

**IOWA YEARLY MEETING (CONSERVATIVE)**  
**2013 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:** There is a spirit within the meeting that seems to provide an important connection for all of us – a sense of missing something important if we don't attend. One person who is not in the community any longer shared that he could stay in the Spirit on his own because of the grounding he had received growing up in the meeting. We all sense that our lives are integrated in the Spirit often in unconscious, subtle ways. Most of us don't really think about gender in relation to our spiritual lives. Many of us grew up with male gender terms being used to refer to God, but are now comfortable using different terms. There is a feeling that God is the same no matter how we describe our experiences and the key is to be sensitive to others' beliefs and comfort. . . . We have heard criticism of this meeting that we seem to be spiritual, but not verbal. In studying the history of the meeting this seems to have been a deliberate decision by the founders of the meeting because of their experiences with the many splits that occurred among Friends in the past and also because of persecution in Norway for not conforming with the state church teachings. Vocal ministry is welcomed when it is shared, but we are sometimes aware of a deep spiritual connection even without a spoken message.

**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:** Several of our members have made visits to Laughing Waters. Their members have also visited our meeting. Two members who spend three winter months in Alabama are regular attendees of the Fairhope Meeting. One of our distant members was invited to speak to an adult Sunday school in a large Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis about faith and action and art. He had a lot of material related to this from the lives and actions of Iowa Friends and from his photography. . . .

Another distant Friend described how he was witness to an accident and able to encourage a frightened woman to call police. She wrote him a thank you and he told her he felt it was no coincidence that he witnessed the accident but that “he had been stationed there precisely for the purpose of being a witness to assist her.” Our meeting is very much a part of our community. We have rummage sales, bake sales, ice cream socials, the ministerial alliance has met here; last summer we had an art festival, and a sewing group has met here monthly for 100 years. Recently the daughter of a retired Quaker minister chose to have her wedding here. Midyear Meeting is a valuable outreach event for our meeting and yearly meeting. The programs are spiritually nurturing and often attract new attenders. . . . We are grateful for several distant members participating in the **Query** discussion. It has increased our sense of community.

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

### **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:** The smallness of the meeting has probably reduced the amount of disharmony within the meeting. We have less conflict. We know each other well. We respect each other. We have been able to deal with changes as they arise, and not let them become an issue. The times when we have had discord, we have at least found some common ground. By listening to each other, we have learned from it. The smallness can also lead to stress related to the simple chores of running the meeting. One Friend had earlier talked about the financial burden of being in the yearly meeting. This is a challenge area for us. We need to be creative in order to resist the temptation to get rid of responsibilities. It comes right up to who we are – our identity is that we are part of IYMC. We want to keep that identity.

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

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

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

. . . It takes a great effort to build family relationships. We must devote time, which is often in short supply, to build trusting relationships where spiritual renewal can thrive. . . .

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

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

## 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:** . . . Our meeting has several members who remain active in ecology activism, who write to state and national legislators with concerns and observations, weighing in on the side of our responsibility to . . . our environment. FCNL directs petitions to our representatives and has gathered questions about environmental viewpoints for candidates. We talked of the debate about climate change and the direct role that human actions have in changing the balance of our atmosphere and how powerful the corporations have become with influence of money and lobbyists. Drought is a big problem but remains ignored politically. We wonder how we can counter the attitude about "American exceptionalism?" Can we influence trade and express our values about the right sharing of resources? We acknowledge that our personal sacrifices and changes in habits have small consequence but we practice them out of conscience anyway. Discernment will help us identify action avenues. We seek divine guidance to encourage us in living with reverence for God's creation. "Love mercy, act justly, and walk humbly with thy God." Micah 6:8

## **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:** It's easy for us to name the ways in which we're beneficiaries of exploitation; it's harder to do something about it, no matter how earnest our intentions. We benefit from the cheap products that are manufactured under unregulated conditions, and often we can't see beyond the convenient price. We often eat animals that are raised under cruel conditions and, again, appreciate first of all their cheapness. . . . As our awareness increases, we attempt to think about the impact of our buying practices. . . . Even those of us who struggle financially have found it possible to live simply and prioritize, choosing responsible food before unnecessary consumer items. It can take courage to resist our culture's emphasis on buying, but this awareness enriches us spiritually and helps us avoid the spiritual dullness that comes with unconscious spending. It takes a village to keep people out of prison. . . . We can advocate for programs that work to improve prisons. The East Hill Singers is a local effort to involve male inmates in a remarkable community outreach singing group. AVP (The Alternatives to Violence Program) is a Quaker-based effort that is extremely effective. Nutrition programs have been

shown to help inmates reduce violent behavior, and Alcoholics Anonymous and various Native American alcoholism programs can help the large number of addicts in the prison system.

## 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:** For many of us, the living into the testimony of peace and nonviolence is the most difficult part of Quakerism. How are we to figure out the things that cause war and then go stop them? That seems to require much meddling of us; perhaps we must do more meddling than we are doing. When the Occupy Movement was going strong as a form of peaceful protest, it seemed intimidating, and that caused some of us to begin to wonder just what is peace: When does even a passive show of force become a violent statement used to intimidate others? When George Fox wrote his epistle in which he counsels us “seek to live in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars,” he was responding to the civil war in England at the time. Are our times so different? . . . Actions such as going to the School of the Americas and getting arrested; joining peace marches; and signing petitions seem to miss the point somehow, and we are unsure what’s missing in our collective effort to be nonviolent. With regard to family, some of us reflected on what it has meant to parent or to be parented with intimidation. . . . How do we find ways to respond and react to children peacefully, especially when our impulse is to express to our children anger and impatience? Separation from God may readily lead us to separation from one another, and when we lose the connection to that of God in one another, we may fall into great despair, pain, and hurt—a spiritual condition that may in turn lead to war and violence. In our current situation as a worship community, we struggle with how Friends among us have been treated. At times our actions and words have felt like an attack on one another. . . . As a result, some Friends have stopped attending and we miss their presence. Do we hurt so much because we have loved one another so much? We need one another to help us consider how we have acted correctly or incorrectly, to help us be faithful and understand the way forward. We feel great tenderness and love toward one another, even as we recognize that as individuals, we respond to pain, fear, and conflict in different ways—some by staying away from worship; others by stepping more fully forward into participating in the life of the meeting. Where is the place and how do we carve out the time to ask one another tenderly, “How were you faithful? What have been the fruits of the Spirit as we walk this walk as best we can?” How might our country, our world, be different if instead of rushing to war and defending ourselves, we rushed to be the first to say “I seek forgiveness and offer reconciliation?”