

Advices and Queries of Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative)

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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?

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 all 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?

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?

4. HARMONY WITHIN THE MEETING

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

ADVICE

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

Relationships among meeting members take time to evolve. Sometimes misunderstandings develop. When differences arise, they should not be ignored for the sake of superficial unity. We believe disagreements which might divide or disrupt a meeting can be resolved through human effort and divine grace, and may result in a stronger and more creative meeting. True harmony depends upon each person's 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?

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 care giving?
- 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?

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?

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 all 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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?