

**New England Yearly Meeting
Interim Faith and Practice 2014**

Study Guide

An aspect of grace is that the Spirit communicates with us in words, images, and feelings that engage us. It is our task as individuals and as meetings to discover how to live faithfully a path we have been given.

These words from page four of the New England Yearly Meeting Interim Faith and Practice 2014 encourage a process of discovery. This Study Guide offers some suggestions about how we as meeting communities might use this book to stimulate engagement in that process. It contains three sections.

Section 1: the chapters given preliminary approval by the Yearly Meeting

Section 2: the Appendices Working Paper

Section 3: “A Peculiar People” and “Moving Forward to the Remaining Chapters: The Integration of Faith and Life”

These three sections illustrate the interim nature of the book, which is very much in process. The preface and chapters in Section 1 have been given preliminary approval, which means they are substantially acceptable, and only minor changes to them are expected when the completed book is given final approval. Section 2 is a working paper and Section 3 describes the task in the chapters being drafted, which is to describe the integration of faith and life in our communal life as a religious society, in our personal lives, and in the wider community. We are eager to have Friends send input on these two sections.

It is our hope that Friends will become familiar with the *Interim Faith and Practice 2014* and allow this publication to deepen their faith as well as guide “practice.” Many meetings have reflected on working papers for the approved chapters, offering helpful feedback. These comments were crucial in revising the texts we presented to Sessions that were then given preliminary approval. Now that those chapters have been published, we want to encourage Friends to read them in a devotional way. Our intent in developing this study guide is to provide such encouragement. We hope that when you pick up this book it will

bring you into the company of the Spirit, as George Fox hoped to bring Friends “*into touch with the Living Spirit of Christ and to leave them there.*” (British Friend vol. 6, pg. 288, 1897).

Meetings may want to host a series of gatherings, possibly after worship, where Friends sit in a circle and read aloud—reading to simply listen—allowing the text to speak for itself, while taking time for quiet reflection between readings. This kind of listening/reading might offer an opportunity for prayer, articulation of faith, or ministry.

We also encourage Friends to familiarize themselves with the Appendices and use them. Meetings may ask particular committees to read sections that refer to practices related to their responsibilities, such as membership, marriage, or recognition of gifts and leadings. This may encourage those committees to clarify their own practices to the meetings.

Section 1.

The chapters with preliminary approval

Preface

Each extract in this *Faith and Practice* retains the original language used by the individual or faith community, language which may sound unfamiliar. Can you hear through the language to the writer's experience of the Spirit?

There are extracts that end most chapters, offered in the same spirit. It may sometimes be useful to read them separately from the main text.

1. Illustrative Experiences of Friends

Our tradition has always drawn people to trust in the Light and find their way to an inward experience of the Spirit, and at the same time we have found encouragement, inspiration and challenge in the witness of others. We therefore invite you to read and reflect on these "illustrative experiences," personal records of encounters with the Divine. These are not offered as statements of (or evidence for) particular beliefs, but more as invitations to join in the journey of the people called Quakers. Some are from long ago, and others are more recent and even contemporary, but similar threads keep reappearing across history and in our own lives. We hope these different voices will encourage you to find your own path into the community of Friends. The chapter is divided into five sections that reflect different aspects of the journey.

Which of these extracts speak most deeply to you and your condition? Can you express why?

Which extracts seem challenging or inaccessible to you? Sit with them. Trust that over time they may open avenues of truth for you.

2. Worship

This chapter is an introduction to the variety of practices of worship among Friends in New England and includes a series of reflections on what we are committing to when we come to meeting. Find what speaks to you, and hold what does not speak to you in waiting worship.

The “Advices and Queries” which follow the introductory essay focus especially on areas where Friends have needed encouragement and/or guidance.

What is familiar to you?

What is unfamiliar or challenging?

What inspires you?

Which advices would provide an opportunity for growth for your meeting community?

Which queries are of the greatest challenge to the corporate worship in your meeting?

Which queries challenge you personally to greater faithfulness?

Which extracts opened a door for you?

3. Corporate Discernment in Meetings for Business

Our way of conducting business, which has arisen out of shared spiritual experience, is perhaps the most counter-cultural aspect of Quaker life. It takes time to get used to and to trust it, and it requires discipline of which we often need to be reminded. Let what we are trying to do be guided by the suggested procedures, the Advices for Clerks and the Advices and Queries meant for all.

Do the first three paragraphs of this chapter reflect your experience of your monthly meeting’s Meeting for Business?

Are there phrases or concepts here that are a fresh inspiration for you?

The Meeting for Business

This section is a hands-on expression of how to move the business of the meeting forward in a spiritually disciplined way.

Are there concepts or processes that bring fresh insight into the process for you?

Are there approaches that surprise you? Why?

Advices on Corporate Discernment

In considering these eight advices together, how would you name the spiritual disciplines called into action?

Advices for Clerks and for Recording Clerks

In your personal experience as a clerk, recording clerk or member of the business meeting, which advices were most helpful?

Queries on Corporate Discernment

Which queries do you personally find most challenging? Which queries might best help your monthly meeting for business?

Extracts on Corporate Discernment

Which extracts provide you with fresh insight? Are there extracts you need to sit with?

9. A Brief History of Friends in New England

When you feel the atmosphere around early Friends and the power of their faith, do you recognize the call to live in the same virtue and power?

Do you read this as a record of faithfulness? Is your life a witness?

Can we learn from the places where we were less than faithful?

How do we feel about the leaders of our past? Do we accept leadership today in the same way?

Has anything moved you enough to search for primary sources?

11. General Advices and Queries

The advices and queries in Chapter 2 (Worship) and Chapter 3 (Corporate Discernment in Meetings for Business) are specific to the spiritual life and work described there. In this chapter general advices and queries are not focused by topic; they are intended to nurture faithfulness as a foundation for every thought and action. They challenge us to turn to the Inward Teacher to seek the particular ways we might be led to serve the one common interest of which Woolman speaks, both as individuals and as meetings, “turn[ing] all the treasures we possess into the channel of universal love.”

Pray with advices and queries; hold them in your hearts. Feel which speak to you, challenge you, show you the way.

Which advices and queries do you find unsettling?
Why?

Which advices and queries do you find encouraging and/or empowering? How?

Is there an advice whose truth you doubt? Why?

Which of the extracts particularly resonate with your experience? Which extracts give you fresh insight? Which ones challenge you? Why?

Section 2. The Appendices Working Paper

The Appendices Working Paper is a response to the request from Friends in New England for more succinct guidance on membership and marriage clearness, travel minutes, recognizing gifts and ministry, and related processes. Fuller descriptions of the practices outlined here, including their history and spiritual underpinnings, will be treated in chapters on which we are now working. As you study the procedures outlined, we would appreciate your comments, particularly on the following:

What needs to be clarified, added or further developed?

Do your meeting practices differ?

If so, we would be interested in your sending us a description. Sending input to fandp@neym.org will help us revise the appendices to make them even more useful to everyone.

Section 3. “A Peculiar People” and “Moving Forward to the Remaining Chapters: The Integration of Faith and Life”

A Peculiar People

The Faith and Practice Revision Committee presented “A Peculiar People” to Sessions in 2003 as “a window for the Yearly Meeting into the work we are doing.” We hoped it would describe the unity of faith and life we wanted to convey in the revision. We have been asked to consider including it somehow in the book and we welcome reflections on this from individuals or groups.

Moving Forward to the Remaining Chapters: The Integration of Faith and Life

Our intention as we move forward with the book is to show the ways in which God is a living, active Spirit, guiding us individually and corporately. This is our testimony. It is manifest in our lives, in how we parent, in how we choose to interact with the earth community, in how we do business in the world, and in the choices we make as consumers and as citizens. In these chapters we want to show how our lives can be infused with the testimony of the living God, whose nature includes truth, justice, compassion, and peace. The task before us is to show the spiritual motion that is the source of all “testimony.”

We seek to convey the experience of lives lived in faithfulness to the Source in the particular contexts of our communal life as a religious society, as individuals, and in the wider community. To that end we hope to include texts that convey the lived experience of Friends—and we want stories—stories of contemporary

New England Friends, and of present or past witnesses that have moved you. We ask that you send us your experiences of how testimony, in all its variety, is expressed in your lives, both as individuals and as meetings and, particularly, of new openings for witness arising in the Yearly Meeting.

Please send them to fandp@neym.org.

Copies of this Study Guide can be downloaded from the NEYM website <http://neym.org/fp-revision/interim-faith-and-practice>. Print copies of the NEYM Interim Faith and Practice 2014 may be ordered through the website or from the NEYM office, 901 Pleasant Street, Worcester, MA 01602 or email office@neym.org. E-book, large print, and PDF versions are/ will be available at that website and address as well.

approved by the NEYM *Faith and Practice* Revision Committee

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