

DISCIPLINE
OF
FAIRHOPE (ALABAMA)
FRIENDS MEETING
1970

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INTRODUCTION

The history of religion has shown over and over again that creeds do not unite, they tend to divide. A group held together by a creed is more brittle and more subject to breakage than a more yielding organic group held together by the Spirit.
Howard Brinton, *Friends For 300 Years*, p. 193.

Since we hold the above to be true, we are concerned that our fellowship be one in which each person is warmly accepted and made to feel wanted and needed, his ideas listened to with prayerful consideration, allowing the Holy Spirit Himself to sift the chaff from the wheat. Division comes about when man assumes authority which belongs to God alone. This Discipline is presented as suggestions rather than commands. We seek to question or query rather than to give specific answers, thus placing upon the individual, in the quiet of his own soul before his Heavenly Father, the responsibility for the discipline of the spirit.

The first disciples and apostles believed it good and necessary to meet together for consolation and strength one of another. Such a meeting together brought them peace and goodwill and a deep sense of fellowship which merged them into oneness with God and each other. Unity through the power of the Holy Spirit was the result of their meeting together. This unity brought a power into their lives that sent them out into the world fearlessly proclaiming the Gospel and meeting the needs of their fellowman.

Feeling a deep void in the churches of his day, George Fox earnestly sought to find what was wrong. The answer came when a voice seemed to speak to his inmost soul: "There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition." -- and when he heard it he said, "My heart did leap for joy." He then knew that the way to communion with God could be found without aid of ritual or clergy and his distinctive message from then on to his generation was that Christ speaks directly to each human soul who earnestly seeks Him. A glowing, vital, power-filled spiritual life is dependent upon direct communion with Him and a very real possibility for anyone.

We are engaged, therefore, not only to meet together for the worship of God, but also for the exercise of Christian care one for another, to strive for unity of faith and practice, answerable to the description Christ Himself gave His flock, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." John 13:34-35.

The immediate Presence of the Light of Christ within, and in His power to transform men into sons of God is the vital message of Quakerism. It is a faith that does not stand on ritual or creed, but on the experience and practice of the Presence of God in the heart of each individual soul. Direct knowledge of God is sought both individually and corporately. It is universal in scope and speaks to the spiritual needs of all men. We feel that true baptism is the experience of being filled with Divine love that both cleanses and heals. John spoke of this in Mark 1:8, "I indeed have baptized you with

water, but He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost." It is the spiritual fact rather than the outward symbol, a changing and purifying from within, which is the true baptism.

We place special emphasis on the ever present Holy Spirit within the heart of man. We call this power the Light Within or the Light of Christ. We feel that every man has a seed of this spirit within him and the choice is his whether he cultivates it so it will flourish or allows it to die from neglect. Love, which is the outworking of this Divine Spirit, is the most potent influence that can be applied to the affairs of men. This application of love to the whole of life is the core of the Christian doctrine. As the Christian becomes conscious of the Inner Light or the Christ Within and submits himself to His leadings, he is empowered by the Holy Spirit to live in conformity to the will of his Heavenly Father.

Growing directly out of the principle of the Inner Light is our ideal of worship. In our meetings the Holy Spirit speaks directly to the human heart and worship is a personal communion with God and a yielding of our wills to the Divine Will for which no ritual, form, service nor aid of clergy is necessary. No vocal service is needed to realize this communion in a very real and vital way. A living silence may be so filled with God or the Divine Presence that all worshippers become conscious of it and are drawn together in unity by the power of His Love. We then know and agree with George Fox where he states, "The least member in the church hath an office and is serviceable and every member hath need of one another."

A spiritual democracy becomes real as all unite before the True Head of the Church. Each person must humbly and prayerfully seek individual guidance and follow his understanding of God's leading. He will be helped by studying the Holy Scriptures.

We believe in the Holy Scriptures: that the writers through the ages were men who believed in and sought after God, and found Him according to their measure of light. We believe that they were inspired to record their experiences. These records show an ever-broadening comprehension of the nature and will of God, from primitive times, through the law and the prophets, to His highest manifestation in the Holy Life and teaching of Jesus, who revealed most fully the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. While we believe in the Holy Scriptures, we do not place them above the Spirit that inspired them and believe that the same Spirit within our own hearts must inspire our reading of them in order for us to realize their greatest lessons and meaning for us today. Today there are fresh revelations of Truth for men who humbly seek to follow the teachings of Jesus.

Taken from the *Discipline* of Monteverde Monthly Meeting of Friends,
Monteverde, Costa Rica., pp. 6-7.

WORSHIP AND MINISTRY

We have a heartfelt concern that our meetings offer a form of worship which is pure,

simple, and spiritual. We meet together in silence and seek to free our minds and hearts for the purpose of spiritual worship. We then wait in humble submission and reverence for the spiritual ability to worship God in a manner acceptable to Him. Worship is not an intermittent process, thus this period set aside for corporate worship with our friends should be looked upon only as a special time of sharing in worship one with another. We must remember a life of worship must underlie all our daily affairs.

In preparation for the experience of corporate worship, the individual may find that he becomes quiet in expectation, or he may find it helpful to read Scripture or other devotional material as a quieting discipline. Adult School, or other Sunday School, a discussion group, or family meeting or reading can be beneficial in the preparation process.

Worship should not be the mere outward gathering of persons, but an inward gathering of hearts unto the Lord. Our worship is based on the eternal reality that God is Spirit and the experience of worship must be in Spirit and in Truth. The prayers of the eternal Christ for us are not just words but holy and creative energies: they are power that enters into us and becomes one with us, giving us ability and opportunity to change, to grow, and to be renewed in character and conduct. Christ comes to us asking us only to respond to Him: when that response is made, worship is achieved. We have opened the door upon which He has been knocking. In the spirit of seeking, we come to know Him and begin to understand the many ways in which He speaks to us.

As the meeting for worship becomes a vital experience for its members, it will quietly invade the homes of its members with a calm, creative spirit and will mold and unite them with the force of Divine love. This Divine love is the greatest force in the world and there is no substitute for the Christian home as the formative center for its growth and ripening.

It is historically significant that the use of a living silence is a sacred way of worship and a means of fusing the whole gathering into one undivided group. It makes possible a society held together by its common experience and group consciousness of God while at the same time allowing a maximum of freedom for the individual worshipper. It makes possible, too, the Quaker experiment in spontaneous ministry.

Our meeting begins in silence at the appointed hour according to the injunction, "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalms 46:10) We allow ourselves to become quiet by putting aside words or thoughts of things other than He whom we seek to worship.

Not all Friends can become truly quiet at once nor even every meeting. It is not something that can be done at will; indeed, "will" will often prove an obstacle. However, after a time several worshippers do seem to share the Presence of a guiding Spirit. Spontaneous vocal ministry or prayer springing from the heart of one or more worshippers may or may not happen. Those who feel called by an inward urging of the Holy Spirit to speak are advised to do so in a simple, clear manner keeping as close to the point of original inspiration as is possible. As the meeting continues, a time comes when the sense of communion begins to fade. Then, a Friend appointed for this purpose,

quietly "breaks meeting" by shaking hands with his nearest neighbor and the worship period ends as quietly as it began.

The Society of Friends, from earliest days, has emphasized the importance of a living ministry to the Christian community. It is freely given in the service of God and man and calls for dedication of life and often for a sacrifice of other claims.

As the worshipper sits in silence, he may feel some message arise out of the depth of his soul which he recognizes by its nature to be intended for the gathering as a whole not just for himself. If he does not give the message, he feels burdened with a sense of omission, but if he utters it faithfully, he feels a sense of nearness and relief. The sensitive worshipper learns to recognize the call as clearly as he would the voice of a friend although he may be unable to describe its quality. Even though a message may seem intellectually fitting, it should not be given unless it is aglow with life.

No one is set apart in our meetings to supply the spoken word. The responsibility rests on every member to be ready and willing to take part under a due sense of Divine leadership. If all are faithful, vocal messages will come from many persons. The whole meeting may be inspired by the simple, heartfelt expression of a young person. The value of the spoken word depends as much on the listener as the speaker. If anything is felt to be spoken amiss, rather than giving way to displeasure at what seems unprofitable, the listener should search his own heart to see if he has done his share in creating the right spiritual atmosphere in which the harm fades and the good grows. The listener may lose help which he might have received had he been sympathetic and sensitive, remembering the message may be helpful to others.

Our meetings are open to all who care to share our manner of worship whether they be members or not. We extend a cordial invitation to this effect.

MARRIAGE

The union of a man and woman is not to be entered into lightly. Counsel and guidance from God should first be earnestly sought. This union will be owned and blessed by Him if the love that draws them together is sanctified by the larger love of Christ. A common faith is helpful and a mutual desire to open heart and home to the spirit of Christ insures a good foundation at the start. We regard marriage as a continuing religious sacrament not merely a civil contract. It is an ordinance of God for the help and blessing of both partners and for the right upbringing of the next generation. The prevalence of divorce and broken homes make it imperative that great care be exercised that the union be on the right foundation. If unhappiness should develop, we believe patient and prayerful determination will often overcome it.

A well-founded marriage has to be worked at and is a source of strength, security, and joy not only to the couple themselves, but to their family, community, nation, and to all whom their lives touch. True happiness comes about by the presence of devoted, unselfish love, not a love of merely a passing attraction, and it must include a real regard

for the personality of the other.

The Friend's marriage ceremony reflects our belief that the marriage contract is made by the couple themselves and completed and blessed by God. The simple ceremony, where the couple say their vows within the framework of the meeting for worship without the help of a third person, is a natural expression of the way of life which Friends believe. In the presence of God and supported by the prayers of their friends, they take each other as life partners, asking God's blessing on their union and dedicating their new life to Him.

MARRIAGE PROCEDURE

In order to assist in every way it can to assure the stability and happiness of couples married under its care, the meeting outlines the following procedure preliminary to the wedding.

The couple presents a letter signed by both of them to the meeting stating they intend marriage with each other. This letter is minuted by the Clerk, and a Marriage Committee is appointed. They are to give any assistance or counsel which the couple may need. It is recommended that a small collection of books and pamphlets on marriage be made available and kept up to date for this use. The Marriage Committee in conjunction with the Clerk also has the responsibility of informing itself as to the legal requirements for marriage and of seeing to it that the couple is aware of them.

After the wedding, the Marriage Committee has the certificate recorded by the Meeting Recorder, sees that the legal report is sent to the County and reports to the meeting. If either bride or groom has children by a previous marriage, the Committee should see that their legal rights are secured.

The marriage itself takes place in a meeting for worship, in which the bride and groom rise, usually toward the close of the meeting, take each other by the hand, and repeat this promise, the groom being first: "In the Presence of the Lord, and before these our friends, I take thee _____, to be my wife (husband), promising, with Divine Assistance, to be unto thee a loving and faithful husband (wife) so long as we both shall live." (or words to that effect).

The marriage certificate is then signed, by the groom first, then by the bride with her married name, and is read aloud by a person previously selected. At the close of the meeting all persons present are invited to sign the certificate as witnesses.

The form of the certificate in essence is as follows:

Whereas, A. B. of _____, in the County of _____, in _____, son of C. B., of _____ and H., his wife, and D. F., daughter of F. F., of _____, and N., his wife, having declared their intentions of marriage with each other to _____ Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends held at _____, according to the

good order used among them, and having the consent of parents (or guardians), their proposed marriage was allowed by that meeting. These are to certify to whom it may concern, that for the accomplishment of their intention, this ___ day of the _ Month in the year of our Lord ____, they, A. B. and D. F., appearing in a public meeting for worship of the Religious Society of Friends, held at_____, and A. B., taking D. E. by the hand, did on this solemn occasion, declare that he took her, D. F., to be his wife, promising, with Divine Assistance, to be unto her a loving and faithful husband so long as they both shall live (or words to that effect). And then in the same assembly D. E. did in like manner declare that she took him, A., B., to be her husband, promising with Divine Assistance, to be unto him a loving and faithful wife so long as they both shall live (or words to that effect). And moreover, they, A. B. and D. E., she according to the custom of marriage, adopting the surname of her husband, did, as a further confirmation thereof, then and there to these presents, set their hands.

A. B.

D. B.

And we, having been present at the marriage, have as witnesses set our hands the day and year above written.

Signed: _____

FUNERALS AND BURIAL GROUNDS

Members of the House and Grounds Committee, or other members they might wish to designate, shall be in charge of offering assistance in regard to funeral arrangements. The Committee shall lay out the grounds, keep the plot up to date and see that the grounds are kept in order. Non-members wishing to use the grounds should get permission from this Committee. The location of the graves may be marked by plain stones or cement flush with the ground.

Simplicity which is consistent with Christian living should be observed in connection with funerals. It should be a time when things temporal are secondary, when the reality of life immortal is deeply felt, and when the Presence of our Lord may bring comfort and consolation to the bereaved.

MEETINGS FOR BUSINESS

A meeting for business shall be held the first Sunday in each month following the meeting for worship. Business meetings should be conducted with deliberation. Each member bears a responsibility to participate and to bring forth freely any matters he feels of real concern. Members should work together with a humble and loving spirit, each

giving the other credit for purity of motive, notwithstanding differences of opinion, and be ready to accept decisions of the meeting even though they may not be in accord with his own judgment. Constant dwelling under the power and control of Christ produces understanding and mutual forbearance that prevents jealousies, misunderstandings, or any breach of love.

A committee shall be appointed annually to nominate a clerk. An important duty of the clerk is to gather the sense of the meeting and state in a minute what appears to be the judgment of the group. This minute shall be read and, after any necessary alterations are made, approved by the meeting in order to become valid. The clerk shall sign and forward any documents or correspondence as directed by the meeting.

The meeting shall furnish a permanent record book of its proceedings. It shall appoint a treasurer every five years to keep account of all moneys received or paid out on behalf of the meeting. A report shall be made to the meeting at least once a year following an audit by a committee appointed by the meeting.

A recorder shall be appointed to serve five years to keep permanent records of membership, births, marriages, and deaths. He shall give a report at least once a year following examination of the records by an appointed committee.

All standing committee members should be nominated by a nominating committee appointed by the meeting. These standing committees shall report annually in writing to the meeting or as often as needed.

All committees should be concerned to carry out their duties promptly and with a sense of Divine guidance. A period of silence before and after the committee sessions is recommended.

Each member should feel a responsibility to speak to the business before the meeting in order that it may be completed with care and dispatch.

QUERIES FOR CHILDREN

1. Do you think of God often during the day and try to understand what His spirit says to you?
2. Do you try to act, as Christ showed the way, so that there is no cause for quarreling with other children? Do you forgive those who injure you by word or act? Are you careful to speak well of others? When your friends quarrel, do you try to help them to feel friendly again?
3. Do you try to be honest and truthful in what you say and do? Do you stand firmly against acts that are sneaky and underhanded? Do you realize that we get the greatest

enjoyment from the things for which we work, and that trying to get something for nothing seldom brings lasting happiness?

4. Are you encouraging fair and honest games? Are you reading worthwhile books and getting acquainted with good music? When you go to entertainments, do you try to choose the good and avoid the bad?

5. Knowing that God gave you your body for your spirit to dwell in, do you make the effort to keep your bodies and your minds strong and healthy by using moderation in all that you do and by avoiding those things which you know to be harmful?

6. Do you try to realize what it would be like to live as others do who are less comfortably cared for than you are, and do you try to make their lives happier?

7. Do you go to your place of worship as regularly as you can, and do you make an effort to prepare your mind for helpful thoughts during the worship? While there do you try to find out what God wants you to be and do?

8. Do you try to feel and to show friendliness toward people of all other races and nations, who, like ourselves, are children of God?

9. Do you work hard to be cheerful, unselfish and cooperative in your home, your school and your playground, so that every day you can put into practice some of the lessons that Christ taught?

These Queries for Children are taken from the *Discipline* of Monteverde Monthly Meeting of Friends, Monteverde, Costa Rica, pp. 35-36.

QUERIES

These queries are intended to call to the attention of our members the need for individual examination to see how far their lives are consistent with our religious profession, and to encourage all concerned Friends to discharge their duty faithfully in administering counsel and admonition when necessary.

First Query

Are meetings for worship and business well and punctually attended? Do Friends come to them with hearts and minds prepared for worship? Is there a living silence in which we feel drawn together by the power of God in our midst? Do we individually take our right share of responsibility in the service of the meeting? Is vocal ministry exercised under the direct leadings of the Holy Spirit, and in the simplicity and sincerity of Truth? Do we foster the use and growth of the spiritual gifts of our members? Do we welcome others to

share the fellowship of our meeting with us?

Second Query

Do we cherish that of God within us, that His power growing in us may rule our lives? Is our religion rooted in spiritual experience, and does it find expression in our lives so that they are in accord with our principles? Do we feel and encourage a growth in Christian love toward all men? Are we careful that in our thoughts, words and actions we do not injure the reputation of others? Do we feel and express a forgiving spirit one toward another? Do we seek to adjust our differences in the spirit of meekness and love?

Third Query

Do we make our homes places of friendship, peace and refreshment of spirit? Do we have regular periods of family worship with inspirational reading of the Bible? Are the children taught the principles and practices of Friends? Do we make a place in our lives for inward retirement and communion with the Divine Spirit? Are we setting an example of Christian living and self-discipline for our children? Are we patient and understanding with them, keeping a sense of humor and a loving spirit as we guide them? Do we choose and help our children to choose recreations, literature and friendships which will strengthen our physical, mental and spiritual lives, and avoid those that may prove a hindrance to ourselves or others?

Fourth Query

Believing our bodies to be the temples of God, are we concerned to attain a high level of physical and mental health? To this end are our lives examples of temperance in all things?

Fifth Query

Are we on guard against the love of ease and self-indulgence? Do we observe simplicity in our manner of living? Do we allow business and outward activities to absorb our time and energy to the hindrance of our spiritual growth? Are we honest and truthful in word and deed? Are we honorable in all our dealings, careful in making promises, and faithful in keeping them? Are we free from the use of judicial oaths, and do we discourage betting and gambling and from practices based on the principle of chance?

Sixth Query

Do we live in the life and power which takes away the occasion of all wars? Do we, on Christian principles, refuse to participate in war or to cooperate in the military effort? Do we work actively for peace, and the removal of the causes of war? Do we endeavor to cultivate good will and mutual understanding in all our economic relations? Do we work to insure equal opportunities in social and economic life for all?

Seventh Query

What are we doing to draw our members together in a spirit of fellowship? Are we making place for each one in the life and activities of the meeting? Do we as a meeting keep in contact, either by visits or personal letters, with all our members? Is our fellowship deep enough so that Friends in material need feel free to disclose their needs and are they assisted as their circumstances require? Is our fellowship one in which a loving spirit of understanding is so felt that members may feel free to come to us for counsel?

Eighth Query

Do we as followers of Jesus take a living interest in those around us? What place do we give to personal service undertaken in a spirit of love and fellowship? Do we seek to understand the causes of social evils and to take our right share in the endeavor to remove them? Do we seek Divine guidance in those matters lest we harm a situation while trying to help it?

These Queries taken in part from the *Discipline* of Monteverde Monthly Meeting of Friends, Monteverde, Costa Rica, pp. 23-26.

ADVICES

I

Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts, which are the leadings of the Holy Spirit of God. Resist not His strivings within you. It is His light that shows us our darkness and leads to true repentance. It is God's love that draws us to Him, a redemptive love shown forth in Jesus Christ in all His life and above all on the cross. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Be earnestly concerned in your meetings for worship to enter reverently into communion with God and with one another. Come with hearts and minds prepared. Yield yourselves up to the influence of the Divine presence so that you may find the evil weakening in you and the good raised up. God calls each one to the service of the meeting. Be obedient and faithful, whether by word or silent waiting; and receive the messages of others in a tender spirit.

Live in love as Christian brethren, ready to be helpful one to another. Rejoice together in the blessings of life, sympathize with each other in its trials. Know one another as fellow workers in the things that endure. Watch over one another for good, praying that each may be a living member of the Church of Christ, and may grow in the knowledge of the love of God.

Make it your aim to promote the cause of truth and righteousness and to spread the Kingdom of God at home and abroad. Be ready to take your part fearlessly and joyously in declaring His message and in witnessing to His power.

Remember the special opportunities for refreshment of spirit and for service which the first day of the week affords; use them faithfully as befits the friends of the Master whose name we bear.

Seek to know an inward retirement even amid the activities of daily life. Make a quiet place in your daily life wherein you may learn the full meaning of prayer and the gladness of communion with your Heavenly Father. Be constant in the private reading of the Bible and other spiritually helpful writings. Gather daily in your families for united worship.

II

Watch with Christian tenderness over the opening minds of your children. Help them to understand the teachings of Jesus. Seek to awaken in them the love of Christ and through example and training in self control to bring them to obedience to the law of God in their own hearts, that they may be joyful and willing in His service.

Carefully maintain in your own conduct and encourage in your families truthfulness and sincerity. In your style of living, in your dress and in the furniture of your houses, choose what is simple and beautiful and therewith be content. Be prayerfully and acutely sensitive to know what things are needful and beneficial for you and your neighbors; being mindful not to foster too materialistic an economy.

Encourage the reading of good books, so that the taste thus formed may instinctively reject the trivial and the base.

Be mindful for yourselves and for your children of the beauty and flower of friendship. Choose such recreations as are pure and healthy. Let them be in harmony with your service to God and man, and in that service be ready at any time to lay them aside. Be on your guard lest the love of pleasure take hold upon you. Endeavor to make your home an abiding place of joy and peace, where the presence of God is known.

Seek for your children that full development of God's gifts which true education can bring. Remember that the service to which we are called needs healthy bodies, well trained minds, high ideals and an understanding of the laws and purposes of God. Give of your best to the study of the Bible and the understanding of the Christian faith. Be open minded, ready constantly to receive new light. Be zealous that education may be continued throughout life, and that its privileges may be shared by all.

In looking forward to marriage remember that happiness depends on the presence of a reverent and understanding love. Consider the serious responsibilities of parenthood, and do not forget the help you may draw from the loving counsel of your own parents. Seek to be joined in a common discipleship of Jesus Christ. Ask guidance of God, desiring, above all temporal considerations, that your union may be owned and blest of Him.

III

In your daily work, and in your social and other activities, be concerned for the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth. Live not for yourselves but for others. Remember your responsibility as citizens for the government of your own town and country. Study the causes of social evils. Work for an order of society based on mutual service and directed beyond all material ends to the true enrichment of human lives.

Bring all your outward concerns under the ordering of the Spirit of Christ. Where you have a choice of employment, whether for yourselves or for your children, think first of the service that you may render to God and to your fellow men. In your relations with others in your daily work, manifest the spirit of justice and understanding, and thus give a living witness to the Truth.

While trying to make provision for yourselves and your families, be not anxious overmuch, but in quietness of spirit seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Be ready, in response to the Divine call, to save or to spend, to give or to bequeath. To one the summons is to bring fresh energy and vision into his work; to another to limit his engagements or even to retire from business, that he may be free for new service in the way of God's appointing.

Inspect the state of your finances at least once each year, in order honestly to determine whether you are living within your means. Make your wills while in good health.

In view of the evils arising from the use of intoxicating drinks, abstain from using them yourselves, from offering them to others, and from having any share in their manufacture or sale. Do not let the claims of good fellowship, or the fear of seeming peculiar, prevent you from standing by principles which you have conscientiously adopted.

Avoid and discourage every kind of betting and gambling and commercial speculations of a gambling character. Remember how widespread and diverse are the temptations to grow rich at the expense of others, and how apparently harmless indulgence often leads by degrees to ruin and crime.

Be faithful in maintaining our testimony against all war as inconsistent with the spirit and teaching of Christ. Live in the life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars. Seek to take your part in the ministry of reconciliation between individuals, groups, and nations.

Let the law of kindness know no limits. Show a loving consideration for all God's creatures.

Follow steadfastly after all that is pure and lovely and of good report. Be prayerful, be watchful, be humble. Let not failure discourage you. When temptation comes, make it an opportunity to gain new strength by standing fast, that you may enter into that life of gladness and victory to which we are called.

Finally, dear Friends, let your whole conduct and conversation be worthy of disciples of Christ. Be ye steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord,

forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

These Advices taken in part from the *Discipline* of Monteverde Monthly Meeting of Friends, Monteverde, Costa Rica, pp. 27-32.

QUERIES FOR THE STATE OF THE MEETING

The following "Queries for the state of the meeting" are an attempt to evaluate our year's progress as a meeting. It is recommended that the first business meeting of the year be set aside for the consideration of these queries.

Let us enter prayerfully and humbly into these considerations, willing to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in facing with equal honesty our failures as well as our attainments. We should then grow in our ability to come to a true and unifying sense of the meeting each year.

I. Has there been a deepening and strengthening of the sense of the Divine Presence in our midst during the past year? Do we feel a sense of our individual spirits fusing into an undivided group as we worship? Do we leave our meetings filled with a sense of love and peace and courage to meet the challenge of Christian living?

II. Do we create in our meetings a spiritual atmosphere which leads to spoken ministry?

III. Are our meetings for business held under a sense of Divine Guidance? How successful are we in considering any subject freely and coming to a "sense of the meeting" satisfactory to all members?

IV. As a group do our actions over the next year indicate a growth in concern and in the ability to apply our convictions to every phase of our lives under the guidance of the Lord?

V. Are we making the best possible use of our *Discipline*? Are there changes which should be made this year?

These Queries for the State of the Meeting are taken from the *Discipline* of Monteverde Monthly Meeting of Friends, Monteverde, Costa Rica, pp. 33-34.

MEMBERSHIP

The Meaning of Membership

Membership in the Christian Church is a high and rich privilege entailing a corresponding responsibility. Ideally it is the outward sign of an inner union with Christ,

the living head, and with the other members who make up the living body. There is no way for this true and inner union to be infallibly discerned by men. Outward membership can never perfectly mark it and there are doubtless real members of the invisible church who do not belong to any recognized Christian body. We may compare the Society of Friends to a family in which all, even the youngest, can and may bear their rightful share in the family life and interests. We are aware that an ideal Christian society cannot be secured on the basis of Birthright Membership, but neither may it be ensured by imposing outward tests of creed or practice nor even by profession of conversion. However, there are certain fundamental principles of belief and conduct that provide a basis for an association through which living membership can find expression. In our Society unity is essential upon the spiritual and practical nature of Christianity -- the claim of Christ to rule the whole of our life, both inward and outward, and the deep and penetrating reality of worship.

There are two ways of acquiring membership in our meeting.

1. Right of birth.
2. Admission on personal application or (for those under eighteen years of age) application by parents or guardian.

Admission By Right of Birth

Children of parents who are members of the meeting are to be considered members by right of birth or adoption unless otherwise requested. If only one parent is a member, the child shall be considered a member if the consent of both parents is given. The children should receive the special loving care and concern of the meeting in order that they may understand and experience for themselves the true meaning of Quakerism.

Birthright members, upon reaching the age of eighteen, have the privilege of deciding whether they wish to retain their membership in the meeting. The meeting feels each member as he matures should have the responsibility and freedom to make his own decision about being a member of Friends. Therefore, at age eighteen, he is asked to state his decision in a letter to the meeting.

Admission on Personal Application or Application of Parent or Guardian

When a person desires to be joined in membership with us, he should apply in writing to the meeting. The applicant should be informed of the responsibilities involved in membership and of the work of Friends. Membership is a high and rich privilege not to be taken lightly. It should be made clear to the prospective member that he can neither give nor receive all that true membership offers unless he is a regular attender of meetings for worship and business and assumes his share of the responsibility for the meeting's activities.

A membership committee shall be appointed by the meeting to assist the applicant in any

way possible. A minute shall be made by the meeting signifying the applicant's acceptance into membership, and unless the person is present, the clerk shall inform the person of this action.

Release From Membership

If any member makes written request for release from membership or transfer to another meeting, the clerk shall give him a letter releasing him from membership with us.

PROPERTY

Trustees, legally approved, shall be appointed by the meeting to have charge of all legal business for the meeting and to hold title to all property belonging to the meeting. All business and trust properties must be properly transferred to any new appointees by the retiring trustees.

PEACE AND BROTHERHOOD

It is our conviction that if we will but put Christ's teachings into everyday practice, then and only then, can a society be built from which peace will evolve as naturally and as surely as does war from our present social order. Let us be continually conscious of this goal and strive for the highest fulfillment of it, keeping before ourselves the vision and faith of "a new humanity which does not recognize frontiers and always stands for the all-embracing world community."

We believe the spirit of Divine Love, as seen in the life, teachings and cross of Christ, teaches us that we, too, must be peacemakers. Before we can proclaim it to the world, however, we must first have peace within ourselves. "That of God" within us, speaking to our condition, is the true source of peace.

All men desire peace, but do not know how to attain it. They are bewildered and frightened, and in their confusion a double standard of morality develops in which, on the one hand men are trained to kill and on the other they are taught that murder is evil. Vast sums of money are going into instruments of death instead of life, while millions of people are near starvation or suffer from preventable diseases. All this is in the name of peace, freedom and security.

Our Christian faith says that war is wrong, and that double standards are wrong. Only the love of God is strong enough to overcome fear, suspicion and hatred. Friends should be able to bring to situations of political tension a spirit of self-sacrificing love. The Spirit of Christ is not changeable and our historic testimony is as true today as it ever was. It calls for action that is peacemaking

and reconciling.

Taken from the report of ALL FRIENDS CONFERENCE, 1952.

The roots of war can be taken from all our lives as they were from those of Francis of Assisi and John Woolman. Day by day let us seek out and remove every seed of hatred and of greed, of resentment and grudging, in ourselves and so far as we can in the social structure about us. Christ's way of freedom replaces slavish obedience by fellowship. Instead of external compulsion, He gives an inward authority. Instead of self-seeking, we must practice self-giving; instead of domination, cooperation. Fear and suspicion must give place to trust and the spirit of understanding. Thus shall we more and more live in true harmony with all men and our lives be filled with joy which true fellowship never fails to bring. Surely this is the way in which Christ calls us to overcome the barriers of race and class and thus make all humanity a society of friends.

Taken from the *Discipline* of Monteverde Monthly Meeting of Friends,
Monteverde, Costa Rica, p. 51.

The Light is in all men, and the closer they come to it, the closer they come to one another.

Howard Brinton.