Durham Friends Meeting

"Quakerism 101"

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

Class 4

Living our Light

Quaker Witness - A Powerful Legacy;
- A Challenging Present

In this session, we will consider:

1. **Historic Quaker Witness**
   What is our legacy?

2. **Action and Waiting – Minding the Light**
   When do we act and on what spiritual basis?
   - Concerns, Leadings, and Witness

3. **The Traditional Quaker Testimonies**

4. **How should we act today to be true to our legacy as Friends?**

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

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A Proud History of Quaker Witness

By John Hunter

From the very beginning, Quakers have been involved in public witness to their religious convictions. George Fox and others from the early years spent a considerable portion of their effort making clear that part of living a life based on the leadings of the Christ Within was about bearing witness to that allegiance, and for these efforts many Friends spent many years in prison or even lost their lives. This spirit of public expression of Truth continued among Friends throughout the centuries and produced many other notable examples. Indeed, we are the inheritors of a proud legacy where even the general public respects Quakers for the integrity of their witness. Historically we are known as the group who treated everyone (especially women) as equals in Spirit, who treated Native Americans with respect, who were fair and honest in business relations, who early on stood up against slavery, and who were in the vanguard of the peace movement.

We have already met some 22 of these Friends in the short sketches provided for past sessions of this Quakerism-101 series, and it is obvious that they populate all periods of Quakerism. We know that from the Valiant 60 in the mid 1600s right into the 20th century, Friends were providing clear public witness. Public witness was simply a natural part of being a Quaker. How could it be otherwise if one truly attends to the Light Within?

Mary Fisher (1623 -1698)

Mary Fisher deserves another look. While we sketched the rudiments of her incredible witness in session 2, we did not examine her motivation. Like the other early "Publishers of Truth" she was swept up in the powerful experience of the love and support in the fledgling Quaker community and the power of the Light Within was a direct and personal experience. When such power and support is so personally felt, bearing witness to its presence flows naturally and without fear.

During the year of her first imprisonment for speaking critically to a priest, Mary Fisher, then in her late 20s, was taught to read and write by her fellow Quaker prisoners, and among her first written sentences was a letter to a local judge admonishing him about making a correct ruling. While we might think this audacious (if not counter productive regarding her own release), for a prisoner to instruct a judge on how to rule with regard to another's case, we must realize that the experience of the Inner Spirit was so personal and real and that the support experienced in the fledgling Quaker community was so empowering that lecturing others seemed right and could be done without fear. Felt from the inside, the faith was so great that speaking out was right and proper and was God's will. Further, if one could simply have the opportunity to be heard, others would in due course surely respond and recognize the Truth and come themselves to experience the reality and accompanying joy of the Christ Within. This was the basic message of George Fox and the early Friends -to live in the spirit and power that had been with the apostles and prophets. Mary Fisher became one of the more outspoken Quakers.

After her release from prison Mary, now age 30, felt called to travel to Cambridge to denounce seminary training to students there preparing for the ministry. She and her traveling companion spoke their radical message stridently and when confronted by authorities, responded in a manner almost calculated to induce harsh punishment by refusing to give their names and saying that Jesus had sent them. They were stripped and endured an unusually violent and prolonged flogging (resulting in serious lacerations) with a steady and unbroken peaceful countenance reflecting their internal confidence that the Spirit of Christ was sustaining them.

Following the Cambridge incident, Mary found herself back in the York prison once again for dressing down a priest. Having run out of money to pay the jailer to keep her in a private or womens' cell (prisoners had to pay jailers for food and better conditions) she was thrown into a large public cell with, among others, some 60 Dutch prisoners of war. In the face of rough sexual advances from the soldiers, Mary turned down the offer of money from Quaker friends which would have afforded a safer cell. She once again demonstrated the internal conviction that her public demonstration of faith would produce a conversion. By no small measure, her refusal was also a statement of solidarity with the poor soldiers and jailers that access to wealth should not allow some

to escape to a better environment. Indeed, Mary's action garnered respect and the abuse stopped.

In her adventure to Boston in 1655 Mary Fisher was again purposefully making a witness by seeking to promote Quakerism in an environment known to be hostile. It may be noted that repressive anti-Quaker laws were passed in Boston soon after her rough treatment there. This, in turn, helped to attract a series of Quaker martyrs, which resulted in multiple hangings, the most prominent being Mary Dyer. Historians not sympathetic to the Quaker cause have noted that purposeful public witness ending in martyrdom seemed to be a clear strategy for moving the population away from support of repression.

Mary Fisher's final great witness to Muhammed IV was again born out of a commitment to witness to her faith. The "Turks" were at war with Christian nations and the Muslim leadership was popularly perceived in most of Europe (and in England) as bloodthirsty, misogynist, and violent. Mary's pilgrimage was of the original Quaker impulse to expose the leader of the Turks to her Quaker insights with the faith that he would respond. Her telling of the story is that he did respond in kindness and even offered her an escort. For this experience Mary concludes that, "They are more near Truth than many nations" and although she did not convert any Muslims she came away convinced of the universalism implied by the Light Within.

Elizabeth Heyrick (1769 - 1831)

Elizabeth Heyrick was a tireless and public British abolitionist in the early 19th century. Her activism toward a public witness began after the death of her husband and her conversion to Quakerism in her 30s. She produced a steady stream of pamphlets beginning in the first decade of the century which totaled 22 by her death in 1831.

Her seminal essay was her 1824 pamphlet "Immediate, Not Gradual Abolition." Hers was the first public voice that dared to challenge the notion that abolition must, by its very nature, be gradual and measured. Her pamphlet was widely distributed in America and predated William Lloyd Garrison's iconic editorial calling for immediate emancipation by seven years. Garrison basically adopted Heyrick's arguments and went on to form a movement re-energizing the abolitionist effort.

Other leaders among the American abolitionists and equal rights advocates took note of Heyrick's work. Notable Quakers such as the Grimke sisters and Lucretia Mott specifically credit Elizabeth Heyrick with providing the inspiration and critical intellectual foundation for moving the abolitionist movement forward. Wendell Phillips remarks, "...little progress was made in the [antislavery] cause" until Heyrick "saw and publicly acknowledged the principle of immediate and universal emancipation; then that great anti-slavery truth flew through the land, shooting arrows into every heart."

Elizabeth Heyrick was aware of sexual politics and believed that a woman was especially qualified 'to plead for the oppressed'. Besides roundly condemning gradualism, she shocked those around her by openly sympathizing with the slave revolts in the West Indies: 'Was it not in the cause of self-defense from the most degrading, intolerable oppression?' Britons had sympathized with Greeks battling for their freedom from the Turks, so why not with enslaved people rebelling against their masters? Her writing touched a nerve, and in the wake of her pamphlet more than 70 British women's anti-slavery societies sprang into being. Usually, unlike the men, they were 'immediatist'. She urged them on, campaigned for a renewed boycott of slave-grown sugar, and wrote more pamphlets.

Elizabeth Heyrick also produced the critical thinking and intellectual basis for other change issues. She engaged a variety of moral topics, including cruelty to animals, education, fair remuneration and living conditions for laborers. She supported prison reform, opposed corporal punishment, wanted the working day limited, and supported striking weavers even though her own brother was an employer in the industry. She also was the first to directly engage the (delicate, in those days) issue of the sexual abuse of female slaves.

Elizabeth Heyrick's public witness was not one of physical confrontation, but she put herself "out there" through her written statements. It should be noted that before the death of her husband, who was a Methodist and a lawyer/military officer, Elizabeth did not speak out. However, after her conversion to Quakerism she seemed to be liberated to use her great intellect to provide a theoretical and moral basis for social change.

A J Muste (1885 - 1967)

By reputation, A J Muste was always at the forefront of the action in the labor and peace movements of the first two thirds of the 20th century. If there was a rally of any significance, it seemed that A J Muste was speaking there. If there was a demonstration or march, A J Muste seemed to be involved. He was also controversial for he was, indeed, a passionate radical who did not mince words and encouraged direct action -often resulting in arrest. Although he flirted with communism for 6 years in the 1930s, he abandoned that road and returned firmly to Christian pacifism for the remainder of his life.

As the excerpt below notes, A J Muste did not often attend Friends meetings, but he was absolutely committed to his public witness in the finest of Quaker tradition. And like many who "push the limits" of public witness, he made many Friends uncomfortable. Was he too strident or too confrontational? Certainly the press and the government thought so. But when compared to the early Quakers, he was firmly in the tradition of public witness to oppose unjust laws.

(the following is from a Friends Journal article by Charles Howlett)

In 1939, when war clouds over Europe became darker by the hour, *Time* magazine called Abraham Johannes Muste "the Number One U.S. Pacifist." The designation was certainly appropriate and he wore the label proudly. From World War I until his death in 1967 at the height of the Vietnam War, Muste stood out in the struggle against war and social injustice in the United States. His leadership roles in the Fellowship of Reconciliation, War Resisters League, and Committee for Non-Violent Action, and his numerous writings filling the pages of the pacifist press, bear ample witness to the Quaker Peace Testimony. Reinforcing this view are many tributes detailing his remarkable career at the time of his death. David McReynolds of the War Resisters League observed that Muste's Inner Light "was so central to him that his life cannot be understood without realizing that he was, even at his most political moments, acting out his religious convictions." Longtime labor radical and writer Sidney Lens commented that "for Muste the term 'religion' and the term 'revolution' were totally synonymous." And one of his closest allies in the peace movement, John Nevin Sayre, noted with affection that religion was Muste's "motivating force... right up to the end of his life."

Born in Holland and raised in Michigan, Muste was a Dutch Reformed minister who was kicked out of his pulpit because of his outspoken opposition to the Great War based on his interpretation of the Bible. He then found a congenial match with Friends. He was inspired by reading early Quakers, Woolman, and Rufus Jones. In 1918 he became a Friend and committed his life to an activist path of pacifism and social justice with Quaker teachings and faith as his bedrock. He organized and took part in countless demonstrations, was arrested many times, and served as a mentor to Martin Luther King, Jr. Muste's involvement in Quaker life and institutions was found in peace work and antiwar organizations rather than strictly in local and yearly meetings, and he was an inspiration to generations of peace and social justice workers.

Action and Waiting – Minding the Light

By John Hunter

We Quakers are clear that public witness must flow from our our spiritual and worship lives. Just as in a meeting for worship where the seed of true ministry does not grow from our ego or our fascination with an intellectual concept, so public witness and social action do not spring simply from our own painful experiences or some notion of political correctness. Our action, if it is to be sustainable and effective, must be deeply and genuinely grounded in love as a product of experiencing the Light Within. Its roots must tap the same source as our religious faith and there be firmly anchored.

In taking public actions there is another factor which involves the broader Quaker community. As we saw with James Nayler, there will often be a question of running beyond one's Light in a manner that may have implications for others in our meeting. What is the correct balance between individual action and it's tempering by the group? Public action will always make some others uncomfortable, but what are its limits? Even the life of Jesus can be seen as a balance between his radical positions and staying sufficiently within the folds of his Jewish heritage so as to be recognizable and effective as a prophetic figure. We Quakers need also to be aware of this balance.

The Wilkinson – Story Controversy

As a backdrop to Quaker activism, the controversy surrounding John Wilkinson and John Story exposes one principle common to Quaker activism: its nature as a "public" witness. Wilkinson and Story were convinced early on by Fox and were seen as respected Quaker leaders in the Westmoreland area. But as the center of Quaker authority shifted to London and organizational and policy decisions began to emanate from the Monday meeting, some Friends felt that this was a betrayal of the original Quaker premise of direct personal guidance. Among these were Wilkinson and Story.

To greatly oversimplify, one of the issues became whether Friends should meet in public or secretly in private. Baptists and other "dissenting" sects had taken to meeting in secret so as to escape the renewed persecution following the Restoration, but London-based Quakers continued to hold their meetings for worship in public as a witness to their religious convictions. They accepted repeated imprisonment, the destruction of their meeting places, and the confiscation of their personal property as a necessary cost of advancing their witness to Truth. While the decision to be open and public about their convictions was genuinely one of religiously felt guidance, it had the broader political effect of helping to cement in the public mind the issues of toleration and the cruelty of law enforcement.

Friends in Preston Patrick led by Wilkinson and Story did not feel bound by much of the guidance coming out of London and in particular were holding meetings for worship in secret, thereby avoiding direct persecution. This precipitated a crisis of organization and leadership and, although small, is seen as the first Quaker schism. The action of the Preston Patrick Friends therefore highlights the principle of the "public" nature of Quaker witness, which for the previous 20 years seems to have been taken for granted.

Concerns, Leadings, and Witness

In the last several hundred years, Quakers have used three terms to help communicate how we work toward taking action.

Concerns are feelings or insights based our becoming aware of a situation that seems to conflict with our understanding of what is correct when illuminated by the Light. We are moved to feel that this situation should be changed. Some of these situations of which we become aware may be strictly personal and we may move to change them quickly and discretely. However, some of these uncomfortable situations may involve other people or institutions and are not in our realm to quickly take care of personally. We may then be moved to share our concerns with others. If we share our concerns within our Meeting, we can see if others also come

to share (come "under the weight" of) our concern and thereby provide both validation of our perceptions and sympathetic support. Having or sharing a concern does not necessarily mean that any obvious solution is in sight. It simply means that one has become aware of a situation.

A Leading is a conviction that I am compelled (led) to personally take up a concern and make it my business to effect the necessary change. While we all have many concerns, we must individually discern which ones we have the time, energy, and resources to actively tackle. Sometimes a leading occurs spontaneously and we find ourselves working on a project to address a concern. At other times, we must struggle for a long time to discern whether we are being led to personally take up working on a concern or let it go, trusting that others may take it up. Such a discernment process may involve the Meeting or even working with a clearness committee. Sometimes, after lengthy consideration, one decides that one indeed does have a personal leading to tackle the concern, but it is clear that the time is not yet right, and the leading is oriented at some future date, or perhaps is dependent on changing circumstances.

Working with a Leading may have two parts. The first, described above, is the realization that one is committed to put time, energy and resources into working to solve a problem. The second part is using some of that time and energy to research and discover what the most appropriate witness may be, assuming that it is not already obvious.

A Witness is an outward action in response to a leading. The action is both an expression of our witnessing (seeing or understanding) what truth the Inward Light has led us to see, and fearlessly allowing others to witness our outward expression of that compelling revealed truth.

Witnessing is by its nature a public statement, although some are quiet and relatively discrete while others may be high profile and radical. The quiet witnesses are simply a product of one's daily life as the concern is addressed through small but persistent ways. "Letting you life speak" in this manner produces a witness that is public in the sense that others may notice, but such notice may be reflective or may take the form of imitation and learning the behavior that is addressing the concern. In this way, a life of service is a profound witness.

Sometimes the witness must take the form of radical action. There are certain wrongs that in specific times and places cry out for the honesty and integrity of a highly visible witness. In these instances, careful discernment as to how to best effect a Leading is critical both as to how to tackle the situation and the ramifications of such action. It is in these cases where consultation with a clearness committee is advisable. It is also appropriate to take your proposed witness to the meeting where you may find that there will be both official backing and lots of personal support. You may also find that the meeting may wish to take on your witness as an important part of its ministry either by supporting your witness in a public manner or by organizing a larger witness to supplement your efforts.

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Traditional Quaker Testimonies

Historically, Quakers have been active in some specific and important areas of Witness which are generally recognized as fundamental Testimonies of the Religious Society of Friends. They are based on our accumulated corporate experience of the Light as it gives sensitivity and understanding to Biblical instruction, modern day experience, and response to our corporate conscience. Our testimonies are not formulated rules, but ways of being in the world. The traditional basic Quaker testimonies have been described as: ***Simplicity, Integrity, Equality,*** and ***Peace,*** and in recent decades ***Community*** has been added.

JBH 2/08

The Peace Testimony

(From Britain Yearly Meeting website)

The Peace Testimony is probably the best known and best loved of the Quaker testimonies. Its roots lie in the personal experience of the love and power of Christ which marked the founders of the Quaker movement. They were dominated by a vision of the world transformed by Christ who lives in the hearts of all. Friends sought to make the vision real by putting emphasis on Christian practice rather than primarily on any particular dogma or ideological system. Theirs was a spontaneous and practical religion. They recognized the realities of evil and conflict, but it was contrary to the spirit of Christ to use war and violence as means to deal with them.

The Peace Testimony has been a source of inspiration to Friends through the centuries, for it points to a way of life which embraces all human relationships. The following extracts trace the source of the Peace Testimony in the experience of the founders of the Quaker movement and illustrate its evolution over three hundred and fifty years in response to a changing world. As a Society we have been faithful throughout in maintaining a corporate witness against all war and violence. However, in our personal lives we continually have to wrestle with the difficulty of finding how to reconcile our faith with practical ways of living it out in the world. It is not surprising, therefore, that we have not always all reached the same conclusions when dealing with the daunting complexities and moral dilemmas of society and its government.

In the closing years of the twentieth century, we as Friends face a bewildering array of social and international challenges, which have widened the relevance of the Peace Testimony from the issue of peace and war between states, to the problems of tensions and conflicts in all their forms. Thus we are brought closer to the witness of early Friends, who did not draw a hard and fast distinction between the various Quaker testimonies, but saw them as a seamless expression of the universal spirit of Christ that dwells in the hearts of all.

I told [the Commonwealth Commissioners] I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars... I told them I was come into the covenant of peace which was before wars and strife were. (*George Fox, 1651)*

Whoever can reconcile this, `Resist not evil', with `Resist violence by force', again, `Give also thy other cheek', with `Strike again'; also `Love thine enemies', with `Spoil them, make a prey of them, pursue them with fire and the sword', or, `Pray for those that persecute you, and those that calumniate you', with `Persecute them by fines, imprisonments and death itself', whoever, I say, can find a means to reconcile these things may be supposed also to have found a way to reconcile God with the Devil, Christ with Antichrist, Light with Darkness, and good with evil. But if this be impossible, as indeed it is impossible, so will also the other be impossible, and men do but deceive both themselves and others, while they boldly adventure to establish such absurd and impossible things. (*Robert Barclay, 1678)*

A good end cannot sanctify evil means; nor must we ever do evil, that good may come of it... It is as great presumption to send our passions upon God's errands, as it is to palliate them with God's name... We are too ready to retaliate, rather than forgive, or gain by love and information. And yet we could hurt no man that we believe loves us. Let us then try what Love will do: for if men did once see we love them, we should soon find they would not harm us. Force may subdue, but Love gains: and he that forgives first, wins the laurel. (*William Penn, 1693)*

The early statements of the Society's corporate witness set out the basic principles of the peace testimony and served to distinguish Quakers from those suspected of plotting to overthrow the established authorities.

"...Our principle is, and our practices have always been, to seek peace, and ensue it, and to follow after righteousness and the knowledge of God, seeking the good and welfare, and doing that which tends to the peace of all. All bloody principles and practices we do utterly deny, with all outward wars, and strife, and fightings with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretense whatsoever, and this is our testimony to the whole world. That spirit of Christ by which we are guided is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing as evil, and again to move unto it; and we do certainly know, and so testify to the world, that the spirit of Christ which leads us into all Truth will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdoms of this world.

"...And as for the kingdoms of this world, we cannot covet them, much less can we fight for them, but we do earnestly desire and wait, that by the word of God's power and its effectual operation in the hearts of men the kingdoms of this world may become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ, that he might rule and reign in men by his spirit and truth, that thereby all people, out of all different judgments and professions might be brought into love and unity with God and one with another, and that they might all come to witness the prophet's words, who said, `Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more'. (Is 2:4; Mic 4:3) (*Declaration to Charles II, 1660; Signed by 12 Friends including George Fox)*

Testimony of Simplicity

(edited and augmented from Wikipedia)

The Testimony of Simplicity is the Quaker belief that a person ought to live his or her life simply in order to focus on what is most important and ignore or play down what is least important. It is the practice of being more concerned with one's inner condition than one's outward appearance and with other people more than oneself. Friends believe that a person's spiritual life and character are more important than the quantity of goods he possesses or his monetary worth. Friends also believe that one should use one's resources, including money and time, deliberately in ways that are most likely to make life truly better for oneself and others.

Like other Friends Testimonies the Testimony of Simplicity is not a fixed or formalized creed but a mutually accepted set of principles and practices that emerged among Friends over time. It is open to modification as Friends listen for continuing revelation from God.

Early Friends believed that it was important to avoid fanciness in dress, speech, and material possessions, because those things tend to distract one from waiting on God's personal guidance. They also tend to cause a person to focus on himself more than on his fellow human beings, in violation of Jesus' teaching to "love thy neighbor as thyself." This emphasis on *plainness*, as it was called, made the Friends in certain times and places easily recognizable to the society around them, particularly by their *plain dress* in the 18th and 19th Centuries.

William Penn wrote:

> Personal pride does not end with noble blood. It leads people to a fond value of their persons, especially if they have any pretense to shape or beauty. Some are so taken with themselves it would seem that nothing else deserved their attention. Their folly would diminish if they could spare but half the time to think of God, that they spend in washing, perfuming, painting and dressing their bodies. In these things they are precise and very artificial and spare no cost. But what aggravates the evil is that the pride of one might comfortably supply the needs of ten. Gross impiety it is that a nation's pride should be maintained in the face of its poor.

Simplicity to Friends has generally been a reference to material possessions. Friends have often limited their possessions to what they need to live their lives, rather than accumulating luxuries. The testimony is not just about the *nature* of one's material possessions, but rather also about one's attitude towards these material goods. Many Friends who have been considered exemplary have also been wealthy; their commitment to the testimony, however, led them to use their wealth for spiritual purposes, including aid to the poor and oppressed. On the other hand, some Friends, such as John Woolman, gave up much of their wealth and economic position when

they felt it to be a spiritual burden.

In recent decades Friends have given the Testimony an ecological dimension: that Friends should not use more than their fair share of the Earth's limited resources. From this the motto has sprung: "Live simply that others may simply live."

Testimony of Integrity (Also known as the Testimony of Truth, or Truth Testimony.)

(edited and augmented from Wikipedia)

The essence of the Testimony of Integrity is taking care to live in the spirit of the Light Within. Being true to the promptings of the Spirit Within involves being honest with oneself. If one is truly honest with oneself, then a personal wholeness or integrity inevitably develops which, in turn, is evidenced by forms of outward honesty (to others) and a highly developed sense of fair dealing and respect for others.

The Testimony of Integrity is not simply telling the truth. Rather it is applying ultimate truth to each situation. For example, Friends do not believe that one should trick others by making statements that are technically true but misleading.

Early Quakers developed two distinctive practices that involved integrity:

1. They said simply "yea" or "nay" to questions rather than swearing or taking an oath. They recognized the truth of Jesus' teaching (Matthew 5) that swearing is often a way to avoid telling the truth while appearing to do so. A person's word should be accepted based on his or her reputation for truth-telling rather than on his or her taking an oath or swearing to tell the truth. (By some this practice is also considered a part of the Testimony of Simplicity.)

2. They set a fair price for goods on sale rather than setting a high price and haggling over it with the buyer. Quakers believed that it was dishonest to set an unfair price to begin with. By having fair fixed prices Quakers soon developed a reputation as honest businessmen, and many people came to trust them in trading.

Other examples of The Testimony of Integrity may include such practices as:

- making sure that one's words and actions flow from one's beliefs
- speaking the truth, even when it is difficult
- paying people fair wages for their work
- giving one's employer the right amount of labor for one's pay
- saying difficult things with grace and tact that honesty demand
- receiving difficult information gracefully and connecting with the integrity of the speaker
- guarding one's reputation for honesty, fairness, and fidelity
- taking responsibility for one's actions and their results
- fulfilling one's commitments
- taking care of items entrusted to one
- being open to the ideas of others but not being too easily swayed by them
- confronting lapses in integrity in oneself and in others
- giving credit to others for their contributions
- assessing people and situations fairly and accurately

Testimony of Equality

(edited and augmented from Wikipedia)

Quakers believe that since all people embody the same divine spark all people deserve equal and fair treatment.

Equality of the sexes

Friends were some of the first to value women as spiritual ministers. Elizabeth Hooten was possibly the first person to be convinced by George Fox and was an outspoken and daring preacher during the earliest days of the movement. Margaret Fell was another early leader of the Friends movement. The first two people who went to what is now the United States to promote the Quaker Faith were Mary Fisher and Ann Austin.

At one time it was common for male and female Quakers to have separate Meetings for Business. This practice gave the women *more* power and was not meant to demean them. During the 1700s, some Quakers felt that women were not participating fully in Meetings for Business as some women would not venture to "nay-say" their husbands. The solution was to form the two separate Meetings for Business. Many Quaker meeting houses were built with a movable divider down the middle. During Meetings for Worship, the divider was raised. During Business meetings the divider was lowered, creating two rooms. Each gender ran their own separate business meetings. Any issue which required the consent of the whole meeting—building repairs for example—would involve sending an emissary to the other meeting. This practice continued until there was no longer a concern over whether women would speak out; some very old meetinghouses still have this divider, although it likely is nonmovable.

Many of the leaders in the womens suffrage movement in the United States in the 19th century were drawn from the Quakers, including Lucretia Mott and Susan B. Anthony. Quaker women who came from an assumption of equality (and who had experience organizing and running meetings) became the natural leaders.

In recent times Quakers were also at the forefront of the "Womens Movement" of the mid 20th century. Quakers continue to strive for the full assumption of equality between the sexes in all ways. One way that this is seen is the continuing of full coeducational opportunities in Quaker schools and the equality in leadership in Quaker meetings and other Quaker institutions.

Racial equality

Friends also eventually became leaders in the anti-slavery movement, although a realization of the wrongness of slavery did not develop for almost a century. In the 1700's John Woolman began to stir the conscience of Friends concerning the owning of slaves. Some, such as Benjamin Lay, used immoderate tracts and shock tactics to encourage speedy rejection of both slave ownership and participation in the slave trade. Friends have always been a part of the larger society and there were Quakers who owned and traded in slaves, but as a group were persuaded of the wrongness of this practice and acted to end their own participation several generations before the larger society.

In 1776, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting prohibited members from owning slaves, and on February 11, 1790, Friends petitioned the U.S. Congress for the abolition of slavery. American Friends were prominent participants in the Underground Railroad, a transportation network for sending escaped slaves to freedom.

Quakers continued to be active in reconstruction after the Civil War, the Jim crow era, and the civil rights movement of the 20th century. Friends were involved in setting up and running numerous schools for freed slaves, although Friends have been fairly criticized for having been slow to act to fully racially integrate their own schools. In America and in England, Friends today continue to struggle with the fact that our meetings, for the most part, are not attended by many persons of color.

Humane treatment of the mentally ill

Quakers were among the first to pioneer humane treatment for the mentally ill, with The Retreat, in York, England, an asylum set up by William Tuke (1732–1822) as a reaction to the harsh nature of 18th century treatment of the mentally ill.

In modern times it has been noted that a seemingly disproportionate number of Quakers are involved professionally in the mental health field.

Humane treatment of prisoners

In the 19th Century Elizabeth Fry and her brother, Joseph John Gurney campaigned for the humane treatment of prisoners. Fry went into prisons herself to provide food, blankets, education, and other assistance to the prisoners. They were able to persuade members of Parliament to pass reform legislation to improve prison conditions. They also were able to influence legislation that reduced the number of crimes that were punishable by death.

Yearly meeting books of discipline have consistently encouraged Friends to visit prisoners. Lucretia Mott in all of her travels most always made time to visit in prisons wherever she went.

In the 1960s a Friend named Eric Baker took part in the founding of Amnesty International, a human rights group primarily focused on the treatment of those in prison and those accused of crimes. It is not directly connected with the Religious Society of Friends but upholds the same ideals as the Testimony of Equality.

Testimony of Community

In recent times Friends have come to see that an awareness of our participation in community is an over-arching reality to which we need to bear witness. Our religious experience seems to show us that we need to cooperate with others (and indeed all of Creation) to bring about what early Christians called the Kingdom of God. Many would assert that humans naturally seek communities which are supportive, loving, and liberating. And while George Fox (and others) preached the Kingdom of God "within", there can be no doubt that, when realized, that inward state is reflected outwardly in the relationships that form our communities.

In a real sense, the Testimony of Community incorporates elements of the other traditional Quaker testimonies. If we are meant to be part of this world, both spiritually and temporally, we need to value the aspect of community in our lives and to self consciously apply the traditional testimonies in all of the communities in which we participate. In doing so we need to be aware of what those communities are. This awareness extends from our family, to our religious community, to our neighborhood, to regional, national, and world-wide networks of relationships and it extends to our spiritual lives inwardly and outwardly. In all of these relationships and potentially supportive communities, we need to interact with integrity, with simplicity, with the assumption of equality, and in peace. Our spiritual progress ("Growth in Grace") is tied to an increasing awareness of our vital membership in Community from the personal to encompassing all of Creation.

How should we act today to be true to our legacy as Friends?

How should friends in the 21st century act so as to be true to our legacy of Quaker witness? Many have observed that we seem to be "resting on our laurels" and are not inclined to actively bear witness to our testimonies. Below are some issues and questions that we may want to examine.

1. In "letting my life speak" what are the small personal ways that I currently bear witness to traditional Quaker testimonies? In what ways is this a personal witness private or public?

2. Should I be involved in more public witness? Should this be individual or in concert with a group?

3. Participating in public witness has social implications. Fear of ostracism, discrimination, or outright condemnation from friends, family, or co-workers is a concern for many. Additionally, we may be directly opposed by government and its agents. There may be personal safety issues in some cases. How do we view these issues and how, specifically as Quakers, do we come to a place of peace with our fear?

4. How do we best come to clarity in deciding how and when to bear witness? How are we sure, individually and collectively that our motivation is clearly rooted in love and is the product of careful listening to the Inner Light?

5. Quaker organizations (AFSC, Meetings, etc.) are from time to time asked to join forces with other groups to support some specific action. While it is good to build bridges and supportive contacts with others working to change our society, sometimes these groups do not share our commitment to non-violence or to racial or sexual equality. How important is it to be "clean" in our associations? How do we fit in and work with such groups.

6. What are the various ways our meeting is involved in bearing public witness to our testimonies? Are there issues that need to be addressed in this way?

Discussion in the Fourth Durham Meeting Q-101 Class

In our fourth 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 was the motivation of the first generation of Quakers to so persistently public witness to their new-found faith?

2. How do you view what appears to be courting of danger in Mary Fisher's going to Boston and her refusal of a safer cell while in prison? Do you agree with the notion that martyrdom was a specific tactic of Quakers?

3. Elizabeth Heyrick's writing was a touchstone for abolitionists. Is there a role for such writing in the modern time and how would it stand out in the context of all of the blogs and other competing pieces?

4. Do you think that A J Muste is a good role model for 21st century Quaker witness?

5. Wilkinson and Story were Quaker leaders who ignored guidance coming from George Fox and London Friends. What is your opinion of the issues of "solidarity" and being public about your witness?

6. Do you agree that witness should always have to be "seasoned" through a discernment process involving concerns and leadings?

7. The traditional Quaker Testimonies of Peace, Simplicity, Integrity, and Equality have stood the test of time. Have their meanings changed in the context of modern times?

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Some Other Resources regarding Quaker Witness (available on the Web)

American Friends Service Committee: http://www.afsc.org/

Friends Committee on National Legislation: http://www.fcnl.org/index.htm

Quaker House of Fayetteville: http://www.quakerhouse.org/index.php

(Note: Durham Meeting was a principal founder of Quaker House and continues to directly support this important witness.)

North Carolina Stop Torture Now: http://www.ncstoptorturenow.org/

(Note: This is not a Quaker organization, but Quaker House and Durham Friends are involved.)