting for worship. Our weekly simple potlucks after worship are an important opportunity to visit. Even without children in our meeting, we have children in our lives and we bring the gifts of the meeting to them.

2014

Considering ourselves a family of believers, we are aware that family members have many different viewpoints or practices for carrying out beliefs, though we remain supportive of each other and respectful of differences, even when disagreements may occur. Living in a college community means we have a fairly transient attendance at meetings for worship, though many short-time attenders do become active in all aspects of meeting. We find that the brochure describing our meeting is helpful for first-time or one-time worshippers. The website has also brought some contacts we might have missed. We still have a message on the answering machine to direct callers. One member remarked that it is meaningful that in our meeting we are not afraid to talk about difficult topics that some of our group face and seek to be aware of events that make for tough times so that we may share highs and lows with each other. The Earthcare group and the newly begun worship sharing provide opportunities to enlarge our understanding and appreciation for the wider Quaker community in our region. We find new strengths in our mutual tenets, though our practices vary.

2015

Through the life of the Meeting, we have all been touched with grace and tenderness by the many considerations of mutual care. We are mindful of the health and welfare of all in our small and tender worship community, and strive to include distant members in our affairs through our “long distance query” participation and other meaningful correspondence. We are challenged by the diminished participation of younger Friends and seek ways to invite and include this vital aspect of our meeting community. One member commented that we sometimes tend to minimize the concerns or feelings of the children. Our dominant culture conditions us to pay more attention to adults than to children. Also, we seem to be socialized to give more weight and affirmation to the words and knowledge of men and boys than to the wisdom and experience of women and girls. While Quaker ideals teach us to resist certain cultural expectations and roles, instead, living into God’s Wholeness and Love as a community, we can still fall short, all the while striving to care for one another.

2016

One of our members provides us with a current list of those who are active in the life of the meeting enabling us to keep in touch with each other; she asked for advice as to who should be included on this list. Friends agreed that rather than removing

names, we prefer to continue to include even those we have not seen for a long time. In thinking about children receiving the loving care of the meeting, someone who grew up in the meeting felt that today's common practice of having two adults be present with children is preferable to having only one adult, as was the practice when he grew up. Friends concurred with this for a number of reasons. We are glad to have the new single page description of our worship for first time attenders, feeling it is a good way to welcome them. We had a number of elderly Friends who are no longer with us. Several have died. One moved away when he was approaching death to be near his sister. We miss him, we want him to know we care about him. Some feel sad at his rather sudden departure and our limited ability to communicate with him now. As we talk about those no longer with us we regret not paying as much attention to them as we might have. We experience the truth of the advice: that sharing our pain and joy-- our feelings rather than our opinions-- does bring us closer together. We feel that gender equality is good in our meeting, although in the wider society, improvement is still needed. Sharing in care giving is clearly more important in today's world in which two adults in a family are likely to be working. A new attender shared that she felt well welcomed.

2017

The biggest change in how we keep in contact with others in the meeting has been our meeting email newsletter. It has kept us well informed of the activities of the meeting and sometimes aids in making decisions regarding an issue that can't wait to be addressed until regular meeting for business. The newsletter has also allowed us to keep in contact with those who have been part of our community but have moved on to another area. While this has proven very beneficial in many ways we are aware that personal contact is still the best way to maintain close relationships with one another. We try to be aware of the need to make personal contact with those who have health issues and also those who do not use electronic communication. One expressed how important seeing familiar faces week after week at meeting for worship helps making difficult adjustments more manageable and gives support when difficult personal needs arise. Another person who was newly returned to the community shared how meaningful the memories of childhood growing up in the meeting had become. Our recent Sunday school Christmas tree decorating party brought all the children together at one time and was a wonderful way for all of us to enjoy their activities.

2018

Ministry and counsel is available to assist people who have issues that they don't want everybody to

be aware of. We share more of ourselves in circle after meeting through sharing joys and sorrows, and often time we follow up later in the week. For people who are new to Quaker practice, it can be confusing where to find assistance, so members of ministry and counsel are now making an effort to introduce themselves as such during our social time after meeting, so newcomers know where to take concerns in need of pastoral concern. We also note with gratitude the efforts one particular member makes to send notes to members who are away, particularly college students. Several in our query circle celebrated our experience of meeting as our chosen family. There are some who live in town but no longer participate in Meeting as their needs were not being met by the Meeting; they may prefer little or no contact. Those situations need to be respected; we hope to remain open to the possible return of such people

2019

As an aging meeting, we are very conscious of giving and receiving care. Some members feel comfortable asking for help and express their gratitude to those helpers. Other members are less enthusiastic about being helped. We go gently as we give rides and bring food. Both givers and receivers have reached a good balance and seem to be more comfortable in their roles. We are grateful for all the helpers here. We wonder

whether we share similar expectations. It is not something we tend to talk about. There are some who attended for a while and no longer do. We wonder what their expectations were. Do we need to talk about the expectations we have and bring to the meeting? Do we have a sense or memory of being loved in meeting? How do we let people know that they are valued and loved? Recognizing a gift or a potential and asking someone to serve in a way that the person has not realized that they could serve is a possible way to communicate that and to help that person grow into his/her potential. So, we need to invite people to take on responsibilities for the sake of that person and the community. We need to be aware of our giving potential and to “give thanks for everything and take nothing for granted.

2020

A number of us shared tenderly that the meeting has, in a sense, become family for us. In part because of our sense of closeness each other, it is hard for newcomers to feel part of the group. We need to be aware of this. We know we need to grow in ministering to each other with sensitivity as we bring our own limitations with us into this meeting family. ... We perhaps respond more often to needs for care outside the meeting rather than within. Yet, within the meeting, we don't have a minister or person that has caregiving as part of a

job, so that when occasions arise, we must not lose sight of needs that may arise. We must be aware of these needs and take responsibility for responding. Although our numbers are small, the care among members is part of the richness of our meeting. Occasions for support may be relatively rare, but the feeling of support is always present.

2021

It is not “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” but “do unto others as THEY would have you do unto them.” People have different needs and we need to be sensitive to those needs. It is also our responsibility to communicate our needs to our community so that they can appropriately respond.

We are reminded that mutual care also extends to our awareness to recognize that, at times, we need to accept the grace and nurture from kindness and care that might be offered our way. This may also involve overcoming a reluctance to seek care and guidance from our meeting community. The seeds of compassion and learning to care for others can be nurtured by feeling loved and cherished. The response from a recent newsletter sent to our distant, perhaps inactive, members was encouraging. Our meeting remains vital in hearts and spirit, even at a distance. Celebrating good times and health while holding space for difficult challenges is a precious and necessary ability for us

to survive and thrive. There are deep reasons we are called Friends.

Whether in giving or in receiving help there is a similar dilemma. Sometimes we see a need but do not feel that we have anything to offer. We may not feel that we have what is needed to make it better. Alternatively, we may not feel that our needs should be brought forward or we may doubt that our community can address them. We tend to look at what we can offer as too small and too insignificant. When asked what we need, are we able to articulate what we really need?

Giving one another space to become our truest and best selves is an important dimension of mutual care. This is true for helping our children to learn and grow in the best way and it is also true for the relationships among the adults in our community. As we closed our time of reflection and sharing with some worship there was a sense of gratitude for the many ways that our Quaker meeting holds us together in a strong web of mutual care and concern.

2022

2023

The new technology of Zoom vastly changes the issue of keeping in touch with distant members. We celebrate our new reality of being able to be together in silence with both distant and near-by

members and attenders. And, this new reality brings new challenges: how to make the experience for both distant and in person attenders as similar as possible. How to make the experience of shared silence meaningful for all and bring all into one community? We try to remain mindfully aware of the unique circumstance and personalities in each situation as we address our response to one another's personal needs and times of difficulty. We share our memories as examples and note times when friends and family have refused our assistance, that acceptance is sometimes difficult for some for a variety of reasons. One remembers a generous friend of twenty years who was reluctant to accept help though he had provided assistance to others again and again. We note such barriers block an exchange that can benefit the connections of friendship and love. Unrequested, unwanted giving can cause resentment and tear relationships. Our tenderness and sensitivity Page 88 can sometimes overcome resistances, soften barriers and lead us to know how to give help without encumbering the one in need.

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.

2007

As we consider what our children and grandchildren are doing in their lives as adults, it appears they are ahead of

those of us who are older in being active in important issues that affect the world we live in. Perhaps this shows that we did prepare them well 33 34 as children of the Meeting. We continue our support for them as best we can, even though many no longer attend Meeting. Learning more about the Bible and our Judeo-Christian heritage is mainly left up to individuals to pursue as they choose. Those of us who attend adult Sunday School discussion hour have found the books of Marcus Borg helpful in expanding our view of the Bible and our religious heritage. Some of us also use various other sources for continuing spiritual growth and guidance. Many of us have found that asking questions is still an effective way to continue to be educated on issues. We actively support our local libraries and also our schools, as well as Scattergood Friends School. Although few of us have children in school anymore, we try to be involved in ways that we are able. Some of us take advantage of adult education courses in the graphic arts, others read a variety of materials and information sources, one is a volunteer in the local elementary school, and two are full time teachers in the public schools. We also recognize that remaining active in the affairs of our local communities is a form of education in itself. As we consider how gender-based expectations affect Quaker goals for education and career choices, we have become aware that in the past subconsciously many of us did have different gender expectations for our own children, especially regarding careers. In a rural area, employment for girls and women was limited by the conventions of the society we lived in. Summer employment especially was more limited and much lower paying for girls. The strenuous physicality of farm work placed some of these limitations that have since been eliminated or eased with increased mechanization. Now we see changes in this attitude in general as more women move into former "male only" occupations such as the construction trades, truck driving, etc.

2008

Improved communication among members of the meeting and parents involved in First Day School has increased awareness and involvement in planning for First Day School. The new calendar is helpful. Parents encourage the rest of the meeting to be more aware of what they are doing in First Day School and what we can do to support these activities; for example, awareness of the use of Styrofoam and writing letters to kids in Iran, a project of the Peace Center. Parents struggle against commercialism in raising their children. Parents involved in First Day School have developed excellent programs that encourage inquiring minds and thinking on both sides of an issue. The —Earth Day Birthday,|| where children give those with a birthday from among the things the giver owns, encourages better use of possessions and recycling. Ministry and Counsel has developed programs to encourage learning among adults in the meeting; for example, on Quakerism and 26 homelessness; and we are planning one on the environment this spring. The meeting has continued the Getting to Know You series which has been successful. We continue to support Scattergood School financially through our yearly meeting apportionment and also through service of members on school committees.

2009

One member mentioned the book Three Cups of Tea by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin concerning building schools for girls in Afghanistan. We are considering having a discussion of this book for our meeting. Everyone has the divine spark, but ignorance is an underlying problem. Extremist groups impose beliefs and contribute to a lot of violence in our world. Because of our location in a university town, we assume members are committed to education and life long learning. The First Day School Education Committee is working to integrate the meeting with the children's education program. Recently there have been fewer activities

for adult education. A program on basics of Quaker beliefs, traditions, and history needs to be provided again. It has been two or more years since we provided it. Presentations on potluck days have covered a variety of topics related to our values. A potluck presentation on history of the Iowa City Meeting would be a good idea. We plan to ask one of our members if she would be willing to plan that one, maybe in the fall to inform new attenders when school starts again.

2010

Beginning and ending with enthusiastic endorsement of fostering the spirit of inquiry, among both adults and children, the discussion explored many paths. Among children, encouraging meditation and inner resources for quiet times seems to help children become more independent and perhaps resist peer pressure. At the very least, the diversity of our First Day School teaching creates fertile ground for asking questions. As always, the subject of the Bible and other sacred texts elicited sometimes skeptical responses. The Bible can be used to reinforce power against individuals and groups, and some among us have been oppressed by this use. It can reflect our social power structure, if it is not read with an open mind. Those who have approached the Bible without preconceived opinions can find it fresh and inspirational; keeping in mind the context can help this happen. Many of us are inspired by writings from other traditions: the Torah, the Tao te Ching, Buddhist texts, for example. Reading the many commentaries on Torah can be a reminder of its

continuing revelation. We appreciate the Quaker belief that if we listen carefully for the Inner Light, we can still experience God being revealed to us in new ways. Of course, everyone has opinions about the public and higher education; most felt that the opportunity for youth to seek their authentic selves too often takes a back seat to learning content. Ideally, education brings forth the knowledge that one already seeks, as in the case of a medical student seeking the wisdom to know what to do when alone with a patient. Education that tries to meet children and adults where they are and to offer opportunities to experiment, explore and fail as well as succeed seems like the best kind.

2011

We see evidence in our younger people that both a spirit of inquiry and a loving and understanding attitude toward life have been nurtured. In lives of service to family and community and in continuing commitment to Quakerism we see this playing out and we celebrate. Probably the best way we can nurture these qualities is to model them in our own lives. In Omaha Meeting many are directly involved in education as teachers and in Lincoln Meeting a number are retired teachers and a few facilitate AVP. Two in Lincoln Meeting are on the Scattergood School Committee, so in some ways can affect education. However, others of us have concerns about the direction public education is

taking in the country, and, not being directly involved, do not see how we can do anything to redirect it. We see public education as fostering competition and compliance rather than inquiry and caring. We are concerned that we in the U. S. are so self centered about our country that we cannot see ourselves as we truly are, continuing to believe that we are leaders in science, medicine, and ethical behavior, when in fact we are not. It was noted that in Lincoln we do have a good school board which needs support as it challenges the direction the nation is taking. We know that we are not preparing ourselves for a changing world when we complain about how things are not as they were in the old days. It seems that in the present time there is too much information and not enough reflection. We ask ourselves, what would it mean for me to prepare myself for an active role in a changing world? While we recognize that education in many ways, helps us know how to live better lives, there may be too much reliance in our culture on formal education and degrees of various kinds. We need to respect different kinds of education—that learned by the people who went before us and that gained in reading or personal experience. We need to approach a new situation with a sense of both what can I teach or share and what can I learn? We can often learn from those without formal education. We need one another and we need to listen carefully to those who have

something to say. We could learn much from our own library. How do we foster a spirit of loving inquiry? The Mandan people would put things where people would see them. Some put themselves and their children where they can see things of interest. A guest once told our meeting that the way to get students involved in inquiry is through a trusting relationship with a teacher; a trusting relationship is the starting point. We have to make opportunities available and not insist that we know the answers. We continue to learn throughout our lives. Of utmost importance, we agree, is to be our best selves.

2012

With no dogma or creed, Quakers tend to naturally foster a sense of inquiry and attempt to resolve conflict in a loving manner. Listening is key. Children in the meeting are exposed to Bible study, study of other religious traditions, and Quaker education, although it is a challenge to plan for the small number, with irregular attendance. Friends appreciate the value of formal Quaker education and its impact beyond just Quaker families. Friends recognize the desire for adults to also engage in Quaker education. Friends are aware that we continue to struggle with gender-based expectations and that we need to be vigilant in this respect. It is important to stay involved and play active roles in our schools, libraries, and other

institutions in the community. We should seek to stay well informed about our communities. We prepare our children to live in a changing world primarily by our example

2013

We have experienced the fostering of a spirit of inquiry, and a loving and understanding attitude toward life in our yearly meeting. A number of us are involved in climate change work and we recognize that, as in peace work, people change when they see people around them changing. We need to change ourselves and to talk about good practices and attitudes so that these become the norm. We agree that we need to encourage curiosity. This is of primary importance and educational systems that are highly standardized can stamp it out. We want to encourage continuous learning, not just learning to get a degree. The fast pace of formal education does not work for all. Different genders, races and cultures learn differently and our system is basically geared toward white males. Younger people often make better use of digital learning than older ones. . . . We need to recognize the spiritual and emotional dimensions of learning, that learning is not just intellectual. Much real learning is experiential. To effectively foster a spirit of inquiry, excitement or passion is needed. In a class, a discussion may be without life unless someone has that excitement,

and takes a risk in putting him or herself out there, offering something of themselves to the discussion. . . . Students learn by connecting emotionally with a teacher and observing that teacher's interest or passion for the material...

2014

Parents always have concerns about how best to prepare our children to go forth into the future with faith, though we don't know what the future will bring as we look at our changing world, or, hopefully, to effect meaningful changes. We become concerned that the schools are teaching kids how to take tests, or how to look good on tests so the teachers' evaluations will be better! The Quaker attitude, traditionally, has always been that teaching students to pursue answers to pertinent questions is better than giving them answers. One parent/teacher mentioned that it is the children who are preparing us for whatever the future holds! And the electronic age sometimes takes over how we learn and how we use what we learn, especially in the connections we make locally and globally. Recent attention to bullying in the schools was mentioned, along with attempts in several areas to balance bad behavior by acts of kindness. Attention to adult education elicited several areas of exploration: a year of reviewing biographies of Quaker pioneers; Quaker roles in the education of

Native Americans; attitudes and beliefs regarding death, afterlife, near-death experiences, etc. We agreed that there is always much yet to learn from our rich heritage.

2015

In both secular and religious education we should be open to different points of view and opinions, recognizing there is no one right answer to most questions. Being open to questioning, and being exposed to different cultures and ideas are key to education. Young friends are incorporating Bible stories into First Day School once per month. Friends have sometimes been hesitant to teach the Bible, perhaps as a reaction to others who share a strict literal interpretation of the Bible. Providing the historical context of Bible stories is key to understanding the intent of the message. Friends' approach to the Bible can be summed up as: "Preach the gospel always. Use words as necessary." Gender bias in education has improved over the years, yet women around the world continue to experience discrimination. Friends see limitations to our current education system in the US, and that teachers are discouraged.

2016

Education to integrate our intellectual, emotional and spiritual dimensions hopefully prepares us to

face and deal with moral issues. It speaks directly to the values that embody an education at Scattergood Friends School. We seek to educate the whole individual. Such education can speak directly to the Quaker witness to community, in our families and other local communities, as well as the community of all people and the community of our planet, even our universe. Education must be more than about how we teach our children; we all need to learn about justice, reform, climate change and peace. A pervasive and prevalent tendency in our society is to educate people to become successful, to get good jobs, and be comfortable financially. This educational focus results in a subtle and perhaps not-so subtle judgment on people who have less education, on people who do unskilled labor. We could benefit from focusing on this underlying attitude. Does it affect education at Scattergood Friends School? Our religious education can find its source in unexpected ways. One Friend spoke of being a chorister as a boy, and how the repertoire of the music educated him religiously. The experience was hugely enriching. In similar ways, we appreciate that Scattergood is open to, and furthers, the idea of integrating work, classroom learning, and communal worship. A family in the Meeting made a trip recently to the Science Center in Des Moines, where one of the grandchildren was eager to share an exhibit on race. The exhibit showed why race has been reason

to differentiate. We are reminded that we never stop learning and experiencing new ideas. We may underestimate our influence for the potential to encourage people to think in new and different ways. We may become less wedded to our old thinking.

2017

The response to this query occurred at a time of the year when many of us reconnect with traditions and memories that evoke a special meaning for families and create a shared happiness. Past stories and present memories are shared in spirit that is unique to 60 our common understanding of what defines a family. We were challenged by one member to examine possibilities that stretch our awareness about what it means to have a “home”, what it means to provide “sanctuary”. For this member, family has come to be defined as “those who have your back and will stand with you, physically, emotionally, and psychologically in these spiritually bleak times”. May we know resilience when troubled times descend on us. May we know a humble courage when there is opportunity to keep a stranger, as we keep our children, in love and safety, and out of harm's way.

2018

Ministry and counsel is available to assist people who have issues that they don't want everybody to

be aware of. We share more of ourselves in circle after meeting through sharing joys and sorrows, and often time we follow up later in the week. For people who are new to Quaker practice, it can be confusing where to find assistance, so members of ministry and counsel are now making an effort to introduce themselves as such during our social time after meeting, so newcomers know where to take concerns in need of pastoral concern. We also note with gratitude the efforts one particular member makes to send notes to members who are away, particularly college students. Several in our query circle celebrated our experience of meeting as our chosen family. There are some who live in town but no longer participate in Meeting as their needs were not being met by the Meeting; they may prefer little or no contact. Those situations need to be respected; we hope to remain open to the possible return of such people

2019

As an aging meeting, we are very conscious of giving and receiving care. Some members feel comfortable asking for help and express their gratitude to those helpers. Other members are less enthusiastic about being helped. We go gently as we give rides and bring food. Both givers and receivers have reached a good balance and seem to be more comfortable in their roles. We are grateful for all the helpers here. We wonder

whether we share similar expectations. It is not something we tend to talk about. There are some who attended for a while and no longer do. We wonder what their expectations were. Do we need to talk about the expectations we have and bring to the meeting? Do we have a sense or memory of being loved in meeting? How do we let people know that they are valued and loved? Recognizing a gift or a potential and asking someone to serve in a way that the person has not realized that they could serve is a possible way to communicate that and to help that person grow into his/her potential. So, we need to invite people to take on responsibilities for the sake of that person and the community. We need to be aware of our giving potential and to “give thanks for everything and take nothing for granted.

2020

A number of us shared tenderly that the meeting has, in a sense, become family for us. In part because of our sense of closeness to each other, it is hard for newcomers to feel part of the group. We need to be aware of this. We know we need to grow in ministering to each other with sensitivity as we bring our own limitations with us into this meeting family. ... We perhaps respond more often to needs for care outside the meeting rather than within. Yet, within the meeting, we don't have a minister or person that has caregiving as part of a

job, so that when occasions arise, we must not lose sight of needs that may arise. We must be aware of these needs and take responsibility for responding. Although our numbers are small, the care among members is part of the richness of our meeting. Occasions for support may be relatively rare, but the feeling of support is always present.

2021

It is not “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” but “do unto others as THEY would have you do unto them.” People have different needs and we need to be sensitive to those needs. It is also our responsibility to communicate our needs to our community so that they can appropriately respond.

We are reminded that mutual care also extends to our awareness to recognize that, at times, we need to accept the grace and nurture from kindness and care that might be offered our way. This may also involve overcoming a reluctance to seek care and guidance from our meeting community. The seeds of compassion and learning to care for others can be nurtured by feeling loved and cherished. The response from a recent newsletter sent to our distant, perhaps inactive, members was encouraging. Our meeting remains vital in hearts and spirit, even at a distance. Celebrating good times and health while holding space for difficult challenges is a precious and necessary ability for us

to survive and thrive. There are deep reasons we are called Friends.

Whether in giving or in receiving help there is a similar dilemma. Sometimes we see a need but do not feel that we have anything to offer. We may not feel that we have what is needed to make it better. Alternatively, we may not feel that our needs should be brought forward or we may doubt that our community can address them. We tend to look at what we can offer as too small and too insignificant. When asked what we need, are we able to articulate what we really need?

Giving one another space to become our truest and best selves is an important dimension of mutual care. This is true for helping our children to learn and grow in the best way and it is also true for the relationships among the adults in our community. As we closed our time of reflection and sharing with some worship there was a sense of gratitude for the many ways that our Quaker meeting holds us together in a strong web of mutual care and concern.

2022

2023

The new technology of Zoom vastly changes the issue of keeping in touch with distant members. We celebrate our new reality of being able to be together in silence with both distant and near-by

members and attenders. And, this new reality brings new challenges: how to make the experience for both distant and in person attenders as similar as possible. How to make the experience of shared silence meaningful for all and bring all into one community? We try to remain mindfully aware of the unique circumstance and personalities in each situation as we address our response to one another's personal needs and times of difficulty. We share our memories as examples and note times when friends and family have refused our assistance, that acceptance is sometimes difficult for some for a variety of reasons. One remembers a generous friend of twenty years who was reluctant to accept help though he had provided assistance to others again and again. We note such barriers block an exchange that can benefit the connections of friendship and love. Unrequested, unwanted giving can cause resentment and tear relationships. Our tenderness and sensitivity Page 88 can sometimes overcome resistances, soften barriers and lead us to know how to give help without encumbering the one in need.

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.

2007

We are aware that we still carry outdated expectations for gender roles at times, in spite of our best intentions. Attitudes are usually developed in childhood and are sometimes difficult

to change, but we try with varying degrees of success. One important way of maintaining lines of communication within families, we have found, is by admitting when we are mistaken in a situation. Children especially seem to respond to such admissions and hopefully learn by our example rather than always seeking to blame others for their mistakes. This same openness is also helpful in marriages. We have expanded our definition of what constitutes a family over the years to include all types of units, and we seek to be supportive of all. We are aware, however, that there still seems to be a subtle stigma against single parents in the general society, depending on the community. We are thankful that prejudice against divorced parents seems to be less obvious and onerous than in the past. As we considered the changes in communication techniques that are now available in this electronic age and how these affect our children and grandchildren's quality of life and development, we are struck by the complexity of keeping things in balance, especially in dealing with the life of the Spirit. Teaching by example has always been more effective than mere words, but sharing our own experiences and beliefs is also important. Conservative Friends have historically hesitated to provide much formal spiritual guidance through set forms, so that individuals may develop their own understandings of the Divine Light. This hasn't always been helpful in

providing a basis for such development, however, as sometimes children have just been left confused and unsure of the roots of our faith. We are reminded that each generation has gifts of wisdom and knowledge that need to be shared.

2008

We feel led to support families and individuals in our meeting in every way we can. Each of us is connected—one with the community of Friends. Our meeting feels like a safe place for young people to learn to speak up and be assertive. It is not always allowed or accepted in the wider world. There is much pressure on kids to be popular and fit in. Here they can be individuals and be liked and accepted for who they are? Children learn from the modeling of adults. Our lives speak. Sharing life's experiences, struggles, and concerns with our children allows them to see a larger picture of the possibilities in life and helps them develop inner resources. One thing we can do for our younger members is to teach about healthy relationships, which can help prevent violence. Adults should let kids know if they are willing to listen. However, the young person may not always be willing to share. That should be respected. Families and our faith community can't do it all. Sometimes professional help is needed. Not all families are nurturing. Some are in denial about problems and even violence. Intimate interactions within a family teach children

what is acceptable, even if it is dysfunctional. Some homes feel like holy ground, where daily centering in the spirit takes place. These practices become apparent in the home. The connection with spirit is communicated by actions and words. Our sharing of joys and concerns and visiting while drinking coffee each week after worship are very much appreciated as a way to connect with each other and strengthen our bonds. Any opportunity to join together is an opportunity to nurture our community of Friends.

2009

Friends noted the importance of committing time to be together. Listening to each other, enjoying each other's company and encouraging each individual to grow in the Light are most important. In one Friend's experience, family life was rarely tranquil. It was important to accept that there will be disagreements and frictions between those who know each other well. Learning to be respectful and respond lovingly to those with whom we disagree, truly begins at home. After first congratulating ourselves on our gender neutrality, Friends came to agree that we do maintain deep cultural gender expectations. We are pleased to note that young Friends seem more at ease with nontraditional male/female roles than we were at their age. Truly listening to each other is key to effective communication. Storytelling is a simple,

effective way to communicate our joys and struggles. We all have favorite family stories which speak to who we are and illustrate complex life lessons. We have many opportunities in our community for meditation and social action, which allow us to put our principles to work. Taking the time to center, to listen to our hearts and the Divine inform our lives and our opinions. Taking action, engaging the world, enlightening society with our own small piece of the Light, deepens our understanding and experience.

2010

Of the households in our meeting, most consist of single adults. We wonder how well we support the needs of those who live singly. One member has taken an on-line course through Beacon Hill about five ways to read the Bible. Courses like this are means by which we can incorporate spiritual and religious teachings into our meeting and into our daily lives. We recognize the loneliness that can come with loss of family connections. A song from the Gees Bend community has lyrics "It's a mean world to stay in, to live in. No brother, no sister, no mother, no father. It's a mean world to stay in, to live in." We are reminded of just how foundational family connections are, and how lonely the world is without them. One of the challenges of living alone is to keep believing that one is just as loved as others who live in a larger family. It's a spiritual

challenge to live in the knowledge that we are each of us equally loved by God. We are mindful of the fragility of families, and many are under severe stress. It doesn't take much sometimes to pull a family apart. It is important for us to watch and communicate and be aware of each other's needs as much as we can.

2011

Although we usually think of a family as a group of people living together, we are reminded that in many ways our meeting is much like a family. We are struck by the second paragraph of the Advice, being aware that this description can also apply to our meeting community: "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." Many in our meeting have their actual biological families living far away, yet still we care about their well being as much as family members whom we see every day. One member expressed appreciation that in her Scattergood family there are scheduled times for silence and meditation. The expectation is that everyone in the school community participates, and this provides a needed incentive and structure for moments of quiet that could easily be crowded out by a busy schedule. This sentiment was echoed by another

member, who described a daily routine including scheduled times for silence and for communication. Meals can be an important time of sharing as well. Sometimes it is helpful to set aside a regular hour to discuss issues that arise and need mutual consideration. In a family system, division of daily chores is essential, and family members usually find themselves playing particular roles of behavior and responsibility. As long as we are sensitive to individual needs and skills when choosing these roles, we feel that roles need not be eliminated and can be healthy and useful. Keeping open lines of communication and giving conscious attention to the needs of the family as a whole and its individual members helps promote health and happiness in the family system. We know how easy it is to let these lines of communication close, that it takes effort and commitment to keep communication flowing. Yet it is worth the effort, for once closed, lines of communication are hard to re-open, and issues left unattended can result in future feelings of guilt and remorse. On the lighter side, a sense of humor can be an important addition to family life. Having fun together, enjoying special meals and going out to movies or other entertainment can be a vital component to a healthy family.

2012

Family roles of every generation are important. We believe that the roles we play as parents and members of all families follow the lead of our parents and those of the previous generation. Often the day-to-day necessities of earning a living and providing a safe and wholesome environment for our families are lessened or eased as we become older. This freedom from worry and responsibility is a blessing that allows the older generation to lead lives that exemplify the love of life and gratitude for the blessing we have been given. This valuable role shows hope to the next generation. Our homes are not only vitally important to our immediate family, but can also enable us to reach beyond our own family to meaningfully communicate with others. When we invite people into our homes we interact on a more personal basis. These friendships are crucial to long term success within a community.

2013

One of us was reminded of Joshua and how he described his loyalties, "As for me, in my house my heart is with the Lord." The home is a place to be who we are, with the spirit, among our individual family members and among our extended family. Love and understanding need to start at home. Life within this family is a journey that relies on trust, respect, acceptance and joyful sharing of all things. It takes a great effort to build family relationships.

We must devote time, which is often in short supply, to build trusting relationships where spiritual renewal can thrive.

2014

We noted the question recently in the news regarding the correlation between parental happiness and the presence of children. A concern was raised as to whether it is environmentally wise at this time to bring more than one child in each family. We considered who would be our family in a time of major crisis, who would we come to? We believe that social organizations can adjust and unrelated people can come together and support each other in times of need, despite the fact that our society is built on isolation and individualism. We thought about who we would protect from danger at such times. One family who chose to adopt children from another country recognized that this extended their sense of family internationally. In considering how we support various kinds of families, we thought immediately of our several elders living alone. One of our dear elders very recently died. We are aware of the importance of our being a supportive presence to those living alone and of the fact that in times of serious illness and death the immediate family plays the primary role. We are aware of the need that people have for community, that isolation is not healthy and we regret that our society uses

isolation as punishment in prisons. Some questioned whether today's children might be more self-centered and we recognize that, as adults, we might be promoting such attitudes. We who are parents need to understand how our children are communicating with us, to be sensitive to that and to keep channels open. Silence may be their way to get their own space. Making a place in our lives for a spiritual practice can help us grow in sensitivity to each other and in happiness. Grandparents can bring wisdom and perspective to families. We noted that the ideal for families suggested by the Query is not the experience of family most of us had as we grew up.

2015

There seems to be no different expectations for men and women in general in our meeting. We have tried to encourage each of our children to pursue their own path. We do see that only sons have returned to family farming operations in our own children, however, and this may be personal preference or just different expectations at the time they were growing up in the community. We do see more women being actively involved in farming in the community at large now, however, and understand that mechanization has made this more possible than in the past. Families are the major testing ground for communicating skills and we can be very theoretical about this. However,

when there are difficulties within the family it is very hard to put these ideals into practice. Some spoke of the effectiveness of using silence or “time-out” when feelings are running high. This gives those involved time to consider issues quietly and that often brings some type of resolution. Expressing forgiveness goes along with this technique, but is often difficult to say with honesty.

2016

One of us remembers the importance to her of Girl Scouting as she grew up; this included learning songs which she taught her children. Looking back now with a greater sense of our white privilege and unawareness, she can see those songs as very racist. We all need to support each other in a growing awareness of our own racism. Sometimes our children, growing up in a time of greater awareness, can help us in our growth. We know that we need to be more conscious and as fully aware as possible. We are aware that many in the working world today are under great pressure to work harder and faster, and thus become exhausted. The Query asks us if we set aside time for spiritual renewal and for many this is hard to do. The Pope, in *Laudato Si*, advises us to “slow down.” Our own testimony of simplicity can help us to do that. Our sense is that our society is pushing people too hard; if we slow down we think more about what we are doing. Is there a way that we as

Friends can witness to a slower and simpler life? Is there a way that we can support businesses which are respectful of their employees? That focus on their wellbeing rather than simply profit making? Are there ways we can actually nurture joy and a sense of contentment? One of us makes and sends cards expressing appreciation of co-workers.

2017

The response to this query occurred at a time of the year when many of us reconnect with traditions and memories that evoke a special meaning for families and create a shared happiness. Past stories and present memories are shared in spirit that is unique to 60 our common understanding of what defines a family. We were challenged by one member to examine possibilities that stretch our awareness about what it means to have a “home”, what it means to provide “sanctuary”. For this member, family has come to be defined as “those who have your back and will stand with you, physically, emotionally, and psychologically in these spiritually bleak time”. May we know resilience when troubled times descend on us. May we know a humble courage what there is opportunity to keep a stranger, as we keep our children, in love and safety, and out of harms way.

2018

Selected Responses Our families abound, whether by birth and blood, or through our beloved spiritual communities. We celebrate our connections, but are often challenged by the changes in technology and time management, understanding broader definitions of gender and equality, and the search for creative paths to acknowledge and express feeling and emotions such as anger and frustration. One Friend said “Love and concern for the well-being of all of God’s creation is in fact sometimes expressed through anger and through working to right “the things we cannot accept”. Intimacy is fostered when there is space to feel and express authentically “all” of our feelings while also being guided to what are appropriate ways to behave when expressing ourselves. Whether our birth family or our chosen family of faith, our family creates and enhances bonds of love not when we are pressured to conform to the ways things have “always” been, but rather when we give and receive affirmations of and witness to one another’s growing into our God-given wholeness

2019

We are aware that these Queries we are addressing are based on the assumption that those responding grew up in or are living in Quaker homes; many of us responding today are living in the Center (Community Corrections Center of Lincoln), an institution quite different from a

regular home. For those of us living at the Center, it does not seem like home as there are different energies there and a lack of respect for others. We want our homes to reflect peace and love; we do not find this at the Center and we have no control over what others do there. We do have control over our own attitudes and actions. We would like to lead the younger generation into better ways of life including gender equality. Someone shared that his mother used to share stories of her life that made him angry, but he's beginning now to have some forgiveness in his heart. Many want to share the stories of struggles of the past with their children, so that their future will be better; we hope the children can overcome stereotypes. We teach our children as we grow, hoping they do not make our mistakes. One person shared the embarrassment he experienced having to teach his children about white racism, about how to act in the face of police violence and that we still have to teach this after all these years. We are living in a very violent world. We know that White Privilege means that this violence affects us in different ways and at different levels. The lack of racial equality is evident in the varied responses that come as we experience or witness racist behaviors. Though none of us are living with children at this time, we all need to nurture ourselves as well as each other. It is good when we can visit each other in our homes; that there are a variety of kinds of

family, all needing nurture and safety. Home for all of us is somewhere we can feel safe; it may not be an actual place; it may be time with a friend or alone. We agree that home is where the heart is; if my heart is with me, then I am at home.

2020

Managing anger is hard when you've been raised in an abusive family. Quakers don't demonstrate or teach good ways to deal with anger. Meetings shouldn't always support families. Some families are not good and children or abused spouses may need to be rescued from them. Or an intermediate step where outsiders can listen to family members and try to help meet their needs and to understand each other's concerns.

Ask your children to pray with you.

2021

For some of us, recognizing a spiritual relationship with our pets can be renewing and deepening. Animal connections can affect our relationships with humans and give us hope. Loving animals is important to many of us.

If we have not invited guests and friends, neighbors and acquaintances who have racial backgrounds and identities different from our own into our homes, what is getting in our way to do so? We remember one late Friend who opened her home to many types of people, regardless of their

background, and her ministry of hospitality still speaks to those of us who knew her.

We gently offer a new version of one part of this query, “What expectations do we hold for each other as family members, regardless of gender, gender identity, or gender expression?” Do we wish “peace on earth, good will to all” as compared to “peace on earth, good will to men”? Such inclusiveness allows us to grow more fully into our shared and collective humanity as One Family.

In our households, we sometimes become aware of different perspectives that are grounded in our individual upbringing, cultural differences, differences of ability/disability. We need to find courage and humility to speak about difficult things within our families, and we need to find humility to be receptive to what is brought to our attention, whether out of conflict, difference, yearning, love, or leading.

We support the variety of families we have in our lives, whether by personal visits to young children, or sharing stories about some of our non-traditional households that are families, nonetheless. Committed couples who decide not to marry deserve affirmation that they may be considered family.

2022

2023

A Friend is sharing their writing with the University of Iowa's Women's Archives. They wondered if the material the Friend had to share would be wanted as it contained history of sexual violence, but all was readily accepted. Family stories revealing negative aspects are as important as those demonstrating positive aspects of family relationships. And it is right to include in the Queries that it is important to talk about both. The phrase "family, whatever its composition" speaks to us. The "disintegration" of the family is talked about a lot these days but this Friend finds this untrue when looking at their children's and friends' relationships. There are blended families; families that contain gay and transgender individuals; intentional communities like Prairie Hill cohousing where a group of people practice group decision making and living in community. The definition of a family is a group of individuals who love and care for one another. Another Friend was also struck by the phrase in the Advices lifting up the importance of "respect for truth, as each person discerns it." This phrase could have easily been left out but it has been included, and it has been so since the beginning of Quakerism. One person spoke of having moved from a rural home to town to a life-care retirement community, and how for many years the family was connected deeply to the rural nature of their place. Living in town in an

apartment building with many other older people has brought a new awareness of the potential for a spiritual belonging. Several members have shared their homes by inviting others over and holding welcoming events and gatherings. We have shared meals together in our homes, and also at local parks. Friends have opened their homes to exchange students as well as to visiting Scattergood students. Modern life has changed the old ways of hospitality, where it was not uncommon to allow even strangers passing through to sleep in an empty bed. May our homes once more become places more for people and less for things.

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 it's 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 attender 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, worshipping 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.

2006

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.

2007

From inner leading we recognize activities that energize the spiritual center, bring us peace and light, discerning these from others that detract and negatively impact our inner calm. We are challenged by the struggles that arrive with our personal commitments and constant activities. We talked about ways to simplify our lives by being more selective in how we choose to spend our time. We should examine what constitutes an addictive behavior or substance. Technology, food, and activities can chronically separate our attention from the “sacred center.” This requires us to remember what is important on our journey. We must sort out what is meaningful to our lives and work to create situations that lighten our physical demands and decrease our active engagement. We are mindful of how our personal decisions impact the environment and the energy demands in the world around us. We must be responsible stewards of energy and the other world resources. This requires that we remain at the same time generous and protective of the goods with which are our entrusted.

2008

We read and pondered Query 11 on social and economic justice. A member shared his experiences of visiting a young person in prison, and now in a halfway house, and how he

sees for himself that the claims of the government about training, social services, and mental health care within the penal system are simply not true. He has seen no evidence of any efforts in these directions. When the political candidates espouse change, as they all are doing, it is not clear whom the change is for, nor whether we might be called on to make sacrifices. The anti-immigration political agenda flies in the face of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25:35-36. Often we are privileged through accidents of birth and upbringing over which we have no control. We recognize that we find it difficult to empathize with people whose lives are so unlike our own. We know that living with people who are different from us helps us understand their reality better. Likewise, we believe we need to exercise our imagination to take in the realities of others' lives. We are aware that the benefits for the participants in work camps is enormous in opening us to how others in the world may live, and are also cautious that we cannot expect the underprivileged to carry the burden of educating the privileged. The work camp movement was a powerful tool for us, but may be a more limited tool for those whom it has been meant to help. We are reminded that many people may hate Americans because we do not even know why others hate us. At times, we have difficulty understanding how our behavior affects others. One couple that has traveled to the east by bus commented that they were almost the only white people on the bus at times. Bus travel is a strong indication of classism in our country. We hope that our belief in that of the Divine existing within all people makes it easier for us to understand another's perspective. Yet we ourselves have not yet been able to agree to marry a gay or lesbian couple. We need to look at ourselves, ask ourselves if we treat everyone equally, before we point fingers at others. We recognize that it is confusing to be American and to be taught that equality is for all, when at the same time our society expends much energy in perpetuating systematic inequity. Awareness of this discrepancy, and how we are all implicitly living within it, is

important to free ourselves to be able to make choices guided by Jesus' words, rather than by society's expectations. We also remind ourselves that the purpose of the queries is to help us live in ways that take us closer to God. A little guilt can motivate us to change, but it is not helpful to respond by spinning our wheels in the depths of guilt. The latter does not promote either thinking or action. We are all right and we can do better.

2009

The Advice and the Query give a daunting picture of an austere life which seems too much for us to live up to. We need to find a balance between the negative and positive responses to the query. We know that the testimony of simplicity sometimes can be a distraction when we interact with our neighbors. We find that the Meeting does help us to focus on the issues of the query. Our lives are 35 too cluttered, with material things certainly, but more importantly in our use of time. We recognize that speaking only the truth is a privilege that some may not enjoy. We do keep to the testimony of integrity by not saluting the flag, or standing for the national anthem.

2010

Time spent quietly whether in meeting or alone in meditation helps reaffirm our awareness of God. Spending time in nature sustains the Spirit. We try to keep a balance in our lives—doing what is important but not becoming involved in too many activities. This is hard because there is so much that needs our time and attention. Meeting helps us stop and seek what our proper way should be. The queries are valuable in helping us question

ourselves, our meeting and our larger communities. We value our rural connections allowing us simple, inexpensive recreation; walking, biking, fishing, feeding birds, listening to music, etc. We need to allow ourselves time to relax, play, and have fun. Our ancestors frowned on being frivolous so it doesn't come easily. There are many addictions in our fast-paced society. Computer games, time on the internet, excessive exercise such as running, lack of sleep, overeating, or overwork to name a few. Balance and discipline are important goals. We are usually fair, honest and dependable. Keeping our lives simple and uncluttered is where we fall short. We have been taught to be careful—don't waste anything—it might be needed—so our shelves and closets are full. We have the books, diaries, pictures and letters of our ancestors—so precious to us. Is this clutter?

2011

A number of us feel that our lives are too cluttered with things and with activities. We recognize simplicity as a worthwhile goal but find it is a challenge to achieve. Perhaps some of our attachment to "things" comes from a lack of trust that our needs will be met. What constitutes clutter may be different for each of us at different times of our lives. As our physical circumstances change, our needs can also change. Experience and

trust can be good partners. Sometimes tending to something one cares about can be misinterpreted as clutter. 28 Limiting the amount of space devoted to a particular type of “thing” can be useful in reducing clutter. A small but carefully selected amount of something can sometimes say more about someone than a large collection. Perhaps in our Reading Group we could explore this subject further. A daily spiritual practice could be helpful, but is not always easy to maintain.

2012

Part of the discussion mentioned how we can be mindful of Quaker values in our daily lives, using discretion in our choices of entertainment, topics of discussion with friends and family, finding escapes from routines that provide joy and beauty in our lives, rather than allowing distractions to personal spiritual growth. Balance seems to be important, though often not easy to maintain. Discussion of this query then turned to how we deal with addictions and mental illness and the ways families are affected. The stigmas that are still attached to sharing this information make it difficult to include in open discussion, but we are aware that we must seek ways to recognize this gap in our caring concerns and open ourselves to correcting it, both within our small groups, in the area-wide paucity of options for care, and in

statewide reform of the system. Perhaps this will be a topic for further discussion later in the year.

2013

This is one we work on all the time. The simplicity testimony is difficult for all of us. Meeting does provide a support group that keeps us focused on ways to simplify our lives, especially through the contacts of the Earthcare group. It seems we sometimes try to live the way we think we are supposed to, rather than focus on how life needs to be lived through us, so all things take their rightful place. The queries help us focus. Use of new technologies seems to result in people not being “present” with each other. Concern about secret organizations relates to the issue of keeping names of members of the meeting out of electronic distributions. Quakers historically were open about their identity. Those of us who feel offended by language used in films and advertisements on television tend to say nothing and the use of objectionable language is so pervasive now that it is very difficult to avoid their use. . . . The principle of integrity requires that we be careful to say what we mean, clearly. On the more positive side, new developments in cyberspace provide opportunities for Friends to connect more readily, and can include people who are distant from monthly meetings.

2014

Friends are aware that gambling, smoking, drug use and the consumption of alcohol have a tremendous impact on our day-to-day lives. The harmful effects that these products have on many lives are well documented. We attempt to make wise choices in regard to the use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco products in our own lives and to help others avoid the problems that use of these items can cause. Appreciation was expressed for recent regulations that reduce smoking in public places. In some ways our lives can seem more complicated now than in previous times. We try, however, to conduct our lives in honest and simple ways by making efforts to keep unnecessary material possessions and activities from over-cluttering our lives. We believe that most Friends have recreational activities that promote and foster mental, physical and spiritual health. We hope the practice of these activities helps others make healthy choices as well. We try to act with fairness and integrity in our associations with others and are conscious to avoid language that is offensive and oppressive.

2015

After noting others' lack of personal responsibility, we were reminded that the only one whose personal responsibility we have control over is our own. We right now are not modeling personal responsibility and serenity, and not allowing spaces

for reflection. One way that we can take personal responsibility would be in our willingness to be uncomfortable in some action we take: to refuse to go along with popular opinion as the people did who protested the PNC Bank's investments in mountain top mining. We need to be willing to take risks and speak up against injustice. To be responsible we need to speak when we witness unconscious use of offensive or oppressive language and sometimes we fail to do this. One of us had a powerful personal awakening long ago and learned that speech intended to be supportive, might actually be dis-empowering for someone else. Waiting for others to complete their thoughts rather than jumping in to complete a sentence is a way that we respect others. To be listened to and to know you are listened to is important. We need to model the behavior that we believe is a good way to live: it is the way to be most effective. We cannot force others. Meeting may be able to help us live lives of simplicity through our silent worship, through reflecting together and through modeling lives of simplicity. We can also be nurtured through our own reading and talking with others who have similar values.

2016

Personal responsibility is one of the most difficult of the queries because it is "personal". Asking us to separate ourselves by refusing to take oaths,

understating the full meaning of the word and the implication that we are only to be trusted when we “swear” to tell the truth, gives us the opportunity to demonstrate that we are who we are! Taking a stand may make others think about their own integrity. Forming trust is a balancing competition for mutual good. Being careful of language that hurts, open to the language of others that is not our own, and being better listeners are all ways to strengthen trust. Ameliorating a problem by NOT speaking may also be the course of wisdom. If diversity is important, we must not take offense but try to embrace differences. When meeting new people each puts their best foot forward, revealing whom they want to be, but forming a relationship goes deeper so each accepts the other where they are trying to earn trust that makes each a stronger person. James Baldwin said to treat every human being as a beautiful new record, then protect yourself from the monster they have become; we learn to set our own boundaries. One other thought was expressed regarding how we treat addiction with the reminder that addiction is not a moral choice.

2017

We wondered what had been early Friends testimony regarding tobacco and alcohol use. One Friend who has studied his Quaker ancestry extensively shared that somewhere in his family’s

history it was noted that a committee had been appointed by the Meeting to meet with a Friend regarding his excessive use of alcohol. Our impression is that historically -- perhaps 17th through 19th centuries --- Friends concern was in regard to excessive use rather than any use. In some of our own families alcohol simply was not used; in others moderate use was accepted. We reflected on the use of the Meeting appointed committee to meet with a Friend regarding excessive use, some perhaps feeling the Meeting was interfering, others realizing that such intervention could be appropriate and necessary. We recognize that our society today has a strong leaning toward individualism and individual responsibility, but we feel that in many situations a corporate responsibility is needed. Today many of us feel challenged to be centered and at peace, not because of any issues related to alcohol or tobacco use, but because of the challenges our present national leadership is providing us, coming from a value system that feels alien. Every day it seems that something new confronts us and it is troubling. Again we need to challenge today's obsession with individualism and try to move to a philosophy of collective responsibility, in regard to health care for example, we need to challenge the present administration's way of defining community and family narrowly; this leads to a narrow understanding of the country's

responsibility. As we think about fairness and integrity, we note that ‘checking your truth’ is important. We need to investigate to the best of our abilities and be open to being wrong and admitting it.

2018

We struggle to find appropriate ways to confront these overwhelming issues, beyond the usual letters and calls to seemingly unresponsive officials and institutions. Among our witness were the following thoughts: “Staying informed on social issues,” as the Advice mentions, consequently requires more than just learning how our elected officials will vote on an issue and what our Meetings support or refute. Being informed also requires that we learn from communities who face greater oppression than ourselves, and who would bear far greater damaging consequences if officials continue to overlook or minimize the needs of those communities. Another added, “I try to focus on what God is wanting of me when I am out in the world and being called on to be brave. I know it is what is being asked because I am usually somewhat crippled with fear of speaking – stomach clenched, heart racing, and yet I cannot speak up. I feel relief when I do speak up. That dual feeling of crippling fear and must be brave is one of my personal physical touchstones for when I am being

led to act. Being asked to do the hard thing instead of the easy thing. That feeling of being held firmly to a spot until I say what needs to be said, whether in the face of someone saying hateful things or engaging with someone who needs a friend. The feeling is the same.”

2019

We feel that we personally need some quiet space in our lives to nurture a relationship with God, or even awareness of God’s existence. We tend to clutter our own lives with news, social media, emails. One spiritual practice is to take advantage of moments of waiting that are imposed on us in the course of daily living: time while the coffee is brewing or the bread is toasting. We need to Page 28 Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) 2019 Minute Book balance de-cluttering with maintaining a healthy social life. One member who has recently moved into an assisted living community feels unduly pressured to join community activities. Another feels annoyed by overly social work colleagues. Screen time is both sedentary and distracting from the Spirit. We know we should be informed, and there is a place for screen-based entertainment, but we don’t need to go overboard, we need to find a balance. One Friend wondered if we are upside down in considering how we can cut back on things here and there to make time for the Spirit. That may be

misinterpreting the Thomas Kelly quote at the beginning of the advice, about “living life from the Center. “ We sense that living from the Center means finding balance and finding balance in many ways was a theme of this sharing. Some of us are blessed with unstructured time which seems to more easily allow for spiritual growth. And at the same time, we appreciate Thomas Kelly’s wisdom that the spiritual life takes no time while it occupies all of our time. What is the meaning of time and how we balance it? Many of us struggle with keeping a balance in honoring both respect for self with respect for others. Honesty in our communications with others sometimes needs to be balanced with consideration for their perspectives. Often we can be more open and honest with those we know well, while we are more circumspect with strangers. Balance involves finding a place where one is ‘at home,’ and it is our responsibility to find that place within ourselves. Some of us know that much inner housecleaning must be done before that home place is comfortable. Integrity for us means being one’s true self, speaking one’s own truth, from one’s own experience. This means not judging others and using the opportunity that reflecting on Queries gives us to look at ourselves. Taking a longer view and being in the present challenge us. Looking forward to what will happen and savoring the now — both valued.

2020

In this time of protecting ourselves from Covid 19, this Query seems to have grown in its meaningfulness to us. As we spend most of our time at home, what is important becomes more clear. Our lives are more simple so we are more able to listen to Spirit and to each other. We recognize that good listening helps us to serve each other better as our own ego is less in the way. Having some structure to our days, provides freedom. We are grateful for this time which gives us more opportunity to just be, and just being brings us to increased awareness so that we allow others' beingness to express itself. Things do begin to take their rightful places as we begin turn our lives over to God, recognizing that we are not in control and that God is walking beside us. ... Our world is such that we constantly must appeal to our ingenuity to avoid distraction and busy-ness. Perhaps it is more important to be aware of how we choose to give ourselves to distractions. They will be there and we cannot avoid them. How do we deal with distractions as we attempt to do God's will? What is the relationship between responsibility and integrity? The root of the word responsibility relates to how we answer. The root of integrity is oneness. How do we respond with integrity to find our way to God. ... If we are called to respond, we must consider the danger in responding to everything in the world. How do we

choose our responsibilities? Our responses need to come from the Divine Center, not from the clamoring of all the little things in our lives. ... We benefit from inequality and exploitation because we live easy, comfortable lives while others don't. Colonialism and Capitalism are systems that exploit other people and the Earth for our benefit. In Northeast Iowa we are privileged: we face climate change and can still grow food. We work "hard" and prosper: many work harder and languish in poverty. ... Engaging in addictive behaviors, whether it involves substances or activities, leads us further from our Divine Wholeness. When these issues touch us personally, we often struggle and question how to navigate an appropriate response. Prayerful compassion and being being wholly present to sit with those who suffer offers us the opportunity to carry our Love beyond ourselves. ... Many in our meeting have difficulty with the wording in this query, starting with the name personal responsibility. People struggling with illnesses of addiction need compassion and often help from others. As Quakers, we should lovingly support "that of God in everyone." As a society, we may shun or label people who need our support. The query is meant to be a warning to us, that we need to consciously think about how we spend our time. Are we spending enough time on spiritual matters? ... Substance abuse has affected us in our families and made it hard to keep centered. Our

lives have been deeply affected by drugs and alcohol. It is a secretive ailment that is not comfortable to talk about, which is why organizations such as Alanon are so helpful. Talking about cancer today seems more comfortable than it did years ago. We hope someday the stigma on discussing substance abuse will ease as well. We acknowledge that we don't have to be happy all the time; we can feel this sorrow and still become centered.

2021

In a way this time of Covid isolation has been a blessing as it has pushed us into more simplicity; things we might have thought we needed, we have learned we don't need or things we thought we must do may remain undone. And our lives still can become too cluttered with video conferencing meetings and classes. The increased use of the internet can bring new technology challenges, especially to those of us who are older. A possible positive use of the time made available through the simplicity of our lives is prayer; we may have dear friends and family who are suffering and in need of our prayers. We have the opportunity to learn what it means that we are called to pray. o "Personal responsibility" may put too much emphasis on the conservative "pull yourself up by your own bootstraps" idea that puts the blame on individuals who are having problems. Blame never

helps but we do need to strive to be accountable. o
A question was raised about the use of alcohol in moderation; some Quakers do use alcohol. There are many more addictions than drugs or alcohol – gambling, work, shopping; realizing the breadth of addiction is important. One Friend is hit very hard by this query. Having been exposed to addictions, this Friend has learned that addiction is not merely the result of eschewing “personal responsibility” but is a disease.

One Friend spoke of their experience receiving charity for the first time in the wake of Iowa’s recent derecho. This was an Page 88 opportunity for reflection about charity, about being a grateful receiver instead of a giver and the value of this vantagepoint. This Friend will be more open to just taking care of community members without focusing on who should or should not qualify for charity.

2022

2023

We affirm that living lives of honesty and simplicity are an essential part of a life of peace. Seeking to lead lives that are “uncluttered” both in our thoughts and with possessions are part of the practice of living with integrity. Being care-full with our words as well as what we choose to speak about can be a part of this practice. The simplicity

of Friend's method of worship helps us reflect on ways other aspects of our lives could be made less complicated. That hour of listening in silence helps us to hear what is important in our lives and gives us the strength to say no to additional tasks and responsibilities. For many of us our concept of spirituality is intertwined with the beauty and wonder of the natural world. We notice that the word integrity stands out noticeably in the advice. In the matter of refusing to take an oath that one is telling the truth, Quakers have found swearing that one is speaking truth implies that one does not always speak truth. Jesus said not to take oaths, that there would be divine retribution. We note also that Friends look to whether they are speaking truth to the letter or considering the spirit of truth and integrity. We think of the Friend who was questioned about what he had in his wagon. He was carrying slaves, aiding their escape from slavery. His answer was that he was carrying "hides." He spoke the truth and managed to defy the law with his clever use of language. His integrity was firm. We appreciate that the Advice is not worded as a rule, but that we are encouraged to think and act with integrity of the spirit.

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 3rd 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 3rd 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.

2007

This brought up registration for the draft. The point was brought up that many individuals at eighteen are too young to make the decision of whether to register or not. Our culture asks our youth too young. Many make a deliberate choice simply to

blow off the government, in other words not to make a choice. As a meeting, we have to be conscious of how we handle this time in our young members' lives. Voting is not the only way we take responsibility for our community, state and nation. In many ways, we assume responsibility every day in little ways...for instance, buying vegetarian, purchasing from small stores, and refusing to buy products from certain companies. These are well thought out decisions that can affect our community even more than voting. When asserting civic responsibility, our higher responsibility is to our society if the government is messing up. Laws are supposed to be just. Civic responsibility is a check and balance on the system of government. It is easy to respond to a difference of opinion with a lack of love. Therefore, it would be valuable with strangers, even if only in mind, to try to have a sense of common ground. Though many of us speak harshly about current politics, if we had the ability to speak to George Bush, if we could look him in the eye, our words would be loving. We don't cross the barrier and speak to those who are not of like mind often enough. One member spoke of how in a work situation, it made him feel alone if he was the only one with a certain mindset. However, over time he discovered how he could speak his mind and still get along and truly like his fellow workers. Sometimes an "I" message worked, i.e., "This is not a cause I would be willing to

sacrifice my life for...or the lives of my children". This story engendered a lively discussion, full of pithy comments. "Reaching the heart is what changes a person." "I am not trying to convince a person on the spot. I am trying to be one of a hundred to convince a person over time." "Even if you disagree, paying enough attention to know what will affect a person is a form of love." Mostly we asked questions: Is integrity at risk if you are in a position of power? How do we discern what we need in order to be healthy inside? Isn't one of the points of pacifism to not acquiesce to violence (unjust power) being acted upon us? Quakers do not seem to be a group of people who tend to seek power. We tend to take pleasure in community; we are professionals, middle class, small business owners. We spoke of methods of prayer...long walks talking to God, quiet meditation, journaling...and how, over time, these methods can become a wonderful life practice and leave us more open to divine leadings.

2008

We are aware of the deep conflict for many of us as we struggle with the dilemma of paying taxes that support programs that benefit our lives as well as others lives and the large portion that goes for military and to support the death penalty. The issue is very troubling and remains unresolved. This election year has provided a more open forum for

discussing political views. Although we sometimes disagree with another person's views, we try to express our own with love, but are not sure we always do so successfully. So often, political views are expressed with vehemence and surety that one's own are the only correct views, it is difficult not to respond in kind. We are often alarmed at the measures individuals are willing to take in order to feel secure from imagined threats. The loss of personal liberty in the last few years in the name of national security is of great concern. As we face the changing economic situation in our nation, we are aware of the real dilemma the country faces as a diminishing world power. While we often individually feel powerless to make any kind of significant changes in our government policies, we try to support organizations that address the many complicated issues we are concerned about. Although concrete results may not be what we quite anticipated, we are reminded that our efforts may bring unexpected benefits.

2009

Because we sometimes cannot support the actions of our government, we make a strong effort to work for issues we can support in our nation, state, and community. The recent pervasive atmosphere of violence, fear, and misrepresentation is destructive to learning to work together for solutions to our many urgent problems. The

seemingly everlasting election process is cause for much alienation and distrust. We feel we work hard to support good candidates and we often contact and thank our elected congressional representatives when we approve their work. We also contact them when we don't. We are greatly concerned about the overcrowding and unjust sentences in our prisons. Several of our members work for the Alternatives to Violence program in the prisons. We support several Quaker organizations working for a just and fair society, so that many who are powerless and ill-treated will not resort to violence and hopelessness. One of our members is concerned about plans in the Dexter Community to put up a statue and commemorate a violent period in their history when the Barrows Gang hid out near there. He had the courage to speak out, but felt his views were not accepted. While it is important to share our convictions, listening carefully to others is key to resolving conflicts. Others might have a better way. We all have different talents and different gifts to work for a better community, nation, and world. If we are tender hearted, loving and sincerely seeking Divine Guidance the right path will be more clearly laid out before us.

2010

The most obvious conflict between the laws of our nation and our religious convictions is the use of our tax money. There is no easy resolution of the problem of the largest portion of our taxes being used for military spending versus Friends testimony on peace. We are torn between taking responsibility for the benefits that our tax dollars bring to our state and nation, and the reliance on military power in any conflict situation. We have not arrived at any unified course of action regarding this difficult decision. The current “gun fetish” that is currently so pervasive in our society is disturbing and contributes to the climate of fear that pervades our whole culture from home life, to our schools, and even to our legislators. Children learn coping skills from their homes and neighborhoods that in turn can lead to violent responses to many situations when their surrounding environment is filled with aggression. We are encouraged by the efforts on the part of schools to initiate programs on dealing with conflict situations by mediation rather than aggression. We struggle as individuals with the moral question of how we would respond to an aggressor who invaded our homes or communities and recognize that if we could be as dedicated to peace making as those who are warriors are to war and violence we would be more effective. In a disagreement when both sides claim to hold the “truth” about an issue it is difficult to discern what

is the truth. In our current political climate, it seems that money often claims to be truth.

2011

We recognize the efforts of groups that represent similar values such as FCNL, AFSC, AVP, Iowa Peace Network, and Citizens for Community Improvement, and a local crisis intervention and advocacy center. We can encourage those who advocate for fairness and justice. Friends feel it is important to share our concerns with those who are involved in making decisions about policy. We must carefully consider how to best speak truth to power, to not unduly offend our governmental representatives, yet to make clear to them if we have deep concerns about their positions on issues. As individuals we try to stay aware of local and global issues and be involved as we are called by the Spirit. We seek to be mindful of the Divine spirit within everyone.

2012

We sometimes feel so at odds with our government that we don't know how to begin. We can't understand why "they" talk and act as they do and we don't have confidence in what they tell us. Society seems to be set up so that hard work and integrity are not rewarded, and it is difficult to believe that our leaders are acting in faith even when they claim that they are religious. Our

feelings of confusion and powerlessness, along with the disrespectful and unpleasant tone of the public discussion discourage us from participating at all. However, we believe that living in the Light requires that we speak and act with integrity, which means that instead of withdrawing from this bewildering world we must try to respond to it in Truth. We must try to act based on what is right whether or not we calculate that it will be effective. We feel we need to work harder to check our leadings and strengthen our actions through worship. Real communication seems more possible at the local level, where we can meet face-to-face and know elected officials over time. Part of acting right is remembering that politicians and bureaucrats are people, with both goodness and weakness. They invest a lot in understanding issues and developing relationships, which can make it hard for them to stay clear in their purpose. God may lead us to help them do that. We were reminded that we are also people, and while no one taking part in our discussion had sought public office, all work for government at some level. God might be leading us to bring our faith more clearly into our own work, perhaps by taking a stand even though confrontation can be unpleasant.

2013

We find ways to assert our beliefs in our daily lives and homes, particularly in the realms of health and

ecological living. . . We are often struck with how economic powers, which wield strong influences on the formation of the laws of the State, oppose our religious convictions, such as with the peace testimony. . . Living with the conflicts between ideas based from our faith, and those our State expects us to accept, can cause fear about who is really in power, what is Truth, and what and who can be trusted. Thoughts like these paralyze our actions, and we recognize the need to keep an intentional faith and hold dear our supportive community.

2014

We considered the advice on civic responsibility. We spoke to ways we feel we fail to live this advice, to the complexities of knowing what Truth is, and how that complexity makes it difficult for some to speak out in our communities. It is not sufficient to speak and act for social justice because we feel social pressure to do so. An external obligation is not the foundation for speaking truth to power. We must be led by the Holy Spirit from within. We try to make choices that, however small, come from within. One member is glad to be part of the Fulbright community. It is not an easy task to know what we believe or what we need to do. We are aware that to stay informed about the world can be a discouraging and daunting task, as we struggle to discern truth in the avalanche of information

available today. One person recalled her teacher, Bob Berquist, who urged his students to stay informed. We considered the thinking of the writer, Margaret Wheatley, who has suggested that our society is lost in a world wilderness in which the usual ways of taking action are no longer working. She suggests the importance of discernment, of pausing to connect with the Spirit and listen to its voice. That Inward Teacher or Light can advise us, helping us find the path, speak truth to power, and to act with courage. We must begin always from the knowledge that there is that of God in all people. That can help us find the path through the wilderness.

2015

Sometimes we become politically active when a particular issue is at stake and we become angry at the current trends or lack of action by government officials. We many then be spurred to become “a part of the solution” with hope for changes at the grassroots level. We learn that not all efforts are rewarded at the polls, but feel enough local support to try to do more. One person asked “is civil disobedience inconsequential?” citing recent Supreme Court decisions. Trying not to just be angry: in our complex world with much corruption, “who can we trust”? We know that violence does not stop wrong-doing, only exacerbates it. It is surprising to learn that people who believe as I do

may not be “good people” in their actions, while others who believe differently many join in the causes for justice and peace. Perhaps our motivation should be to do right rather than to effect change: one must feel compassion for all others and care of the environment in order to sustain any effort. Our daily lives reflect our attitudes and relationships with civil authority and carry on into interactions with the rest of the world. Simple deeds, exchanges, and purchases demonstrate how we really, personally, care for our immediate environs. Be a good neighbor! You may find yourself interested in organizations you know little about.

2016

difficulty seeing that of God in everyone at this time of presidential campaigning and congressional inaction

our first allegiance should be to the holy spirit – are we careful to reach our decisions through prayer and strengthen our actions with worship?

Friends need to keep informed and speak truth to power nationally and locally

we profit and are victimized by our white privilege – need to be aware of racial profiling, income disparity, etc.

we have a clear responsibility to remain aware of climate change and be willing to make personal changes, corporate changes, and be involved in

local and national actions to affect significant changes ie. Bakken Pipeline, frac sand mining, etc.
are we open to civil disobedience if called? Are we willing to offer sanctuary to refugees if called?

2017

Decorah Friends discussed the conflict between American Indians and a proposed oil pipeline that had the potential to poison their water supply and cross part of their tribal land. We are concerned about the continuing conflict between for-profit corporations and the health of our environment. We may not always oppose the laws but oppose how they are administered. Many friends have a continuing concern about the percent of our taxes that go to pay for the military. They see the Peace Tax Bill as an unresolved issue. Our local Peace and Justice Center does outstanding work on important issues and is currently involved with the issue of guns and the gun laws in Iowa and the U.S

2018

Initial discussion centered around the inappropriate use of the phrase "Friends believe". Since we do not have a dogma, but rather agree on the process of seeking together with respect for the views of others, there is no universal "belief". We've been asked to comment on changes that should be made to our queries, and this is one that bears further discussion. This led to the importance

of language and the responsibility to choose carefully how we state matters of faith, speaking always lovingly to others, even if differing in belief. In considering whether ... those whose beliefs or actions include violence would be welcome to worship within our community, there were doubts, though some felt that hateful attitudes in peaceful worship might be brought into the Light. ... Our discussion of this query centered around several political issues that are currently prominent in the news. One person spoke of their mixed emotions about the recently passed more stringent requirements to the state abortion law. Another shared her personal experiences of working in a county hospital where she saw abuse of the legal right to an abortion and consequently felt strongly that the seemingly arbitrary taking of human life should not be condoned by the government. Another felt concern that there seemed to be a lack of understanding in Congress and the legislature of the economic conditions that effect personal decisions on many levels.

2019

We have a long history of good intentions regarding social justice issues. The Quaker boarding schools for Indigenous children in which we tried to “civilize” these children is one example. The idea of the penitentiary as a more humane and spiritual way to deal with those who broke the laws of the

land is another example. Attempts at humane treatment of the mentally ill is another. We acknowledge with humility that we are learners and we recognize that some of the ways we have tried to address wrongs were well intentioned, but still not right. We hope to have the courage to continue efforts to move toward a more just society. We feel a strong sense of responsibility to vote and to communicate with those we elect to serve us at various levels of government. We value the model John Woolman gave us in his dialoguing respectfully with slave owners regarding the injustice of slavery. We practice praising our elected leaders when we feel that their words and votes are just. We recognize the wrong of current laws that keep many who are able to contribute in a positive way to society from voting. We realize the need to take into account a wide variety of life experiences, rather than seeing only through the lens of our own experience. We realize the importance of integrity and, when we are in positions of power or responsibility, acting from a spirit of justice and fairness. Another aspect of that integrity is to stay true to ourselves in our speech, especially when we are aware of potential harm to those with less power. Being a mediator can require strong integrity and courage. People of faith can be bridge-builders. Are we called to this work? How can we not vilify others while clearly and strongly speaking our Truth? As Gandhi stated,

“It has always been a mystery to me how men can feel themselves honored by the humiliation of their fellow beings.” Can we spend our energy in prayer for those with whom we strongly disagree? Truly respecting those we seek to serve includes letting ourselves be followers to support the development of leadership in marginalized groups. It is important not to co-opt their leadership by always inserting ourselves into these roles.

2020

Friends find it easy sometimes to focus on national and international conflict and forget the violence against folks here; hunger, inadequate housing, lack of regional health care, unrecognized poverty affecting children. I believe our economic system in the US and the market/state are among the biggest causes of violence in the world today. ... Several Friends stressed the importance of listening closely to what others are saying. Others will respect and begin to listen to us if they realize we value what they are saying. Testimonies help us think about our actions and feelings before we actually take action. Testimonies help us in difficult situations, where we have to interact with people who do not share our values. Seeing that of God in everyone is important, and sometimes all we can do for people is to pray. In our current political environment, we may have difficulty seeing humanity in those whose opinions differ from ours. Listening to others is

hard when our values conflict. As Quakers, we need to reach out and listen to those who are vulnerable, and help others fight for their rights whenever possible. ... Members agreed that given the deep polarization of belief in our society, discussions with those of opposing opinions are challenging. We struggle to have loving attitudes towards those with whom we disagree. We find that more productive discussions can be held if we ask questions of the other party, rather than simply to confront opinions which differ from our own. A book by Harold Heie was mentioned as a good resource for methods of respectful conflict resolution between groups with differing opinions.

2021

We see Friends evolving over many years in our understanding of what it means to respect those we hope to serve. Every year we consider this query at tax time when we are aware of our personal conflict with the payment of taxes that support the military, yet we pay them in part because we know that taxation also supports much that we need and support.

There is so much in this query. Many of us have become aware that laws are not applied in an equitable way (e.g. recent deaths of Black people at hands of police). This query gives us many options: civil disobedience, prayer, advocacy. This friend struggles with how to live out Quaker

testimonies with the demands of work and family. One Friend sees this as the darkest moment in American history. But in their lifetime, we have gained, not lost, civil rights, equity for women, rights and fair treatment of persons with nontraditional gender and sexuality. The challenge is great, but it is our responsibility to struggle. This Friend challenges those who have the time to engage in civic responsibility. Our discussion for this Query occurred two days before the 2020 election. Our hearts were filled with both cautious optimism and serious apprehension. Although the query can inspire and challenge us in our testimonies, we acknowledge that this query was conceived as a snapshot in a certain time, and the thoughtful, faithful discernment that was required could not envision the extreme polarization of our political discourse and the real, immediate threats to our democracy. In this light, we were challenged to ask what might be missing within this narrative of our advice and query. Do some of these go far enough to reflect the times we now inhabit? A suggested further query might include: "How do we respond when so many experience systemic loss and suppression of their voting rights?"

2022

2023

Friends spoke of ways they have found hope in these times and with this darkness. There are young people with energy providing structure and form and inviting us to join them. Hearts can open by the telling of real stories about real people; by putting a face on what is happening. There are everyday victories such as helping people find a little power over a bad situation. Our political landscape has taken a darker turn with increasingly mean-spirited legislation aimed at LGBTQ+, poor, and voiceless communities. We seek to find ways to counter these areas of public discourse. Recently, a few members attended a rally at the Statehouse to voice support for the transgender among us. Recognizing our Quaker educational history and witness gives us a hopeful balance to many of the social and political dilemmas that we encounter. If we embrace our “peculiar” testimonies, we can reveal our vision that can be a mechanism for awakening the light in others, perhaps even our elected representatives. This “audacity of hope” can truly bring about a transformation in our world. We need to share optimism both about the inherent quality of the Inner Light in humanity and about the possibilities of bringing justice to the world, but only by non-violent action. The polarization of belief apparent in our society and our political parties continues to be a problem for all of us. This polarization increases our awareness of how members of this

society have widely differing views of what constitutes civic responsibility and how they should properly and effectively act upon it. Some groups seem to be energized and activated by the differences among us. Others may find the chaos created to be overwhelming and may back away from involvement of any kind. While no single individual act will turn the tide on the many issues facing the human family, we do understand that engaged living, grounded in spiritual discernment, does have a corporate effect. Questions of how much meat we eat; how much gas we use; how much we consume; how much we throw away; how we express our views to legislators and neighbors; how we offer care to communities in need, all contribute to our common life.

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 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 Neibuhr 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.

2007

This brought up registration for the draft. The point was brought up that many individuals at eighteen are too young to make the decision of whether to register or not. Our culture asks our youth too young. Many make a deliberate choice simply to blow off the government, in other words not to make a choice. As a meeting, we have to be conscious of how we handle this time in our young members' lives. Voting is not the only way we take responsibility for our community, state and nation. In many ways, we assume responsibility every day in little ways...for instance, buying vegetarian, purchasing from small stores, and refusing to buy products from certain companies. These are well thought out decisions that can affect our community even more than voting. When asserting civic responsibility, our higher responsibility is to our society if the government is messing up. Laws are supposed to be just. Civic responsibility is a check and balance on the system of government. It is easy to respond to a difference of opinion with a lack of love. Therefore, it would be valuable with strangers, even if only in mind, to try to have a sense of common ground. Though many of us speak harshly about current politics, if we had the ability to speak to George Bush, if we could look him in the eye, our words would be loving. We don't cross the barrier and speak to those who are not of like mind often enough. One member spoke of how in a work situation, it made him feel alone if he was the only one with a certain mindset. However, over time he discovered how he could speak his mind and still get along and truly like his fellow workers. Sometimes an "I" message worked, i.e., "This is not a cause I would be willing to sacrifice my life for...or the lives of my children". This story engendered a lively discussion, full of pithy comments. "Reaching the heart is what changes a person." "I am not trying to convince a person on the spot. I am trying to be one of a hundred to convince a person over time." "Even if you disagree, paying enough attention to know what will affect a person is a form of love." Mostly we asked questions: Is

integrity at risk if you are in a position of power? How do we discern what we need in order to be healthy inside? Isn't one of the points of pacifism to not acquiesce to violence (unjust power) being acted upon us? Quakers do not seem to be a group of people who tend to seek power. We tend to take pleasure in community; we are professionals, middle class, small business owners. We spoke of methods of prayer...long walks talking to God, quiet meditation, journaling...and how, over time, these methods can become a wonderful life practice and leave us more open to divine leadings.

2007

The conversation was lively, indicating participant interest and involvement in these issues. The group indicated awareness that the United States consumes a vast proportion of the world's resources, that our economy is based on consumption, and that the issue is complicated. There are indications that we, as a nation, are becoming more aware of our environmental responsibilities and challenges on an international scale. Such indications include the focus of the most recent Time magazine and Al Gore's campaign to educate the population on global warming. There continues to be a major segment of our population which is "keeping their heads in the sand" about this issue. The issue can be overwhelming. How can one individual be effective in making a change in such an overwhelming task? The extreme sides of this issue can be off-putting, with the issue such an emotional one it makes some avoid it altogether. Discussion included water

usage and irrigation specifically, fuels and transportation limitations in this country, and the ways we can impact these by limiting our use of water and energy/fossil fuels with efficiency and alternative methods which will reach the same goals. The group displayed an obvious awareness of conservation/environmental issues and ways we as individuals can conserve in our daily lives, along with a genuine interest in conserving. Attitude is important. Also, we have choices that can impact the environment relating to where we spend our money. We can build "green." We can select foods that are grown in environmentally sensitive ways (Whole Foods is an illustration). There are numerous ways to spend in an environmentally responsible way while also supporting our consumption-based economy. Members of the group shared stories of the uniqueness of the environment, such as the simple ways birds enhance our lives, the complexities of their (bird) world, and the reminder that we are all a part of nature, just like the birds, so human activities could/should be considered as a part of nature. Some talked about using an item until it is worn out before replacing with a new/newer item. Not all energy solutions are without controversy, such as fluorescent lights which are energy efficient but research has indicated their detrimental effect on autistic individuals, as well as disposal of their mercury content. Not many solutions are without

side effects to take into consideration when making choices. It was noted that in the last eight years several initiatives that were making a difference in an environmentally responsible way have been stopped/dropped by our government. Family planning is at the core of over-population issues and the health care issue is directly related. Des Moines Valley Friends Meeting can look with pride to our most recent project of replacing a worn-out heating and cooling system with a geothermal system. Although the cost of the initial installation is greater, the impact on our environment is substantially improved and long-term cost of operation will be reduced. We are indeed putting our money where our stated values are. We have joined the national Friends as exemplified by the new FCNL office building in Washington, D.C., a green building. Our actions are matching our words and we hope to share these actions with a broader community to inspire more movement in this direction of environmental responsibility.

2008

We are encouraged that concern for environmental issues has become more widespread in the society at large. Yet we are troubled that the attempts to address these concerns do not question or attempt to alter the disproportionate use of resources, both as residents of this country and as human beings

on the planet. We are challenged by the advice to give thought and effort to replenishing what we receive from the earth, knowing how short we fall. As one Friend asked, —How can I possibly give back what I receive when what I receive is my very life?|| What we give back is profound gratitude for the earth and the joy we experience when we live in harmony with creation. We recognize that a strong emotional connection to the earth is necessary and we work to nurture this in ourselves and others. We hope to mobilize with gratitude rather than guilt. We seek to live simply and be good stewards of the earth’s resources. We go out of our way to grow and prepare our food. We are content with smaller houses and older cars. We recognize that living responsibly does not have to be difficult; it is in fact fun and satisfying. We look for ways to communicate this to others. 30 We struggle with our dependence on cars. We find it hard to imagine the earth restored unless people stop driving cars. Yet we are unable to do so ourselves, and we ask ourselves, —If Quakers can’t stop driving, who can? We hold this concern as we calculate our carbon footprint, and make choices to reduce it. Even small changes, such as driving at or below the speed limit, can make a difference in ways we cannot know. We seek to remain open to the leading of the spirit as we grow in our awareness of our interconnectedness.

2009

Our meeting is very concerned about our responsibility to our environment. We want to support the life around us that is also so much a part of ourselves. Our monthly reading group has been studying —Environmental Economics|| with essays by John Woolman, Kenneth Boulding, Marshall Massey and others. Frequently awareness can make a difference in the choices we make to live responsibly. At our open house one member gave a tour to share knowledge about the —green building|| that now houses our meeting. Making choices to improve energy efficiency is important and we should weigh the cost of efficiency against how much we value our planet. It is important for us to take responsibility for the choices we make. We recognize that by decreasing our use of fossil fuels we can live more simply and in harmony with creation. Our meeting has endorsed the Earth Charter, implemented a True Cost of Travel program, and done many other things with regard to environmental issues. Still we recognize that it is hard to be as responsible as we need to be, and continue to be a part of the greater society. It seems that the only way to be responsible about our use of energy would be to renounce use of fossil fuels and live apart from society. It is hard to find answers for the deep questions that we feel we must answer, and sometimes awareness and information come to us in paradoxical ways. For

example, the television often has excellent programs on environmental issues. Even as we meet here in a brick building which sits on a concrete parking lot, we can hear birds singing and notice the tracking of the sun across the sky. Perhaps Malvina Reynolds' song, about the inevitability of grass growing up through sidewalks, can give us a measure of hope: God Bless the Grass!

2010

We are all thinking about the damage humans/ we have done to our planet. We search for ways to make a difference. We know that we are all part of a system that operates far beyond our individual control. We remind ourselves of Don Laughlin's teaching of the importance of models, as we attempt to live closer to the divine, the good connection, with the universe. We are also thankful and appreciative for 31 Don's faithful attention and work for the environment over so many years. He is a model for us all. We spoke of the importance of setting examples for our young people, as well as being open to the teachings young people have to offer us. It is through respect for creation and community that we may find way opening for us. We note that we operate with a deficit when we label anyone as 'other.' When we make a distinction between 'us' and 'other,' we can be sowing the first seeds of conflict. We have taken

new steps in our search for environmental responsibility since we last answered this query. We are grateful for the formation of the Earthcare Group, which is involving Friends from our meeting, the West Branch Friends Church, and the Iowa City Meeting. The group is actively addressing these questions. It is a growing and enriching experience for those involved, reminding us perhaps that lemonade can be made from lemons. We are glad that last spring and summer the meeting embraced the idea of cooperatively harvesting and preserving corn to provide locally grown food for meeting families. It was a meaningful and fun project. Yahara Meeting is taking initiative to replenish some of what we are given. One of those gifts is petroleum. With the Earthcare Witness Program Yahara has suggested a way to calculate the true cost of travel and is asking people to pay that cost. Any funds contributed are being used to support Scattergood Friends School's goal of establishing wind power on campus. We thought about how to continue our work. Perhaps the Earthcare Group can alert us to legislative action on such issues as the burning of coal, and the subsequent damage that causes. We heard about a group of people in Sweden who have calculated that if each person were to use energy at a rate of no more than 2,000 watts (17,500 kilowatt-hours annually), there would be enough energy to meet everyone's needs. This

would be a significant limitation, but one that can be lived with. We are aware of the compromises life requires of us. Do we fix or replace old appliances when new ones may be more efficient, but have a built-in obsolescence factor? Most difficult of all perhaps are the compromises we face within family and community life. Families are spread across the country, even the world. We are used to traveling for meetings, but are beginning to use conference calls, despite the lack of face-to-face communication. Questions about the use of computers and cell phones, which often are outdated within a few years, raise questions about disposal. Modeling a lifestyle not dependent on satellites, the internet, cell phones, etc. is very difficult. Our world expects us to be tied into the electronic world. 32 We face a series of compromises that are not easy to figure out, especially if we have children. How do we make a difference with our small decisions in the face of the much larger system we are all part of? How do we walk the other way? We charge ourselves to embrace and carry the magnitude of the first sentence of the Advice. "All of creation is divine and interdependent: air, water, soil, and all that lives and grows." There is that of God in us and in nature. We may not always be clear about how to proceed, but we see clearly that it will require community to create change. None of us can do it alone. We are grateful we are not alone.

2011

We discussed the various recycling programs available in our area and also shared the small ways we are trying to be good stewards of the earth. We also discussed the tradeoffs of buying locally grown food that may mean a trip to a town that is farther removed than buying from our local food market. It is discouraging to feel that in spite of our concern for the environment, nothing we do seems to make much of a difference. The comment was made that we as a nation need to shift our thinking that growth is the answer to our economic problems and shift to a more sustainable pattern of living. We are also aware that population growth is at the core of many of our problems. We recognize it is a balancing act between what we do practically and staying true to our spiritual concerns. We are aware of the violence that is prevalent in our relationships with the rest of creation, but aside from being conscious of changing our own patterns of living as best we can, our efforts seem minimal. We do try to nurture and respect life around us.

2012

If education about our interdependence were offered from the very beginning, we would grow up with more sense of interconnection. One member put the experience of communion in a new light. When we eat – “this is my body, my blood” – we

recognize that this food is connected to us. The food we eat is our body; the liquid we drink is our blood. This perspective opens the door for thinking about interconnection and looking beyond self-interest. . . . The connection between materialism, environment and spirituality makes one think of John Woolman's observation about the true interconnectedness of everything, and how the growing materialism of the culture of his day was causing people to be cut off from the Spirit. This is the insight that underlay his fight against slavery. Material desires cut you off from the Spirit; this allows you to treat the environment or fellow beings as if they were not part of you. The challenge is how to extricate ourselves from this.

2013

Our meeting has several members who remain active in ecology activism, who write to state and national legislators with concerns and observations, weighing in on the side of our responsibility to . . . our environment. FCNL directs petitions to our representatives and has gathered questions about environmental viewpoints for candidates. We talked of the debate about climate change and the direct role that human actions have in changing the balance of our atmosphere and how powerful the corporations have become with influence of money and lobbyists. Drought is a big problem but remains ignored politically. We

wonder how we can counter the attitude about “American exceptionalism?” Can we influence trade and express our values about the right sharing of resources? We acknowledge that our personal sacrifices and changes in habits have small consequence but we practice them out of conscience anyway. Discernment will help us identify action avenues. We seek divine guidance to encourage us in living with reverence for God’s creation. “Love mercy, act justly, and walk humbly with thy God.” Micah 6:8

2014

We deal with the desire to live sustainable, environmentally conscious lives in a culture that doesn’t always make it easy or practical to do so. As middle class Americans, our use of energy is disproportionate. We need to use less energy and fewer resources to accomplish the tasks that we do, but we also need to recognize that we must do fewer tasks. We should be mindful of how we spend our money and the impact that can have. Friends Meeting can support us in our efforts, and individuals who live sustainably can inspire and encourage us by example. It is important to recognize and express our appreciation 24 for those who take positive steps. The large and growing number of humans on the planet reduces the impacts of our efforts to live in an environmentally responsible manner. Reducing

family size can be as important as other lifestyle changes we undertake. We appreciate the use of the word “wellspring” in the Advice, reflecting both the internal and the external sources of our life.

2015

Perhaps listening to the Spirit and listening to the earth is the key to healing our relationship with the earth. It is important to be aware of the proportion of the environmental resources we use. Being able to see these resources as “property of the common” might help us live in a way that is more sustainable. When living in a human-made world, it is easy to lose our awareness of nature. Rising from synthetic sheets and putting on synthetic clothing, and going in a car to work all day in a human-made building, it is easy to lose appreciation of nature. Appreciation is fundamental, and when we can go outside and be in nature, we can remember and experience the beauty of God's world. Unreasonable exploitation is a good place to start to examine our relationships. Humans can be exploited for easy energy such as in the mining of coal or tar sands extraction. It was a blessing to be raised on a farm, with parents who took seriously the stewardship of the land. The ability to experience with all my senses the natural world around me has stayed with me throughout adulthood. Many times it is easy to feel helpless about what to do, and very difficult to find my

public voice in order to talk about things like poisoning our aquifer and the oceans.

2016

As we strive to be conscious of our relationship with the environment we recognize there are many ways to live responsibly. We discussed the lack of water in California and the multiple ways people conserve and reuse this limited resource including reusing gray water and not washing vehicles. We discussed understanding the “cost” of alternative energy or other environmentally friendly ideas. Is the environmental fad of the week really a good thing- it is hard to know. We discussed better uses for trash and garbage: methane collection and increased recycling. We discussed electricity usage and alternatives including solar power and LED lights. We discussed transportation including the availability of buses and bike paths/routes. We recognize that much of Omaha and Bellevue are not bike or pedestrian friendly. In general, we all related there are many ways to strive to be environmentally responsible and we all feel the need to continue these efforts and work towards more.

2017

In much of the Midwest environmental degradation has been subtle: soil erosion took quite a few years before it was really noticed; our

water was clean before chemicals became common usage; etc. Now at last, we are aware that so much damage has been done it may be irreparable. How can we continue to be educated and educate others about the seriousness of our negligence? How can we wake people up? Recent floods remind us that we have not always done the right things when we have acted. And the legislative bodies have not been changing how we build cities or how we do agriculture. Levees are only a temporary fix before they fail. Our natural environment is our connection with the transcendent; for many just being outdoors is a means of spiritual renewal. There is an order that must be preserved and made available to everyone.

2018

Our location in a rural area challenges us to seek means of responsible transportation, to limit miles driven, to be frugal in use of energy in all areas of our lives, and to encourage renewable energy sources when possible. One of our members became concerned about environmental damage from cars and fossil fuels as a teenager and has chosen to not own or to drive automobiles, to use bicycles and public transportation where possible. He led us as a meeting to take up his concern about fossil fuel, which led to the approval of a minute on ethical transportation. A modified version of

that minute was taken up and approved by the Yearly Meeting this year. Others in our meeting choose to use alternative energy fuels, and low-impact technologies, while others mindfully have chosen lower impact practices in farming and lifestyles or have made radical changes to their diets and no longer eat red meat, or choose to resource locally grown small-farm produce. We discuss how we are mindful of fair-trade and how we seek to appropriately distribute the wealth to smaller economies

2019

There seems to be a spiritual disconnect between human awareness and what remains of the garden, our perception of paradise, and our place within it. Jesus says, “the Kingdom of the Father is spread out upon the earth, and men do not see it.” So, in Meeting we discuss how we personally can open ourselves to perceiving and knowing that the natural world is ‘paradise on Earth.’ We are pleased with the new leadership of the QEW and sought this year to support its ministry by sending handwritten, personal letters to every meeting in our yearly meeting to encourage more engagement in this witness. Our meeting contributes to QEW’s outreach. Members are encouraged to check out its newsletter, *Befriending Creation*. We considered whether we might be living in the sixth great period of extinction, this time created by

humankind. Recent studies have shown that the population of flying insects has Page 31 Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) 2019 Minute Book declined 50% - 85% in the last 50 years. This massive decline is affecting birds and pollinators. Our agricultural community loves using fungicides and pesticides, which kill organisms that live in the ground and serve literally as the root of the Web of Life. All of this comes about because of the evolution of the West's culture of consumption, which in turn contributes to climate change. We are seeing the precursor of what is coming at us in term of floods and droughts. It takes 30-40 years for methane and CO2 to come to equilibrium, so even if we cut off all of our excess production of these gasses, it will take 30-40 years for the climate to stop warming. AFSC and FCNL help us respond to the question of our disproportionate use of resources. QEW has a mini-grant (e.g. \$500) available to meetings for initiating small, local projects. We are grateful for the work of FCNL to influence national priorities. One resource for engaging more productively in the conversations about climate change is the book *What We Think About When We Try Not to Think About Global Warming, Toward a New Psychology of Climate Action* by Per Espen Stoknes.

2020

The book, *Nature's Best Hope*, encourages the growing and nurture of native vegetation to regain the balance of ecology; these plants will invite native insects and birds. So, as we replace plants in the Meetinghouse yard, we can bring in native plants. Evidence of the effect of native plants can already be seen. ... We talked about the Biblical meaning of the words "stewardship" and "dominion." In Genesis 1, it is said that God gives humanity dominion over creation, but the word really meant having a starring role, or a visible role. (The sun and the moon also have dominion.) The word stewardship meant using one's spiritual gifts, from Jesus' parable of the talents, where the servants returned the talents multiplied. In Hosea, the wild are treated as God's property and God makes an agreement between humans and the other species. This is far from the common human interpretation which is that humans own nature.

2021

Perhaps we can focus more on a sense of reverence toward all of creation. Historically we have had a sense of hierarchy with man at the top and coming from that perspective we were not aware of the harm we were causing other aspects of creation. We are glad for more awareness now and an opportunity for a better relationship with all of creation. We appreciate this quotation in the FCNL newsletter from John Woolman, "the

produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious Creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the Earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age.” We need to think of the whole network of life, both now and in the future. We must use creativity to re-imagine new ways of living harmoniously with creation.

The challenging part is how to do this work as a community – not individuals and only accessible to people of higher socio-economic classes who have the resources to be “environmentalists.” It is a struggle to develop a system that doesn’t require people to choose between expense and environmental benefit.

We were interested to learn the Pope has recently spoken out about the wrongs of capitalism, and against the concept of a “just war”. These two things have driven the unconscionable, excessive use of fossil fuels that are responsible for the environmental chaos we are experiencing now.

There was a concern that the onus is placed too often on the individual consumer; we need to use our collective voices to call out industries that are environmentally irresponsible. We need to be vigilant about systemic causes of environmental degradation.

2022

2023

We value the perspective of those who have a sense of tenderness in their relationship with nature's creatures. Children may experience such a sense. We also appreciate those who sense the power in the natural world; we can now experience that in the storm fronts coming through — powerful, beautiful and terrifying. Some of us have hope as we sense the power of the earth. We have hope through FCNL and its work lobbying Congress for better care of the earth; for this we are grateful. In meeting we hear our mutual sense of helplessness in slowing or turning the rapid rise in our human impact on the planet because the problems seem so overwhelming. "What are we doing about our disproportionate use of the world's resources?" The query assumes that we individually ARE disproportionately using resources. Some of us express exasperation—how is this measured? How much is our proportionate share? How many square feet, how much air and water, how many calories or meals per week? Our wealth in possessions and means separates us from others less fortunate. Are we called upon to sacrifice and diminish our fortunes? Of 7.9 billion humans, what is an equitable share? What abundance is too much? One Friend appreciated the tone of the Advice and that it speaks of the good basic relationship every person has with the environment. It does get sticky when addressing

specific policies and practices that affect the whole of nature—politics and polarization can enter in and divide people. It would be helpful to keep in mind the tone of the Advice when enmeshed in discussions and decisions that are divisive. Another Friend states they love this Advice and Query. The questions are challenging and beautifully stated. A Friend talked about their moments of resonance in the natural world and sharing those moments – that joy – with others. That sharing generates joy in both the giver and receiver. Another speaker is happy to see young people who are very active in the environmental movement. There is a synergy between militarism and environmental degradation which needs to be explored. War and environmental concerns are dots that should be connected. The query mentions “proportionate use.” Of course, we in the U.S. take a disproportionate share, but even if resources were allocated equally across the 8 billion people on earth, should we be thinking of nature as “resources?” Do animals and plants have a claim? What is a “reasonable” exploitation of nature?

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.

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.

2007

We find many ways in which we struggle with fairness and exploitation in our own lives. It is encouraging to see examples of those around us finding ways to try to be fair, in spite of systems that seem to encourage competition and promote injustice. For example, retail sales promote “cutthroat” competition, yet most sellers tend to work cooperatively, and to value being honest with customers. It is a sense of fairness that prompts many of us to avoid buying things at stores if we know the low prices are partly due to exploitation of employees, suppliers, and the environment. However, economic issues are complicated. For instance, the jobs corporations provide might 39 40 be so badly needed that Friends should consider other means of pressuring the corporations. Those of us who work as teachers have opportunities to see the power of finding and valuing the different kinds of gifts students have. This is a way of answering that of God in each person. We do benefit from socioeconomic advantages; many of us came from middle-class families and received good educations, for instance. We all benefit, whether we like it or not, from having a “military arm” that protects us and our economy. It was noted that socioeconomic advantages are helpful toward some goals,

but we need to examine whether those are our goals or not. Some of us find it difficult to reach out and get to know people from different cultures and backgrounds on our own. We need some structured way to do this. Reading books by and about people we don't meet in our everyday lives can help us to understand them.

2008

We are certainly aware of the benefits we derive from our society's exploitation of natural and human resources. We know that problems of pollution and the various problems with immigration are related to the overuse of our resources. We are part of the problem. Most of us live in houses that are too big and thus use too much gas to heat, for example. We know that we should be doing something about the prison problem in Iowa. One of our members participates in Alternatives to Violence. We need to work with our legislature. They want to build more prisons when we think that it would be more appropriate to imprison fewer people, especially those with minor drug offenses and bad check writing. Rehabilitation programs are more socially uplifting as well as cost effective. We participate in a host of events in Ames that address social injustice. Our support of Scattergood is a means to foster understanding of these issues. We think that Scattergood School does a lot for both its students and staff in seeing and understanding injustice issues.

2009

We are aware of how we benefit by simply living in this country compared to other places in the world. It seems that anything that brings comfort and ease to our living experiences seems to come at the expense of someone else. We share a feeling of being locked into some of the exploitive systems just because of where we live, e.g. no public transportation readily available and lack of services in our immediate area. Many of us try to support groups that are

intimately involved in addressing some of the social problems of the world and the environment. We are also aware that our current economic climate has produced many instances of heartache because of foreclosures and rising unemployment. As difficult as these situations are for those directly effected, these difficulties have produced some innovative programs ideas and solutions that may bring about more significant changes which is encouraging. Our concerns for the conditions in our prisons today such as treating mental illness as a crime, mandatory sentences for non-violent crimes, etc. are hard to address on an individual basis. Some of us provide support to various organizations such as Alternatives to Violence Program that are working to change the system. Some also maintain contact with friends and family members who are incarcerated. Being living examples of the belief that all individuals have value is all some of us can do. The complications that drive people to violence are impossible for most of us to comprehend and to address in any meaningful way. We are reminded that —we are not called to be successful, but to be faithful.

2010

In addressing the question about our being both beneficiaries and victims of inequity and exploitation, Friends discussed the exhibit on race at the Science Center, and we were encouraged to visit this stimulating traveling exhibit. Assumptions based on how we interpret the idea of race have an impact on how we treat each other and look at one another. One Friend pointed out that those of us who are not poor benefit from those who are living in poverty, such as having cheap labor to butcher our animals, take care of our lawns, or to serve us in restaurants, for instance. “Why are those of us

who are privileged to live with more resources so blessed?" one Friend asked. Even though we may be privileged, we can also be victims of the inequity and exploitation around us, as we understand how complicit we are in systemic racism and economic injustice by benefiting from it. Our own complicity, whether passive or active, may make it hard to live with ourselves as we feel the pain of others who are discriminated against by our society, and insofar as we understand that we have an obligation to challenge the systemic injustices. On the question of immigration, one Friend suggested that our meeting dedicate a second hour to examine this difficult issue. Have we all done what we can or should do, both as individuals and in a corporate sense? Has this meeting done as much as we can to work on peace and social justice concerns? Some among us feel that we use too many of our resources for our building and not enough to relieve suffering and to try to change the inequities we see around us. Examining how we use our shared resources is one way for us to respond to this query. One Friend observed that there are limits to what we can do and using some of our resources in taking care of ourselves up to a point is necessary so that we don't become a burden on others. Friends expressed that it is discomfoting to see the inequity and exploitation in our community, our country and our world and not be able to end it easily. What are we called to

do, as we see and understand these inequities? In the past, the meeting has had a unifying project, such as caring for a Sudanese family, which united us in our social action. The life of the meeting on an ongoing basis helps all of us to lead examined lives where we consider how we might be change agents and take action. Some expressed that the inward life nurtured by the meeting helps us recharge and sustains our spiritual lives so that we will have the energy to speak truth to power. "Can we unite on a single position on how to move towards economic justice?" one Friend asked. A response: Those of us who have been lucky enough to have experiences success and who have access to resources in excess of their needs should share these resources with those less fortunate, who often, through no fault of their own, have fewer resources than they need to meet even their basic needs.

2011

It is obvious to most of us that we are both beneficiaries and victims of our current economic and governmental systems. Ways we can address this situation directly are less clear. Three members are involved with the Alternatives to Violence Program in South Dakota and Iowa. In listening to their examples of their interactions with those in the prison facilities we are kept current on the results coming from this program. It is inspiring to

hear of these examples of the life of the Spirit awakening in people who are 30 incarcerated. Through their sharing plus those of educators in today's school systems we have been given a glimpse into what drives people to violence. We are thankful that there are programs like AVP that directly address the prevailing violence which seems inherent in our society today. We try to speak out against prejudice against minority groups, but do not feel very effective when one comes across blatant statements. For example, how does one respond while visiting with an eighty-five-year old neighbor with only an eighth-grade education who casually uses the "n" word when talking about our President. Turning such a statement into a question back to the person is good advice but difficult to follow in such instances. We feel our support for Scattergood Friends School and the social awareness and concern it fosters in its students is one indirect way we help make our society into one that values everyone for who they are.

2012

Two facets of social and economic justice with which we contend are the societal/political and our own attitudes. Many of our problems are due to our economic system which is based on inequality. Whole groups can be led to disrespect and treat others inhumanely. Prisoners and the mentally ill

population are particularly susceptible to this. Addressing the symptoms requires addressing the system. This is the basis for much of the activism in which Friends have engaged over the years. But we must take care not to put all the blame outside ourselves. We must look at how we treat each other. How can we get past our internalized disrespect and acknowledge the humanity in our neighbors on a daily basis? Differences can sometimes be viewed as “interesting” when viewed in Divine Light. Daily prayer and meditation are important in keeping this clarity. We deal with these issues in personal ways, pursuing our own social actions and supporting each other. But what’s next? What would we find if we asked, “What is God asking us to do, as a meeting?”

2013

It’s easy for us to name the ways in which we’re beneficiaries of exploitation; it’s harder to do something about it, no matter how earnest our intentions. We benefit from the cheap products that are manufactured under unregulated conditions, and often we can’t see beyond the convenient price. We often eat animals that are raised under cruel conditions and, again, appreciate first of all their cheapness. . . . As our awareness increases, we attempt to think about the impact of our buying practices. . . . Even those of us who struggle financially have found it possible

to live simply and prioritize, choosing responsible food before unnecessary consumer items. It can take courage to resist our culture's emphasis on buying, but this awareness enriches us spiritually and helps us avoid the spiritual dullness that comes with unconscious spending. It takes a village to keep people out of prison. . . . We can advocate for programs that work to improve prisons. The East Hill Singers is a local effort to involve male inmates in a remarkable community outreach singing group. AVP (The Alternatives to Violence Program) is a Quaker-based effort that is extremely effective. Nutrition programs have been shown to help inmates reduce violent behavior, and Alcoholics Anonymous and various Native American alcoholism programs can help the large number of addicts in the prison system.

2014

Perhaps there should be another query: "How are we perpetrators of inequality and exploitation?" Sometimes I think my privilege is a result of the choices I have made. But to feel that way denies the existence of God, God's working in my life, and of God's grace and love for all of us. Even if you do everything right in your life, have faith in God, and make the right choices, because of the system's inequities, you can still be in dire circumstances and find it nearly impossible to rise above the situation. I'm reminded of the words of Abraham

Lincoln: "As I would not be a slave, neither would I be a master." In my lot in life, it's easy to be a master and you have to go out of your way in order not to be. Since society rigs the game to advantage the rich, it's important for us to work to "un-rig" the choice, and expose the negative of this system that favors a few. There must be opportunities for everyone, and we must work to make that happen. Charity can make us feel good, but can also help us ignore our responsibility to work for justice.

2015

Friends talked about the New Jim Crow that has placed more people of color in prisons than ever before. Friends Journal has had articles about this problem and the corresponding issue of White Privilege. White Privilege is a difficult issue for many Friends to discuss as our community, our meetings, and the Society of Friends is largely white folks. Anger against whites and white males that Friends have experienced can prevent needed empathy and dialog among F(f)riends. Many whites have advantages – education, employment, etc. What can/should we do about this? Being aware of history doesn't have to make us angry or feel guilty: it can make us more understanding of the psychological traumas that may affect their behavior today. Can we live our lives so "we do no harm"? Exploitation for financial gain has affected many justice issues including food – the "get big or

get out” trend. The idea of cheap food has allowed people in the U.S. to spend a smaller % of our income on food than in the 1950’s. This injustice has created and continues to support a movement towards realistic food production. Many of us support the Coop movement. What would be the best way to help groups that have not assimilated? FCNL says one of Friends’ goals is “to help everyone achieve their potential”.

2016

We should commend the Johnson County Board of Supervisors for implementing the raise in minimum wage, phase one of which goes into effect today. Xenophobia is a disease that is hard to overcome. It is a sad fact that in the University of Iowa, a state supported institution, only 3% of the student population is black. 31 Our Quaker background certainly laid the basic patterns that have become emphasis on equality, justice, meeting human needs and providing education for all. Deeds of justice really must begin at home: it’s very simple really. We hope there will be a ripple effect. But our “system of justice” is more complicated and may even be obstructive. Changing systems happens only when individuals are open to the responsibility of making personal changes first. It is easy to delude ourselves into separating victims and oppressors of injustice and inequality. We must rely on divine guidance or a spirit outside

ourselves to get clearness on what is “right” and look beyond what the law defines as “just”. The Scripture used to introduce this query spurs us to action. Turning points come from some when one realizes that he is both a victim and an oppressor. Holocaust victims who created Israel are now inflicting hurt on Palestine. The two are linked. It is good to teach a man to fish, but we have to feed him first and provide the tools with which he can then feed himself.

2017

Several Quakers in Ames meeting shared experiencing discrimination from the Ames police force. An example shared was an African American child was playing in the park and the police stopped and asked the child what he was doing there. This inspired our meeting to write a statement about this. Our meeting also invited the police chief to come and speak to us after meeting. We met with a police officer who listened to our concerns. The police office shared what the police force is doing to decrease discrimination in their department. He mentioned trainings about discrimination the police officers regularly go to and eventually getting cameras for the officers. He also shared a program where community members can go on ride a longs with the police for a couple hours. A few from our meeting participated in this. As a meeting, we will continue to stay in

communication with the local police and plan to have further dialogue with the police in the future

2018

This Query brings to mind the lack of justice and human rights for prisoners in Nebraska that we heard about yesterday from a speaker from the Nebraska ACLU. We feel great concern about the inequalities of our society and bullying of many groups of people who don't wield political or financial power. Fear makes us keep quiet in the face of inequity when we should speak. In the workplace one of us noted that some people are enjoying their privileged positions because they have information or some other source of power, instead of feeling that they are serving the people. We feel that better communication across groups should lead to more justice, and that secrets are harmful at personal and political levels. Economic practices are very often at the root of social injustices. While there are innumerable examples of inequities and discriminatory practices related to wages, access to housing, education, medical, and other services, we have failed to come to grips with some foundational economic injustices. We live and work on land that was outright stolen from Native Americans. Our buildings and infrastructure were built with the labor of enslaved African Americans and other people of color, with the resulting extensive benefits and profits going to

white males. We will not be able to make progress regarding racial (including indigenous) injustice until we apologize for these wrongs and find ways to redistribute the wealth and resources that were created as a result.

2019

When we attempt to answer how we as members of a Monthly Meeting are victims of inequity and exploitation, we are reminded by the voices and history of the region's indigenous peoples that the land upon which we live has undergone tremendous destructive alteration after being taken by militia and military force only four and five generations back. In less than 200 years this region between Page 32 Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) 2019 Minute Book two rivers has lost a biological diversity that once equaled tropical rain forests and in terms of plants and animals is now more equal to a desert. That we are victims of inequity and exploitation, in part is due to the slow understanding of how we arrive at this moment, like awakening, opening our eyes, recognizing the very systems that we have inherited, engaged, and wrapped around ourselves, support and further the catastrophe that we see as American economics; the eminent domain of the super-rich. We acknowledge among ourselves that within this nation there is a disparate widening gap between the haves and have-nots, inequity between races,

between the privileged and lower class, inequitable distribution of welfare. At this point in time, we are a very diverse group, some of us benefiting enormously from economic and political structures that have been part of our country throughout its history, while others of us have clearly been the victims of these same structures. One of us shared his story of being imprisoned for 14 years after filing a complaint of discrimination and subsequently being falsely charged with a crime. We were reminded of the suffering of children whose parents are incarcerated — both emotional and economic suffering. We were also reminded that when judges and prosecutors hold elective offices, they are subject to political pressure that may obstruct justice. We must recognize that, while some of us benefit from our political and economic structures and some of us suffer from these same structures, all of us are beneficiaries of the exploitation of the natural world. Our greed in this exploitation has already begun to cause suffering and more suffering lies ahead. We have a moral duty to cherish creation for all life in the future.

2020

We need to expand our awareness to include the life experiences of probably most people of color who on a daily basis face situations that may well bring up anger. Anger happens because of the way

people are treated; people who are just trying to live their lives. Many of us struggle, as we are growing in awareness, to understand what our role might be in the journey toward healing. We can keep open to growing in awareness. We can reach out to and communicate with those who have different life experiences from ourselves. We can support organizations working to address this societal dysfunction. We can nurture positive energy needed for the healing. ... Eugene Debs in 1918 spoke the following words at his sentencing hearing: "Years ago I recognized my kinship with all living things, and I made up my mind that I was not one bit better than the meanest on the earth. I said then and I say now, that while there is a lower class, I am in it; while there is a criminal element, I am of it; while there is a soul in prison, I am not free." These are words we need to hear, consider, open ourselves to. We attempt to listen, to hear with an open heart to the experiences of others that may differ widely from our own experiences. Listen to the Spirit. Let the Spirit show us the way. We are aware of stories told in West Branch about Laurie Tatum, who worked as a Quaker in the Indian schools. He was understood to be a hero, to be doing good. Today we understand that the Indian schools were a tool used to assimilate Indians into white society. Social and economic justice can lead us into confusion as times change. What was once just, is not always understood to be

that today. We do not know how Laurie Tatum understood what he was doing. He was a good man. We are dealing with the edges of action and inaction. We struggle with the ideas of action. We need to consider the possible violence of silence and inaction in the face of racism, social and economic injustice. What can we do? ... We all touched and appalled by the degree to which we benefit from inequality. Penn Valley Meeting has always included those of less wealth as well as more, and we especially appreciate input from those who have been victims of inequality as well as beneficiaries. In spite of our efforts to educate ourselves, we can't even fathom the extent of our dependence on others' exploitation, from the making of our cell phones to the availability of a mind boggling array of goods. The United States does, after all, consume some 60% of the world goods. ... Righteousness and pacifism are not passive. Righteousness means fulfilling every relationship in the best possible way. Conservative Friends believe the voice of Christ in our hearts and in the Bible come from the same source. If we are in a place of faithfulness – which John Woolman called “low” - that is the moment when we act, do something. We don't hold ourselves apart from society. Usually being changed by God requires us to act.

2021

In our meeting there is serious concern about and action related to incarceration and those who are incarcerated. Talents are wasted which have not been allowed expression. We know that some programs within prisons have beneficial effects and reduce recidivism rates: Alternatives to Violence Project, yoga, 12 step and literacy education are good examples. Programs offering help to those who reach out for it and overall positive systems of incarceration make a huge difference in outcomes. Societal attitudes make a difference; believing in the potential of each person rather than categorizing some as just criminals. Radical respect for everyone is basic. It is easy for us to dismiss and not believe the story of someone from a background different from our own; we must listen, believe and accept others' stories if we are to understand where they are coming from. Talking circles are a good tool. We need to see society as a "we" rather than "us versus them." o It is not enough to learn about racism and all the inequities detailed in this query. We must do something about them! We not only can confront racist speech, acts, cultural norms that we witness but we can use our voices to press for laws to change structural racism.

2022

2023

We feel there is incredible loss to society as a whole and to individuals within that society when we do not value each of us equally and provide opportunities for nurture, safety, education, food security, and respect for each of us. We may need to be exposed to another culture to become aware of the limitations of our own culture's views; we need to be opened up to wider perspectives to begin to grasp the potential of all. We live in a culture that seems to lean more toward punishment than assistance and to look with disfavor on those receiving help. A change in such attitudes is needed. There are concerns that the criminal justice system is broken, and that prison populations are disproportionately men and women of color. Sentencing guidelines need to be based on rehabilitation and recovery. We wonder what motivates, for example, those involved in the January 6, 2021 insurrection. There seems to be a strong fear of losing status in the future if one doesn't fight now to maintain status. A fear that others will take one's place or that people not like oneself will be running things – will be in charge. The verse from Matthew at the beginning of the advice indicates that God wants us to help one another with our own hands. The good Samaritan story teaches that we should help one another with our own hands in addition to giving money. It's odd that the query seems to be more about supporting

institutions that help others. We encounter people in need on street corners as we drive around town, but don't usually stop to help them. We support them with taxes and donations, but seldom with our own hands. Even to speak up as advocates, it would be better if we were involved either as someone who has needed help or as someone who has helped. There is a need for long-term solutions for disparities in economic and social conditions. If every individual is to be loved and cared for, opportunities must include: 1) a sound education, 2) useful employment, 3) proper health care that is sustainable, 4) adequate housing and correction of a shortage of material and people to build, and 5) a social and economic system aimed to give people a feeling of dignity. These opportunities for social and economic justice need to be addressed nationally and locally.

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 Cornbread 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.

2007

Conflict is a natural part of human life. However, we do not accept that violence must also be a part of human life. Democracy was conceived as a way to settle conflict without violence. More open and honest discussions about our conflicts may be a way to prevent violence. Is the avoidance of conflict a problem that can lead to more anger and violence in our lives? Approaching conflict and situations that may give rise to conflict is a process of discernment. We must both open ourselves and listen to others as they open themselves, and be careful to balance our speaking and our listening. Our culture today is all about being busy and staying busy, but we fear this has led to a loss of civility in daily interactions. Slowing down as an alternative to being driven by agenda opens pathways that allow us to face conflict and defuse it. Voting peace is important. Local issues can be divisive, and have been lately here in Ames around development issues. The Christian community has also become sharply divided around differing approaches to issues of morality and justice. Unfortunately, communication about these conflicts has become part of the problem when it is focused on rallying cries and slogans. Being certain in rightness rather than being certain we must listen is part of the problem. Being fearful of openness and fearful of change is part of the problem. We fear for what happens to

democracy when our society's commitment to communication withers. We do not always know how to respond to others we encounter in daily life who are victims of society's ills. Unfortunately, we encounter individuals with unhealthy habits that compound their misfortune, and supporting them without enabling their unhealthy ways can seem to require knowledge of professional counseling methods. So several of us support organizations like Habitat for Humanity, Doctors Without Borders, and Amnesty International as a way to respond positively in support of those who are hurt by poverty, war, and injustice. We also specifically considered which organizations approach peace and nonviolence issues in a manner most consistent with our understanding of these issues. We affirm the Friends Committee on National Legislation and the stabilizing presence they are maintaining in Washington. Their commitment to open communication with those with whom we have disagreements is inspiring and shows a constructive approach to conflict and politics.

2008

One of the basic foundations for peacemaking is the recognition of the witness of Truth and goodness in every heart and the acknowledgement of this witness in seeking reconciliation with those with whom we have differences. We are challenged by the overwhelming forces that create and maintain conflict. If we are open to the leadings of clear thought and the path of Light, we can develop faithful, effective and compassionate alternatives to violence. Often, the events of the moment lead to feelings of frustration and a call for some to express these motivations in some form of non-violent direct action or civil disobedience. We affirm this path for those who are led, but acknowledge that, as we seek direction in our response to war and violence, the journey for many begins with allowing our Spirits to seek a more loving and holy attitude toward conflict and those whom it effects.

2009

We try to keep informed on important issues through various sources, especially beyond mainstream media presentations. However, we can never be certain that the information we gather provides the complete picture. Cultural differences color our own personal view of national and world affairs. Addressing domestic violence in a direct way is not easy. We support the local Women's and Children's shelter with contributions both on a personal level and through Sewing Bee funds. Having information available about local services and providing it when we sense a need is also important, but is not something we have done very effectively. It is especially difficult to accept that there may be violent situations within our own families that need to be addressed. Those who have tried to approach a situation often feel ineffective and helpless. At one time in the wider local community, addressing peace issues was identified as just a Quaker issue, but that is no longer true. In some instances, being identified as belonging to a peace organization brings resentment. We try to respond to such situations with tact and sensitiveness. Unfortunately we also can resort to similar stereotyping and attitudes of —us versus them|| especially with those who share our concerns. We try to support peace and justice organizations with our donations although that often feels like an easy response when more direct action is needed. We were reminded by one person that just being involved with our local communities and families contributes to addressing larger issues. Many commented that it seems easier to talk about gender issues now than in the past. However that does not necessarily mean these issues have been addressed effectively. We recognize that basically little has changed in society's attitude as a whole.

2010

We struggled with the breadth of this query, which covers war, structural injustice and our communal

and personal lives. We appreciate the Fox quotation which introduces the query: "We seek to live in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars." A thread which was introduced early in the sharing and continued to weave its way throughout the discussion was the importance of treating people with respect. A frequent cause of violent incidents is the lack of respect shown an individual or group. When one treats others with respect, the attitude of the other may change; the attitude of both may change. We recognize the importance of peace beginning with oneself. We considered difference among us and how those different from the majority tend to have a harder time. Dealing with those different from ourselves can be very challenging. Sometimes we may be intentionally disrespectful. Or we may unintentionally lack respectfulness because of unawareness or varying cultural expectations. Difficult economic times may cause people to be more fearful, self protective, and less caring of others. On the other hand, sometimes emergency situations result in people reaching out and helping each other. Some of the difference depends on whether people are able to come from a sense of abundance and love or a sense of scarcity and fear. We are concerned that we have accommodated ourselves to terrible wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. We know that our country's policies are creating death and misery for many and are thus making

enemies for us. We don't know what to do and have a sense of despair. We see in Greg Mortenson (Three Cups of Tea) one who has brought life and hope to the same part of the world where war is bringing death and destruction. He does his work with a sense of deep respect for the people. What was his spiritual journey? How can we move from despair to hope and empowerment? The quotation from George Fox is about personal transformation that results in a different way of being in the world. Are we able to be fully open to our moments of not being respectful, of not sharing, or not listening well and letting those moments of our personal lack become moments of transformation, of allowing a greater power to come into our lives?

2011

Discussion started with viewing nonviolence as avoidance of conflict. There may be a stereotype of Friends avoiding conflict as a form of nonviolence. The group acknowledged that conflict has the ability to bring people together. But how do we turn conflict of ideas into a positive thing? A question was raised "How do you progress to dealing with conflict without a 'winner/loser' outcome?" It was pointed out that not all discussions of conflicting opinions or ideas need to be an engagement. If you differ, you can simply comment, "I see things differently" and let it go at that. It was pointed out that there are currently

forums for training in civility and dealing with conflict available to us. Example: several had heard Jim Leach speak this past Friday regarding civility. This is the first of a series of trainings in Des Moines as part of the Character Counts. The discussion did identify a desire to avoid fueling anger with opposing conflicting thoughts and the complication when egos become involved. However, acknowledging difference without challenge can be done. Peace and harmony can be attained even with conflicting stands when the fact that there will be differences can be accepted. Words can cause violence when misunderstood or said carelessly without intent to harm. This can be a daily practice to use words carefully so as not to cause violence. It was pointed out that our meeting does not look for areas of conflict. As silence is a part of the meeting process, there may be a feeling that we respond to conflict with silence. Is that good? We also discussed silence vs. honesty. When is it better to respond to a conflicting statement voiced by someone with silence? Are we being honest with that person? Discussion included timing and coming back to a statement you do not agree with at a time when the environment may be better for discussion by both parties. It was also noted that healing is not the same as fixing. Healing comes from within and we all have the ability to heal. It was felt that our culture may be conditioning us to violence by viewing violent

television or films, by the use of machines of war in our national pageantry/celebration (military aircraft flyovers, for example), etc. The power of “language of reconciliation” was also noted as a tremendous tool to defuse violence, as in South Africa. We can look at our consumption habits and ways that we can project our belief in nonviolence. As George Fox said, “(We) seek to live in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars.” It was also noted that as human beings we are capable of many emotions and actions. In some areas, it is believed that the human being is “hard wired” to do things to survive, from revenge to nurturing. The complete human being knows when it is necessary to be aggressive and when to be passive. It is the appropriateness of the action at the given time that is important. The group acknowledged that Quakers can seem to be invisible, perhaps due to some of our tenets not to evangelize our beliefs. Early Quakers were not so much that way. The early Quakers acted on their beliefs and were persecuted for it often with jail or death. Times have changed. We tend to work to get our message out quietly. Summary: “Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.”

2012

Some of our members are active in the Peace Center in Iowa City, which has an important presence in the area. One member had recently

read Michael Klare's *Rising Powers, Shrinking Planet*. The world's dependence on petroleum has led to countries maneuvering militarily to obtain oil and gas. The world's remaining oil supply is in unfriendly, dangerous countries. His fear is that it may be a very traumatic world for the next 50 years. Another book mentioned was Eric Fromm's *The Art of Loving*. Care, respect and knowledge are important in relationships with others. Trying to address national and international problems seems overwhelming, but the idea of starting with oneself and then widening the circle into small spheres can have an impact in trying to effect non-violence and peace. We need to address things in our homes, within our families, and our communities. The art of loving needs to begin with our own inner peace. . . . We can't work for peace in our communities and the world if we don't have inner peace.

2013

For many of us, the living into the testimony of peace and nonviolence is the most difficult part of Quakerism. . . . How are we to figure out the things that cause war and then go stop them? That seems to require much meddling of us; perhaps we must do more meddling than we are doing. When the Occupy Movement was going strong as a form of peaceful protest, it seemed intimidating, and that caused some of us to begin to wonder just what is peace: When does even a passive show of force

become a violent statement used to intimidate others? . . . When George Fox wrote his epistle in which he counsels us “seek to live in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars,” he was responding to the civil war in England at the time. Are our times so different? . . . Actions such as going to the School of the Americas and getting arrested; joining peace marches; and signing petitions seem to miss the point somehow, and we are unsure what’s missing in our collective effort to be nonviolent. With regard to family, some of us reflected on what it has meant to parent or to be parented with intimidation. . . . How do we find ways to respond and react to children peacefully, especially when our impulse is to express to our children anger and impatience? Separation from God may readily lead us to separation from one another, and when we lose the connection 31 to that of God in one another, we may fall into great despair, pain, and hurt—a spiritual condition that may in turn lead to war and violence. In our current situation as a worship community, we struggle with how Friends among us have been treated. At times our actions and words have felt like an attack on one another. . . . As a result, some Friends have stopped attending and we miss their presence. Do we hurt so much because we have loved one another so much? We need one another to help us consider how we have acted correctly or incorrectly, to help us be faithful

and understand the way forward. We feel great tenderness and love toward one another, even as we recognize that as individuals, we respond to pain, fear, and conflict in different ways—some by staying away from worship; others by stepping more fully forward into participating in the life of the meeting. Where is the place and how do we carve out the time to ask one another tenderly, “How were you faithful? What have been the fruits of the Spirit as we walk this walk as best we can?” How might our country, our world, be different if instead of rushing to war and defending ourselves, we rushed to be the first to say “I seek forgiveness and offer reconciliation. . . .?”

2014

In the face of so much anger, violence and war in the world in which we live, even in the community where we serve, there is often a feeling of “what can one person do that will make any difference?” It is tempting to simply despair and sink into hopelessness. Yet, we don’t give up; we continue to strive to educate ourselves and others as we try to understand what underlies such actions, as we seek a more peaceful path. We are aware that even Quaker families are not immune to sexual violence and we realize that we are not different from other families. We must not trust the peace testimony and the recorded history of alternative service or imprisonment rather than military

constriction to shield us from the human traits of anger and resentment that surface in actions hurtful to others. Several personal experiences were shared in which we recognize unloving reactions in situations that are out of our control or past aggressions against us foment for years before being made known, or are harbored secretly in families or communities that fail to deal with wrongs that cause life-long emotional injury to children. Is it any wonder that our world leaders, then, decide to use violence to counter violence? Bringing these issues out, recognizing that it is OUR problem, is the first step. We feel that this Query, if taken seriously, should make such discussions possible in every monthly meeting. It can't wait another generation! But we must not despair; we must still seek "that of God in every one" we meet.

2015

We recognize that while our commitment to peace and non-violence calls us to be kind, kindness is sometimes not enough to address hate and aggression. While these are often blamed on religious and ethnic differences, it is important to note that it is not the differences that are the issue, but rather the behaviors of exclusion and lack of acceptance for those differences. Another view is to remember that humans are social creatures by nature and we seek each other out, forming groups by shared similarities. What we seek is the

“beloved community” of all beings, but falling short of that, we fall into looking at the world in terms of “us” and “them”. We cannot completely understand the nature of the “beloved community”, but we know that it calls us to journey beyond the human, beyond “us” and “them” until the “us” means all of us. We also note the importance of making our views known by writing to newspapers and publishing opinion pieces. An example would be a recently published letter in the Cedar Rapids Gazette supporting the negotiations with Iraq rather than continuing on a war footing. Additionally, we realize the importance of being mindful in what we do. Our emotions, both positive and negative, cycle -- much as breathing does between inhaling and exhaling. When we remain mindful of our condition, be it optimism-happiness-faith or doubt-confusion-fear, we can better respond in peaceful ways. We think of the example of the mindful way in which forgiveness was expressed after the shootings at the Emanuel AME Church and how it worked to diffuse the cycle of violence.

2016

Several spoke of their use of FCNL material to keep informed on important issues on the national and international level. Some of us try to use varying sources of information to try to keep a clear picture of key 32 issues and to understand the true

reasons for wars and violence in our society. Many support financially the AFSC, FCNL, Friends Peace Teams and other like-minded organizations as well as the local Women and Children's Center and social service organizations in our area. Being citizens of the US we are unfortunately identified as supporting violence and war around the world in spite of our best intentions. The widespread support of the gun culture continues to concern and alarm us, but no sweeping resolution seems to be considered by officials in any meaningful way. Some of us try to quietly counter this challenge in our local communities and we are heartened by periodically finding others who share our views. We also feel that violent video games may feed into this culture of guns as the only way to solve personal and international problems. We find the extreme aura of patriotism that seems to surround us on almost every public occasion disturbing as we feel it only glorifies military accomplishments without recognizing the human costs.

2017

We are reminded that the often-quoted phrase from the Bible, "where two or three are gathered together," occurs in the context of conflict resolution. Many of us try to work for peace but wonder how to educate people. Giving to FCNL and lobbying our Senators and Representatives never seems like enough. How can we educate people to

understand that security is not just a big army? It is people who are content with their lives. War starts in our minds and starts with fear. The more that fear is cultivated, the greater the inclination toward violence against the perceived enemy. Although we can act to influence events as much as it is possible for us, peace starts inside, with dealing with fear. The only thing we have against fear is love. How do we teach love and create an environment where love is practiced and lived, and becomes a part of the way we think and what we do?

2018

It was noted that at least five of the queries address peace. Some members said that they were attracted to Friends Meeting because peace issues are a fundamental concern of Quakers and Quakers actively work for peace. The question of whether inner peace is needed to be a peacemaker came up. Many individuals throughout history have done valuable work for peace, but did not enjoy an inner peace. Support of social justice issues is important in peacemaking. Those who live in fear in our communities cannot let themselves be open to others. People need security in their lives before they can reach out to others. We may need to show our compassion with those living in fear over and over. It was pointed out that avoiding all conflict is not always possible in promoting peace. Working for peace and non-violence can

sometimes be discouraging. One friend expressed her belief that working for peace and social justice requires steady, constant effort. We are very concerned about the current administrations attempts to address US safety concerns through more military methods. Several of us try to contact our legislators by email or phone when important issues are being considered in Congress regarding military spending, Health Care, international relations, domestic safety issues, etc. We have found the alerts and information on issues by the FCNL especially helpful in these efforts.

2019

Although it is not always be true, we like the statement of aspiration at the beginning, about seeking “to live in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars”. That is how we can be real, authentic, and peaceful. The “shoulds” within this document are not bad, but our real guidance comes from the deep well within. When we dwell there, all is well. We are aware of the pull to stay in our comfort zone, and we can stay in the bubble as long as we need it. Carry the sword as long as we can. We shouldn’t jump into the water if we don’t know how to swim, but nourished by the power of God we can jump in the water, let the pain of the world into our awareness and respond to it with love. But staying there is sacrificing something huge. Like the rich man who

came to Jesus saying he had done everything right all his life but wanted the kingdom of heaven, but wasn't ready to jump in. He saw what he was sacrificing by not jumping in, and sadly went away. We can sympathize with this young rich man who was not ready yet. We believe the Guide Within walked away with him and continued to speak to him. And the Guide continues to speak to us even though we fall short. The Alternatives to Violence Project is one way we hope to spread the message of nonviolence and create a little more peace in the world. A Friend testified to his own experience of having benefited from conflict avoidance techniques he learned in AVP... Today we are challenged by growing intolerance in political discourse. We see more and more our neighbors dismissing any opinion not their own as wrong. Friends have varying views on peace and the necessity of military defense. Each of us brings what Light we have to the gathering, and together our Light is made stronger. George Fox is said to have advised William Penn to lay down his sword when he was ready to lay it down. By example, we try to lead others to the Light.

2020

Even when people have conflicting beliefs, they usually believe they are doing the right thing in making decisions. Unfortunately, many of our current power structures allow people in power to

make decisions without consulting people whose decisions will impact. ... We are now more aware of the cumulative effects of trauma, and remain hopeful for change as more information and attention are directed to studying trauma's cumulative effects. ... We have more power than we realize and we can focus on our commonalities and invite a calming spirit. We will be more at peace when we are content with our lives, not always feeling that we need more. Our voices asking for an end to war need to be heard. Solutions are not easy; Jung notes that we need to recognize that there is both good and evil in each of us.

2021

Several themes emerged in our sharing. We must become aware of and acknowledge the enormous impact of our history on present conditions. Building a nation on stolen land, with slave labor, and exploiting the environment is our true history. Our present-day racism, climate crisis, economic inequality and political division are natural results. We need to recognize what we have done and where we are. Only then can we have hope and move forward. This does seem to be happening; we are becoming more aware.

Our violence involves not only physical violence, but also emotional violence against each other and violence against the natural world. Only by living in harmony with nature can we survive. Our

continued exploitation has led us to the coronavirus and to other serious danger.

There was a great surge of protest during the Viet Nam War and the nuclear build-up during the Cold War, but currently war and violence is hidden by the ruling elite. The true cost of war is hidden. We must realize the proliferation of war and scrutinize the way war has changed and how it is aided by both the military/industrial complex and the media.

The overreaction and brutality exhibited by our militarized police and undocumented Federal agencies in response to non violent peaceful protests have created even more pervasive traumatic experiences among those same communities and a deep-felt concern for all those with a conscience. We struggle to find an appropriate path to mitigate and metabolize the damage this has caused us all.

Noting that fear and feeling threatened cause violence in general, we discussed how this works in our lives, and examples we're familiar with. We fear change, changes in our way of life, and losses, including the loss of power and control. Remembering that not we but God is supposed to be in control could help relieve our fear, but this faith is something we need to work on.

We fear differences, and people we see as different from ourselves. We build narratives around the way we see things and tell ourselves we are right

and those who disagree with us are misguided or misinformed. Working on internal, implicit biases is seen as a spiritual discipline. The sources of bias may include lack of exposure to people who are different (a different race or class, for example), or things we tell ourselves to justify how we earn our money or how we have invested our time. Our examples included inordinate faith in our own professional paths, and herd mentality. Past hurts may also be a source of a bias, and healing from the past may be important to creating future peace with in ourselves, between ourselves and others, as well as among nations.

The Friends testimony of integrity asks us to check frequently with our inner guide and speak and act accordingly, rather than in accord with our employers, the State, or our social groups. Or sometimes be silent. The Guide may speak to us through others, whether they are right or wrong, perfect or not.

2022

2023

One Friend takes war to include any intent or action that causes both unintentional and intentional harm. What is hopeful is that we can be mindful of trauma informed modalities in care and healing. Assume everyone you encounter has experienced harm. If you start at that assumption,

it allows that other person or group grace. Understanding is key. We all need to develop the inner power and strength to allow others to be who they are and overcome their challenges. We need to drop our own egos to work for a peaceful world. Another Friend objects to the term “overpopulation” in this query. Overpopulation is a term left over from the 1980’s and triggers white European American concern about the birth rate among Black and brown people in the Southern Hemisphere. What should be expressed here is the problem of inequitable distribution of the resources around the world as a cause of violence and war. We need to expand our definition of peace to include personal relationships. Being a victim and a victimizer are not two separate things. Violence perpetuates violence. This query needs to Page 97 recognize the extent to which our mass media has covered up our country’s involvement in war and violence. Being against war is not enough. The problem is to decide what it means to be peaceful and what is the difference from just being kind. We appreciate Friends and other pacifists. Our faith encourages us to hear the voices of Friends. We are grateful for everyone in this room in our attempts to live in ways to heal wounds. We are aware that much of our effort in seeking peace is in finding equality in a world of injustice and inequality. We see a lot of violence and feel we have little power to change it. As individuals, as

Americans, we know we are also guilty of violence, and often feel dismayed at the prospect of changing ourselves. We know that peace is more than a lack of violence. Peace comes with the power and love that we know when we are One with the Spirit. Then it is possible to find Oneness with each other through connection and understanding. We know that fear underlies the causes of war listed in the last words of the Advice. Fear can break the experience of being One with the Creator. Love builds peace one step at a time.