

Durham Friends Meeting

“Quakerism 101”

A short course for interested members and attenders
Introducing the history and principle elements of Quakerism.

Class 3

Quaker Practice: How and Why

In this session, we will consider:

- 1. The Basis for Worship and Ministry**
- 2. Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business**
- 3. Quaker Organization**
 - Yearly Meeting and Other Organizations**
 - Faith and Practice**
 - Durham Meeting structure and Committees**
- 4. Membership in the Durham Meeting**

To prepare for class, please read the following short essays and excerpts. (Downloading and bringing them to class for reference is suggested.)

If you are inclined, it is also recommended that you read through the North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) “Faith and Practice – Book of Discipline” (1983 Revision). Copies are available in the Meeting library.

JBH

Friends (Quaker) Worship

By Bill Samuel

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(abridged – JH 3/07)

The early Friends felt that the churches' worship was not true worship. George Fox wrote, "For teachings, churches, and worships that have been set up by man's earthly understanding, knowledge, and will must be thrown down with the power of the Lord God." (To Friends in the Ministry (1656))

Friends had a distinctive worship, of which Isaac Pennington writes:

Our worship is a deep exercise of our spirits before the Lord, which doth not consist in an exercising the natural part or natural mind, either to hear or speak words, or in praying according to what we, of ourselves, can apprehend or comprehend concerning our needs; but we wait, in silence of the fleshly part, to hear with the new ear, what God shall please to speak inwardly in our own hearts; or outwardly through others, who speak with the new tongue, which he unlooseth, and teacheth to speak; and we pray in the Spirit, and with the new understanding, as God pleaseth to quicken, draw forth, and open our hearts towards himself.

Thus our minds being gathered into the measure, or gift of grace, which is by Jesus Christ; here we appear before our God, and here our God, and his Christ, is witnessed in the midst of us.

This is that gathering in the name, which the promise is to, where we meet together, waiting with one consent on the Father of life, bowing and confessing to him in the name of his Son; and that fleshly part, that fleshly understanding, that fleshly wisdom, that fleshly will, which will not bow, is chained down, and kept under by the power of life, which God stretcheth forth over it, and subdueth it by. So then, there is the sweet communion enjoyed, the sweet love flowing, the sweet peace of spirit reaped, which the Father breathes upon, and gives to his children; the sweet joy and refreshment in the Lord our righteousness, who causeth righteousness to drop down from heaven, and truth to spring up out of the earth. And so our Father is felt blessing us, blessing our land, blessing our habitations, delighting in us, and over us to do us good; and our land yields its increase to the Lord of life, who hath redeemed it, and planted the precious plants and seeds of life in it.

God's Teachings and Christ's Law Part XIII,
A few Words concerning the Worship which
our God hath taught us. ca. 1671

Worship and Ministry in Words

Early Friends were clear that they came together to wait upon the Lord. They claimed Jesus' promise in Matthew 18:20, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." (New Revised Standard Version) They silently gathered to experience Christ's presence. It is often said that Catholics and Quakers have in common a focus on the *actual* presence of Christ in worship. For Catholics, Christ is present physically in the communion host. For Quakers, Christ is present spiritually as our priest.

For Friends, Christ was always the true teacher. Christ may deliver a message in words through a human being. This might be through any person present in worship. However, Friends also recognized that God gifted certain people for the public ministry of the word. Starting very early in Friends history, those especially called to this public ministry met together in select meetings for mutual encouragement, discernment and prayer. These meetings sent out "The Valiant Sixty" - men and women who traveled the world proclaiming the gospel that Christ had come to teach his people himself.

This ministry of the word was a free gospel ministry. It wasn't done to earn a salary, and ministers were expected to earn a living the same as anyone else except when they were called to travel in the ministry. The faith community would provide any material support needed to enable such ministry, whether it be taking care of their farm or business while they were away, providing child care, paying for passage on a ship, or whatever. But they were not salaried. As the Society of Friends became more structured, those faithful to a special call to ministry were formally "acknowledged" or "recorded" in the minutes of their meeting (congregation).

Quaker Worship Today

Patterns of Friends worship today are quite varied, but are generally divided into two categories. One category is usually referred to as *unprogrammed*. The other category is referred to as *pastoral* or *programmed*. Sometimes the distinction is expressed as being between *meetings* and *churches*. Unprogrammed Friends retain the practice of referring to local congregations as meetings rather than churches, but many (although certainly not all) programmed Friends have adopted the more common terminology in the large society and call themselves churches.

In North America, about two-thirds of the congregations are programmed. In the rest of the "developed" world, Friends are largely unprogrammed. In the "developing" world, where the majority of Friends live today, the programmed pattern predominates.

The unprogrammed Friends follow the pattern of gathering in silence without pre-planned sermons, music or other prepared elements. Anyone who feels moved to speak may offer vocal ministry. Generally, brevity in speaking is strongly encouraged, whereas early Friends sometimes spoke at great length. The practice of recording ministers has fallen into disuse in many places, and generally there is little emphasis on nurturing special gifts in the vocal ministry.

Programmed Friends normally have an order of service, including a sermon and hymn singing. Sometimes they have a period of what they most commonly call "open worship", and sometimes "communion after the manner of Friends". Sometimes this is token or absent. There are now usually educational requirements for recording ministers, which was never the practice before the rise of the pastoral system.

There is often a lot of suspicion between unprogrammed and programmed Friends. Unprogrammed Friends charge that the pastoral system is incompatible with the early Friends emphasis on the free gospel ministry and that programmed Friends have adopted too much from Protestant churches that early Friends would have called apostate. Programmed Friends charge that unprogrammed Friends have often abandoned the early Friends emphasis on Jesus Christ, and definitely their evangelical zeal.

Quaker Ministry

Excerpts

Barclay's Apology (1675):

As by the light or gift of God all true knowledge in things spiritual is conceived and revealed, so by the same, as it is manifested and received in the heart... every true minister of the gospel is ordained, prepared, and supplied in the work of the ministry; and by the leading, moving and drawing hereof ought every evangelist and Christian pastor to be led and ordered in his labour and work of the gospel; both as to the place where, as to the persons whom, and as to the time wherein he is to minister. Moreover, they who have this authority may and ought to preach the gospel, though without human commission or literature; as on the other hand, they who want the authority of this divine gift, however learned, or authorized by the commission of men and churches, are to be esteemed but as deceivers, and not true ministers of the gospel. Also they who have received this holy and unspotted gift, as they have freely received it, so are they freely to give it, without hire or bargaining, far less to use it as a Trade to get money by.

Prophetic Ministry, (from PHP #54, by Howard Brinton)

The term *prophetic* indicates in a single word the basic theory of Quaker Ministry. He who appears in the ministry in a Quaker meeting is, at least theoretically a *prophet*, in the sense that he or she is an instrument through which God speaks to the congregation. The divine call was more deliberately waited for and consciously felt in the older Quakerism than is the case today. But even today a prophetic ministry is still the goal, however differently the word *prophetic* may be interpreted. A teaching ministry consisting of what Robert Barclay calls material "conned and gathered" may have its occasional place in a Quaker meeting, though it is generally more appropriately exercised at other times. The most satisfactory ministry in the Quaker meeting of today arises out of a flash of insight, felt in the silence and delivered with brevity and a deep sense of concern. Ministers who can speak at length and exhibit throughout the genuine spirit of prophecy are rare in any generation.

Iowa History Project (L.T. Jones)

That it was not intended by the Yearly Meeting in Iowa that the introduction of the pastoral system should thus reduce its meetings for worship to a one-man ministry and a set routine is made clear by the statement which opened the explanation accompanying the adoption of the proposed system in 1886: "By a regular ministry is not meant that a single person should be placed at the head of a meeting and do all the preaching, nor that there should necessarily be preaching in every single instance". But the very conditions which were thus guarded against now prevail almost universally among the Orthodox Friends in Iowa. The religious responsibility of the individual member in the congregation has largely been shifted to the shoulders of the pastor. Under ordinary circumstances he is expected to preach a sermon both religiously instructive and intellectually interesting. If the sermon approaches an hour in length, uneasiness and restlessness is frequently observed. Periods of "waiting silence", once so precious to those who deemed reflection and deliberate thought the best medium for worship, are often periods of embarrassment for both the congregation and the minister.

JBH - 3/07

Waiting Worship - A Personal Understanding

By John Hunter

*Appeared in the Durham Meeting Newsletter
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Upon calculation, it turns out that I've been attending Quaker meetings for worship for 44 years and I think that in the past decade or so I've finally become truly comfortable with the experience. This means that it took me some 30 years to become acclimatized, which is pretty glacial for someone who considers himself a quick study. Do I now have it 100 percent right? Of course not. There is no such thing and besides, the experience of meeting for worship is quite personal.

I know that I am not alone in a failure to quickly appreciate what meeting for worship can be. Attenders at meeting commonly are filled with questions such as: "What am I supposed to be thinking or feeling? Why can't I get my shopping list out of my head? What am I missing that everyone else seems to be understanding? And why is this quiet form of meditation called 'worship?'"

In my case, I was educated early on with regard to the "theory" of what is supposed to happen in meeting for worship. I was required to take a course in Quakerism at my Quaker high school and discovered that, in addition to the obligatory explanations in yearly meeting books of discipline, essentially all notable Friends of the "unprogrammed" tradition have written on this topic. There must be hundreds of essays, pamphlets, chapters of books, or whole tomes devoted both to the basic concepts of "waiting worship" and to various subsets of individual practices. I've read a dozen or so from the classic descriptions by Thomas Kelly and Rufus Jones down to essays in various meeting newsletters. Our own Conservative tradition has produced some thoughtful writing regarding the beauty, depth, and power of meeting for worship if approached properly.

Now I do not presume that I can improve on explanations offered by the greatest Quaker writers of the last century. I can, however, share some of what I have discovered with hopes that it will be useful.

First, I found that I agreed from the start on some basic negative definitions. There is a whole list of what meeting for worship is NOT, and I found that I could fully agree. Meeting for worship is not an intellectual exercise and mental or verbal essays are counterproductive. It is not a therapy group and emotional sharing of the sort that looks for sympathy or to shock or impress is inappropriate. In short, it is not about me, my feelings, or my insights.

Meeting for worship IS essentially a spiritual experience. Meeting for worship is the opportunity to experience a fundamental and profound connection to..... Ah, here is where Quakers are at a loss for words and substitute many of same. "That of God," "Still Small Voice," "Inner Guide," "Christ Within," "Truth," "God," "Inner Light," (or simply "The Light"), "Holy Spirit," "Love" (as in: God is Love), "The Spirit," "Seed," and the list can (and does) go on. For me, the term that personally best expresses what I feel so powerfully connected to in meeting is "Spirit of Love". It is not important to me what terms others may use because I recognize its presence in that person regardless of what they call it. When I feel it myself or see it in others, it is calm, radiant, powerful, clear, accepting, kind, embracing, and generous. The topic of the messages in meeting may be about anything (and even expressed with anger) but if the Spirit of Love accompanies the message we are bound together along with all creation in a powerful supportive connection. Sometimes it is clear that everyone in the room is caught up in the Spirit and senses the essence of messages offered from the silence even before they are spoken. Such a "gathered" meeting is a wonderful experience.

I have become convinced that a consciousness of the presence of this spirit is the basis for worship. Whereas group "worship" is typically seen as performing a set of rituals, praying, singing, listening to scripture or a sermon, etc. all of which are oriented toward adoration, paying homage, and making a connection with God, we Quakers simply wait quietly. We practice waiting to sense the fundamental connection. When we are fully and deeply aware of its presence I believe we are truly worshipping.

Can the new attender immediately adapt to our Quaker style? Not usually. It takes time and practice. Two steps

forward and one step back. Some meetings are duds, while others are wonderful experiences. For me it took decades to move myself to the point where most every meeting for worship is a rewarding and positive experience. Not all, of course, but my personal batting average is getting better and better.

There are many tips for successful Quaker worship offered by various authorities. These may include preparations before meeting, techniques for “settling in” or calming the mind, breathing, sitting properly, proper use of scripture, how to listen to messages, and various tests for appropriate speaking in meeting. While I have sampled these suggestions, what has worked for me is trying to consciously focus on the spirit of love that binds us all and is our birthright. This may not necessarily work for anyone else, but it has been of great assistance to me.

So realize that it will take time - months if not years. Sooner or later, however, you will find that the shopping lists really have stopped buzzing through your head, or the ruminations about office politics or family squabbles no longer follow you to meeting. Sooner or later you may discover that coming to meeting and joining in a silent waiting worship is more important than you could have imagined.

Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business

JH - 4/07

Introduction

One of the most distinctive of Quaker practices is the way we conduct our business. Our methods are puzzling to most outsiders and even may be frustrating to those who do not understand the worshipful context we strive for. And this is the key: we intend that our business meetings ideally should be conducted in a manner that is open to being led by the Spirit Within. In this way we seek to perhaps end up in a position closer to revealed Truth rather than expediently proposing quick solutions to issues before us.

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From London Yearly Meeting

What's special about a Quaker business meeting?

A Quaker business meeting is essentially a meeting for worship, except that it has a pre-arranged agenda. Whether it be a working party, a committee, a local, regional or national meeting, the process is the same: Friends coming together in silence in order to draw closer to God and each other, and to seek the guidance of the Inward Light.

What's going on in the meeting?

A meeting starts with a period of quiet worship. The clerk then opens the business part of the meeting. As in a secular meeting, someone presents an item, and answers questions of clarification. But rather than debating the matter, the gathering then tries to discern, in an atmosphere of worship, what love requires of us. Spoken contributions are offered as ministry and are wrapped in silence. If things seem to be getting heated, the clerk or another Friend may ask for a period of silence. A touch of humour often helps the process. No vote is taken, as we are not trying to reach consensus or establish the will of the majority, but to work in harmony with the Spirit. This approach can be very liberating, because it ensures that minority views are not dismissed or suppressed. A minute is drafted by the clerk and presented to the meeting; it is for all those present to agree the record of their deliberations.

Can I come to a business meeting if I am not a member of the Religious Society of Friends?

Yes - attenders are usually welcome to attend open business meetings. You will need to let the clerk know in advance that you would like to come. You may be asked to withdraw for certain agenda items.

What is my role in the meeting?

As in any meeting for worship, your primary role is to listen respectfully to others and to 'the promptings of love and truth in your heart'. Even if you disagree strongly with another contribution, listen patiently to each to learn what you can, trusting that you will be heard in the same spirit. It is helpful if you prepare beforehand, read the papers and reflect prayerfully on the business, but remember that responsibility for the outcome belongs to the meeting as a whole, not to any individual. Come to the meeting with heart and mind prepared - not heart and mind made up.

What is the clerk doing?

The clerk is rather like a cross between a chair and a secretary. Clerks prepare the agenda, do the necessary administration and guide the meeting through the items of business. The clerk has to try and discern the outcome of each item (often called 'the sense of the meeting'), and to prepare a draft minute to lay before the gathering. Although it is the meeting that is really in charge, clerks carry a lot of responsibility. We need to support them and do all we can to avoid making their job more difficult by holding private conversations while a minute is

being drafted, for instance, or by quibbling over a good enough minute.

Who can speak, and how often?

Once an item on the agenda has been introduced to the meeting anyone may speak, but remember, this is a meeting for worship. If you feel led to minister, test your prompting first. Equally, don't let shyness or a sense of unworthiness hold you back - you have a responsibility to help the meeting by sharing any relevant insight or information you may have. In formal meetings it is the practice to stand and wait to be called by the clerk; if another Friend is called or the clerk stands, you should sit down again. There is no need to repeat a point which has already been made, or to speak twice to the same matter unless asked to do so. Try to resist the temptation to be argumentative. The point is not to win an argument but to uphold our community as we work together for a better world.

Are minor matters dealt with differently from main items?

Some matters may be complex or controversial, and a wide range of views will need to be expressed. It may take more than one meeting to find unity; a rushed decision driven by the clock may well turn out to be unsatisfactory. Other matters will be routine or minor or relatively straightforward, so that they can be swiftly dealt with. Though the process remains the same, it is not necessary to consider every item at great length or in deep solemnity. That said, a matter that looks routine beforehand sometimes turns out to raise unforeseen controversy!

What if I don't agree with the minute?

If you feel the minute doesn't reflect the sense of the meeting, or is badly worded, there will be an opportunity to comment after the draft minute is presented. If you don't agree with the decision reached, try to set aside your disappointment and accept that the decision has nevertheless been reached collectively through the discipline of waiting together in the Light, in a sincere search for love and truth. The right decision is important, but no more so than reaching it by the right process - a process in which you played your full part. Remember that unity is not the same as unanimity. You may need to continue reflecting on the matter and talking it over with other Friends. Sometimes, at a subsequent meeting, it becomes clear to the meeting that a new direction is needed.

Isn't all this asking too much of people?

The discipline we have laid upon ourselves is a demanding one. Quakers are human, not saints. A more experienced or self-confident Friend may drown out a quieter voice that the meeting needed to hear. Strong feelings on an issue may make some Friends intolerant or even aggressive. But it is worth struggling with the challenge, for when the process works the reward is a powerful sense of rightness and unity.

Quaker Meeting for Business

From a paper by Eden Grace in 2000 proposing Quaker process as a possibility for the World Council of Churches to adopt in the conduct of its own business.

I will freely admit that a Quaker Meeting for Business is vulnerable to abuse. Those who do not enter the process in a right spirit can seriously jeopardize the Meeting. In order for the Meeting to function, the members must share a commitment to a spiritual discipline. This discipline is cultivated rather than regulated, and it takes time to acquire. There is no official list of rules, although each Yearly Meeting (autonomous Quaker church) has a book of discipline which gives guidance on the spirit and practice of the Meeting for Business. Some elements of the discipline are:

- *attitude toward God:* We enter into the Business Meeting with hearts and minds prepared to be led by the Holy Spirit. We renew our commitment to Divine authority and our belief that the living Christ is present this day to teach and lead us. We submit to Divine will and seek to lay our own strong feelings and desires before God.
- *attitude toward the other members:* Our process places a high value on the strength of the community. A Sense of the Meeting is only achieved when those participating respect and care for one another. It requires a humble and loving spirit, imputing purity of motive to all participants and offering our highest selves in return. We seek to create a safe space for sharing. We pray that we might listen carefully, respectfully, lovingly. We listen always for the presence of God through what someone is saying, knowing that each of us is endowed with some measure of Divine Light. The creation of the blessed community is both a necessary prerequisite and an inevitable by-product of corporate discernment. While this is most easily accomplished at the local level, where members are already known to each other, it has been our experience that, when we ask the Lord's help, deep Christian community can form even among strangers.
- *attitude toward the process:* We value process over product, action or outcome. We respect each other's thoughts, feelings and insights more than expedient action. The process of reaching a decision yields more "results" than the decisions themselves. Attention to the Divine movement in the community is, in fact, the source of decision and action, so that process and outcome are ideally two sides of the same Sacramental experience. Through that experience of the Unity of the Meeting, we are prepared for faithful discipleship in the church and world. A decision which is made without that experience is of little value.
- *attitude toward potential outcomes:* We know that none of us is likely to enter the Meeting with a fully-formed understanding of the will of God, and so we expect that a new way will emerge which is not necessarily identified with the position of any person or faction. "... a group, meeting in the right spirit, may be given greater insight than any single person." "A gathered meeting under the authority of God is often able to find unity in creative ways which were not considered before the meeting but which become apparent during its course. Though the process of Quaker business may take some time, at the end it can find a united meeting able to act swiftly because the action has been widely agreed."
- *commitment to the authority of the meeting:* All authority rests in God. Once the Meeting has discerned God's will as best it can at that moment in time, the decision of the Meeting is vested with a measure of Divine authority. Decisions are not "revisited" by staff, clerks or committees. Those who were not present accept the decision of the Meeting. This is not to say that the Meeting's decisions have ultimate authority, since our discernment is never free of human imperfection. The Meeting itself can always revisit decisions, and new light may be found.
- *role of human leadership:* The Meeting is served by a Presiding Clerk, and often also a Recording Clerk. Friends are appointed for a limited time, and these roles are widely shared among the membership. The Clerks have no formal authority of their own and can not speak for the Meeting. Their task is to focus and enable the discernment of the Meeting by laying business before it in an orderly way, managing the pace and discipline of the discussion, listening for the Sense of the Meeting to emerge, restating that Sense in clear language and asking for approval, and recording the business in written minutes. The Clerks develop the agenda and discern whether an issue is ripe for consideration by the Meeting or needs further seasoning by a committee. The Clerks are responsible for judging the "weight" of each comment by discerning the movement of the Spirit in the Meeting, rather than developing a tally of opinions pro and con. The Clerks are servants of the Meeting and not participants in the discussion. On rare occasion, when a Clerk finds that he or she must speak to an item of business, a replacement Clerk must be found

until that item is concluded. Thus we avoid the temptation to assign any authority to human figures which would obscure our utter dependence on the authority of God.

- *role of written minutes:* The Clerk makes sure the Meeting understands what is being approved by stating it in clear language which is written down, read back, discussed and approved by the Meeting at the time the decision is made. The minutes, once approved, become authoritative. They are kept and referred to indefinitely. Thus minutes and minute-taking are crucial to the process, and are seen as a weighty spiritual practice rather than clerical function.
- *preparing an item of business:* Generally, the Business Meeting benefits from having items seasoned beforehand by a committee. The committee usually brings the item with a recommendation, but even if it does not, it should have done some work on preparing the item and anticipating various questions and concerns.
- *personal conduct:* We usually only speak once to each item. We only speak when recognized by the Clerk. We don't plan messages ahead of time, but listen instead to the movement of the Spirit and pray for guidance as to whether we are being led to speak. We fully expect that our message may not be needed, as God may have empowered another individual to offer the same insight. We do not offer redundant messages, since the Sense of the Meeting is not discerned by a tally of opinions. We pray continuously for the Meeting and its Clerks. Friends often find the Meeting for Business to be a purgative, humbling and awe-inspiring experience as we let go of our own self and personal agenda. Although the Meeting is a solemn event, humor is sometimes appropriate and helpful. We refrain from comments which suggest argument, debate or an attempt to convince, and rather give testimony to our experience of the leading of the Spirit in this matter. We listen thoughtfully and respectfully, observing a pause between messages for deeper listening. Each person present has a responsibility to participate and not hold back if they are led to speak. Every member of the church has the responsibility to attend the Business Meeting to the extent they are able.
- *on dissent:* "If an individual differs from what appears to be the general sense of the Meeting, it may be taken as a sign that the Divine will has not quite been grasped." The Meeting should be especially sensitive to sincere expressions of difference from the growing Unity. These may indicate that the Meeting has not truly listened to God's prompting among us. When a Friend feels he or she must "stand in the way" of Unity, the Meeting and the Friend will patiently labor together in hopes of coming to a truer understanding of God's will. However, individuals do not hold a power of veto, and should be ready to recognize the validity of corporate leadings and to submit to them if conscience allows, being recorded in the minutes as "standing aside". While we boldly profess a spirituality of unmediated relationship with the Divine, we are always mindful of how the human person is, in fact, already a mediating force. Our own past experience, our fears, our sin, and the influence of our cultural context, can all obscure our discernment of God's will. The presence of dissent and discord in the Meeting is therefore always an occasion for prayer, repentance and conversion by the whole Meeting.
- *on time:* Quaker decision making takes time. We can not allow ourselves to be hurried. A sense of urgency or pressure can quickly erode a process of deep seeking. We don't impose a deadline for making any decision. If Unity is not reached in one Meeting, the matter is laid over.
- *on not finding the sense of the meeting:* We take no action until there is Unity on taking action. Thus the Quaker process is essentially a conservative process in that respect. Things stay the same until we are in Unity on changing them.

Friends would not claim to have perfected this process, or that we always practice it with complete faithfulness. What I've described in this paper is Quaker process in its ideal form. Most Friends are painfully aware of how our humans falls short of the spiritual ideal, and of how fragile our process can seem. Corporate discernment of the will of God is a risky and imperfect proposition. In relying so extensively on the Holy Spirit, we make ourselves vulnerable to pitfalls and failures. However, far from being a weakness, such vulnerability is central to our understanding of the power of worship (and business) "in spirit and in truth." To fall into the hands of the living God requires leaping, laying ourselves open to risk. Our commitment to this process, and our assurance of its outcomes, can only be proven in the eschaton, but still we give testimony to the truth we have been given, and are able to say that we have tested this method and found it that it does indeed bring us into Unity with the will of God.

An Historical Note on Men's and Women's Business Meetings

By John Hunter

4/07

Quakers have always been products of and engaged within the dominant society in which they lived. As much as many would have argued that they were (or at least should have been) not OF this world, history has clearly demonstrated otherwise. Even while “worldly” or “creaturely” activity was directly invoked against in yearly meeting disciplines and in other documents, it can be shown that most Friends were significantly engaged in the wider society and to some degree most certainly influenced by it.

Once such area of influence was societal expectations of relations between men and women. While it is true that Quakers honored a theology that made the sexes equal in God's eyes, local law and custom still held a powerful sway. One of the ways this was evident was the custom of holding separate business meetings for men and women within the monthly meeting. (Meetings for worship including men and women, with full equality assumed and practiced, were always held by Friends.) While in most churches of the 17th century women held no authority whatsoever, Friends moved in the direction implied by their theology by establishing parallel business meetings for women. From our modern perspective we may see this as a fundamental inequality, for indeed it was “separate but unequal” in that women's sphere of business was assumed to be that of traditional female interests and pursuits. However, from the perspective of the time it was seen as quite progressive if not radical. In the general society, the idea that a woman could organize and conduct a business meeting was outrageous, especially if men were present. (Separate Quaker business meetings for men and women were generally abandoned by the early 20th century.)

One of the consequences of women's business meetings was that generations of Quaker women (especially when compared to most of their compatriots of other religions) came to learn leadership skills, to assume attitudes of action, and to develop the assumption of personal legitimacy and power. It is no wonder that Quaker women came to be significantly represented in the leadership of the important social and political movements towards equality of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Quaker Organization

By John Hunter

Quaker Structure

The fundamental unit for unprogrammed Quakers is the Meeting for Worship. This would be any group of Friends meeting regularly for worship, usually weekly, and might be as small as two or three people (perhaps just a family) or it may be as large as several hundred Friends. One or more of these worshipping groups (and possibly some additional individuals) will come together and be constituted as a “Monthly Meeting”. The Monthly Meeting is so named from the fact that it meets monthly to conduct business. The Monthly Meeting is the basic organizational unit for Quakers. It is the legal entity that owns, leases, or otherwise arranges for meeting places, approves and conducts marriages, conducts memorials, and generally makes decisions regarding business and finance. It is also the body that both takes into membership individuals who wish to become members of the Society of Friends, and also is the body that holds membership in a Quarterly or Yearly Meeting or other appropriate associations.

A Quarterly Meeting is the traditional body composed of a group of Monthly Meetings that send representatives to meet “quarterly” (once every three months) to conduct business. A yearly Meeting is an association composed of representatives of Quarterly Meetings (and/or Monthly Meetings in many cases). A Yearly Meeting meets annually to accomplish business, hear reports, conduct religious programs, and is the body that sets common expectations of faith and practice for its constituent Monthly Meetings.. A yearly Meeting is an autonomous body which may, or may not, choose to formally associate with other Yearly Meetings or various other Quaker bodies such as Friends General Conference. (Many Durham Friends attend the annual FGC Gathering each summer.)

The fundamental organizational basis for unprogrammed Quakerism is based on the key belief in the universal potential to experience the effects of the “Inner Light.” From this universal assumption comes the logical extension of equality among all people. Consequently, our organizational structure is based on our worship style and our decision making practice both of which assume that anyone may have equal influence. This means that, in theory, the Monthly Meeting is also autonomous, although in Quaker history this has sometimes been a contested issue. In current practice the Monthly Meeting is, in fact, autonomous in that it can choose to join any yearly meeting that will have it, or it could choose to withdraw from any affiliation if it wished. As a member of a Yearly Meeting, the Monthly Meeting is bound to follow that Yearly Meeting’s procedures and practices, but it can also try to influence those procedures or resign if necessary. The practical issue of autonomy would be complicated in cases where the Meeting property is owned by the Yearly Meeting or controlled by persons sympathetic to it. (One of the arguments during the Great Separation was whether a Monthly Meeting was bound to be subservient to the Yearly Meeting or its officials. However, even as various Quakers tried to discredit each other, it was generally recognized that only the Monthly Meeting could discipline its members.)

Faith and Practice

Each Yearly Meeting, through its “Book of Discipline” or “Faith and Practice” document defines the expectations for its members in two general areas. One part addresses the issue of Quaker faith and traditionally does so by providing commentary on historical extracts. Doctrinal issues and worship practices are presented in this area. The other area addressed is that of specifying procedures to be followed with regard to various administrative functions. Procedures are specified for accepting members, accomplishing marriages, the duties of Clerks and other officials, and the appointing of ministers, elders, and overseers. Procedures are also detailed for reporting on births, marriages, deaths, and membership statistics. Additionally, there are lists of “queries” and “advices” that are directed to be read and considered by various components of the Meeting.

Durham Meeting Structure

Like most meetings our size, Durham Meeting is structured around a network of volunteers and committees. There is no pastor, and only in 2010 did the meeting first take on a part time administrator to assist with our youth ministries. With this exception, all of the Meeting’s work is rotated through volunteer membership. Durham Meeting has constructed a Meeting Handbook that details all of the committees and appointments and provides other administrative detail. (The Meeting Handbook may be viewed on the Meeting’s website.)

Appointed Officials

There are three principal appointed officials in the Meeting; the Clerk, the Recording Clerk, and the Treasurer, each of which is a short-term (two year) appointment. Friends serving in each of these roles are not expected to be leaders as might be typically expected in other settings. The Clerk is expected to preside at the Monthly Meeting for Business, but only as a facilitator who does not generally weigh in on issues under discussion. The Clerk is responsible for following up with various committees to be sure that actions taken by the meeting are being discharged. The Clerk is also responsible for drafting required reports to Yearly Meeting and accomplishing correspondence on behalf of the Meeting.. The Recording Clerk functions as a secretary at the business meeting and composes the minutes. The Treasurer manages Meeting funds, but does so at the direction of the meeting and the Finance Committee. There are two additional appointed officials: the Archivist, and the Meeting Scheduler.

Although it is a historic Quaker tradition to name ministers, it should be noted that Durham Meeting has never named a minister nor has it named elders for over 30 years. Like many other liberal unprogrammed meetings, in recent decades Durham Meeting has not felt clear in balancing the traditional Quaker emphasis on equality with singling out individuals to name their gifts in such a public and permanent way.

Committees

The bulk of the work of the Meeting is accomplished through committees and volunteers working on behalf of those committees. A Nominating Committee is appointed annually to make nominations to all of the remaining committees and representatives to out-side organizations. Each committee then selects a clerk who is responsible for conducting the meetings. Committees are generally nominated in the late spring and approved for starting terms of service in September. With the exception of the Ministry and Counsel Committee, all committees and appointments are open to any member or attender of the Meeting. In fact, committee service is one of the best possible ways to get to know the Meeting and its members. The principle committees are:

- Adult Education Committee
- Building and Grounds Committee
- Care and Concern Committee
- Communications Committee
- Finance Committee
- First Day School Committee
- Housekeeping Committee
- Library Committee
- Ministry and Counsel Committee
- Nominating Committee
- Peace and Social Concerns Committee
- Youth Ministries Committee

In addition, the Meeting appoints individuals to serve on important boards and as representatives to outside organizations. Principal among these appointments are:

- Carolina Friends School Board of Directors
- Durham Congregations in Action
- North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative)
- Piedmont Friends Fellowship
- Quaker House of Fayetteville Board
- Youth Opportunities (“YO Durham”)

Finally, there are opportunities for service on various ad-hoc committees. Among these are Clearness Committees which meet with members to seek clearness regarding membership, marriage, or personal issues.

Membership in the Religious Society of Friends Through Durham Meeting

From: "Membership in the Durham Monthly Meeting" (brochure), first published by the meeting in 1982. [Two sections are omitted in this version: Transfer of Membership, and Sojourning Members.]

The following statement is intended as a guide for people who are considering becoming members of the Religious Society of Friends (*Quakers* or *Friends*) and who will be making their application through the Durham Monthly Meeting. Since each Friends Meeting may consider membership in a slightly different manner, there are consequently somewhat different expectations regarding the membership application process. The following statement speaks to the particular expectations for membership in the Durham Monthly Meeting and outlines the process for becoming a member of Durham Monthly Meeting and the Religious Society of Friends. We encourage individuals to consider becoming members as soon as they may feel led to take this step.

Expectations of Membership

While both regular attenders and members of the Durham Meeting are encouraged to participate fully in the life of the Meeting, members are considered to have made a special commitment to the Meeting and to the Religious Society of Friends. Such a commitment indicates a serious and profound choice of a spiritual community in which value is placed on the community's nurturance of the individual *and* on the individual's growth through a long-term commitment to that community.

Members are expected to take responsibility for the functioning of the Meeting in a number of ways. Principal among these is the necessity to be aware of the spiritual, financial, and corporal needs of the Meeting and to offer to do what is needed. Friends have traditionally chosen not to rely on a "hireling" minister, but instead are convinced of the value of the concerned ministry of all members of the Meeting, knowing that growth comes from active participation. Membership implies financial and time contributions as resources permit to assist in the continued flowering of the spiritual community.

Membership for Children

Children of parents who are members of the Meeting may be listed as *Family Members* if the parents so request. As such, these children come under the care of the Meeting community and remain so until either the parents' membership is transferred or withdrawn, the child reaches age twenty-one, or the child receives membership as outlined below. Children whose parents request Family Membership status upon the birth of the child may be referred to as Birthright Members.

The Membership Process

The steps required for becoming a member of the Durham Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends are briefly outlined as follows:

- Initially, the person wishing to become a member writes a letter to the Clerk of the Meeting stating her or his desire to become a member. Such letters are often a simple brief statement, but equally often may contain some of the feelings or reasons which lie behind the person's desire for membership. Letters which are received from couples are welcome, but are acted upon separately for each individual.
- Upon receipt of a letter requesting membership, the Clerk will bring the request to the next monthly *meeting for business* and a Committee for Clearness will be appointed to meet with each person requesting membership. Typically, three or four Durham Friends are named by the *business meeting* to such committees. It is important that at least one person, if possible, be named to the committee who knows the applicant well. *The applicant may also be asked to suggest members from the Meeting whom s/he would particularly like to serve on the committee. Membership is not a requirement for inclusion on a membership Clearness Committee, but each Committee should include at least two members of Durham Monthly Meeting.* [Language added after brochure was published in italics.]
- The Committee for Clearness will meet initially with the applicant to discuss the meaning of membership in Durham Meeting, and to explore the meaning of membership for that individual. Normally a decision about membership will not be made at that meeting. Typically a second meeting will be called for further exploration with the applicant, and a decision about membership may be made at that time or at subsequent meetings. Clearness Committee members should feel free to meet without the applicant at any time during the decision-making process. [This is a revision of wording in the brochure on membership.]

- The principal concern is that there should be sufficient time and a sufficient number of meetings to arrive at a consensus regarding whether to recommend the applicant for membership to Meeting for Business. [New text.]
- Upon completion of their meeting(s) with the person requesting membership, the Clearness Committee will report to the next monthly *meeting for business* recommending that the person be accepted as a member, or that additional time be allowed to facilitate a further readiness. When the *meeting for business* acts on the report of the Clearness Committee to accept a person as a member, the person's name will be added to the Meeting's membership list and forwarded to the Yearly Meeting for recording. In addition, it has been the custom at Durham Meeting for the Oversight Committee to appoint a Welcoming Committee to allow more Friends to become better acquainted with the new member.

Readiness for Membership

Becoming a member of the Durham Meeting is a process that may take some time. The person desiring to become a member will meet with a Committee for Clearness whose role is not to pass judgment on the prospective member, but rather to assist the person in the process of spiritual seeking which will result in the clear leading that membership is the right step for the growth of the individual and for the life of the Meeting.

Some areas of consideration that will likely be explored by the prospective member and the Clearness Committee during the course of their meetings are listed below in query form. These queries in no way imply that there are set standards of knowledge or certain beliefs to which an applicant must subscribe. It is, however, the expectation that the Committee for Clearness and the prospective member will seek clarity together regarding the rightness of membership in the context of these queries as they relate to the individual and the Durham Meeting.

In order to learn more about Friends, their practices and beliefs, prospective members are encouraged to engage themselves in discussion with knowledgeable Friends in the Meeting, to borrow and read various pamphlets and books, and to attend some of the programs or retreats sponsored by area Friends. In addition to the meeting library and the libraries of meeting members, sources of current Quaker reading material are given in the Appendix.

Suggested Queries for Persons Requesting Membership

1. Do you have some understanding of the history of the Society of Friends, and of the current affiliations of Durham Monthly Meeting?
2. Are you familiar with the traditional Friends' "testimonies" on race, sex, pacifism, and simplicity and can you relate these to Friends' interpretations of the Christian message? Do you have a sense of how Durham Meeting is similar to and different from other Quaker Meetings?
3. Are you familiar with the practices in Durham Meeting regarding vocal ministry, and with the conduct of *meeting for worship with attention to business*? Are you aware of the assumptions behind these practices? Are you acquainted with the committee structure in Durham Meeting?
4. Are you aware of the *Faith and Practice* of our Yearly Meeting and are you comfortable with its contents? [*Faith and Practice – Book of Discipline of the North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) of the Religious Society of Friends*, 1983 Revision.]
5. Has the period of acquaintance occurred of sufficient duration and depth so that both you and a significant number of Meeting members can feel confident in your understanding and knowledge of each other?
6. Finally, and most importantly, what has led you to desire membership? Have you examined your desire to apply for membership in the light of your spiritual leading and religious conviction? What does this membership in the Society of Friends mean to you and to your understanding of your relationship to this monthly meeting?

Discussion in the Third Durham Meeting Q-101 Class

In our third meeting for this series of “Quakerism-101” classes we may be discussing some of the following questions. Can you locate relevant material pertaining to these questions in the selections above?

1. What is the “kernel” of Quaker Worship and has it changed over the centuries?
2. How is worship as we practice at the Durham Meeting different from other branches of Quakers?
3. What is Quaker Ministry? Who are Quaker ministers?
4. Can you describe the difference between “consensus” and traditional Quaker business practice?
5. If you disagree with an articulation of the “sense of the meeting” what should you do?
6. Is each member of a meeting “Bound” by Yearly Meeting pronouncements on faith?
7. With regard to membership, is there a statement of belief to which an applicant must subscribe?

Some Other Resources for Further Study (available on the Web)

Durham Friends Meeting: <http://durhamfriends.org> (Click on “About Our Meeting”)

FGC Gathering: <http://www.fgcquaker.org/gathering>

NC Yearly Meeting (Cons.): <http://ncymc.org/>