

**IOWA YEARLY MEETING (CONSERVATIVE)  
2010 QUERIES AND SELECTED RESPONSES**

**1. MEETING FOR WORSHIP**

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 do we integrate our daily lives with meeting for worship? Do we seek opportunities for worship outside of meeting?

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 Response: 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 worshippers.

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.

**2. OUTREACH**

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 Response: 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.

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

Query: How can we hold our meeting 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 Response: 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.

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

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 Response: 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."

## **5. MUTUAL CARE**

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?

Selected Response: 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 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.

## **6. EDUCATION**

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 Response: 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.

## **7. HOME AND FAMILY**

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 Response: 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.

## **8. PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY**

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 Response: 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?

## **9. CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY**

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 decision through prayer and strengthen our actions with worship? Are we open to divine leadings?

Selected Response: 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.

## 10. ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

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 Response: 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 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.

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.

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

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 Response: 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 re-charge 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.

## **12. PEACE AND NONVIOLENCE**

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 Response: 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?