

# Proposed Revisions to *The Guide to Our Faith and Practice*

27th day of eighth month, 2010

Dear SAYMA Friends,

The SAYMA Faith and Practice Revision Committee hopes to present three proposals at Yearly Meeting 2011.

1. The section on Education (section IV part B number 2) was last presented to monthly meetings several years ago; it is being recirculated for comments because the present revision contains significant changes and so much time has passed since it was last reviewed.

2. We have revised the earlier proposal on Earthcare, now titled Harmony with Nature; if approved, this would become a new section (IV,B,5) under Areas of Witness.

3. We are proposing a new section on the subject of Meeting for Threshing. This has not been reviewed before by monthly meetings. If approved, it would become Part C of section II; subsequent parts of that section would be relabeled.

As a reminder, our process is as follows:

1. In the fall, the committee circulates proposed revisions to monthly meetings and worship groups and requests that comments and suggestions be returned *in the form of minuted responses from a meeting for business*.
2. In late winter, the committee meets to consider the responses and make changes as led to the proposed text. These revisions are circulated in March for review in advance of Yearly Meeting when they will be considered in

the annual meeting for business.

Paper copies of the proposals, side-by-side with the original text when there is one, are being distributed to the clerks and SAYMA representatives (or contacts) of meetings and worship groups affiliated with SAYMA. We will post these documents in down-loadable format on the SAYMA web site as soon as we can; the web site currently is being reorganized so posting may be delayed for a while.

We ask meetings to review the proposals and respond to us by Wednesday, November 24th. Responses must be in the form of a minute from your Meeting for Business. We much prefer to receive these via email as they can be sent on directly to committee members without retyping. Send responses to Kathleen Mavournin at kmav@icx.net.

We approach the end of this Faith and Practice revision cycle. We hope that these are the last proposals we will put forward for revision of the body of our Faith and Practice document.

SAYMA Faith & Practice Revision Committee

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## 2. Education [Original]

*We shall never thrive upon ignorance.*

Joseph John Gurney (1831)

*To Friends, education is an intensely religious thing; it means the training and development of the spiritual life, the liberating of the Divine that is within us.*

Gerald K. Hibbert (1930)

[1] Friends' basic belief in the Inner Light, the presence of "that of God" in everyone, has guided us to promote a society based on understanding and good will. Although God's truth transcends mere schooling, education is fundamental to full participation in that society. Those who read and study are better equipped to pursue corporate truth within the Religious Society of Friends and better able to act as individuals in the wider world. We have a concern for the educational welfare of all.

[2] Friends encourage the development of integrity, simplicity, moderation, and an inward sense of values. We try to foster in ourselves and our children a steady growth in self-discipline, respect for the rights and needs of each individual, and celebration of differences in others. We recognize that values are being taught – consciously and unconsciously – in our communities and institutions; we seek to encourage cooperation rather than competition, and we attempt to cultivate a sensitivity to social problems and injustices and the concern to do something about them.

[3] These goals have been reflected in our support for and participation by adults and children in First Day School, Friends' schools, home schooling, private and public education, and higher education. For Friends, education nurtures our own

## 2. Education [Proposed revision]

*When it is faithful to its foundations, Quaker education is neither student-centered, nor discipline-centered; it is inward-centered. Quaker education operates from the conviction that there is always one other in the classroom—the Inward Teacher, who waits to be found in every human being.*

Paul Lacey, *Growing into Goodness: Essays on Quaker Education*, 1988

[1] Friends' basic belief in the Inward Light, the presence of "that of God" in everyone, has guided us in our search for Truth. Education, its root meaning being 'to draw out', has been a core concern of Friends, whether directed towards self-education, our religious education, including that of our children, or the formal secular education of students in educational institutions.

[2] Early Friends, including George Fox, were often described as Seekers. As they sought knowledge of God, they discovered that God could speak to and teach them directly, which is the central lesson of what became Quakerism. Today, Friends continue to seek Truth in both spiritual and secular matters and to see our own seeking and finding as a life-long practice of our spiritual journey.

[3] Recognizing that each of us has gifts to share and that our seeking is continuous, Friends endeavor to share our understandings with each other. In our communities of learning, we learn from each other and all are cherished for the gifts each brings. As we practice mutual respect and active listening, our community itself is transformed. As we seek to live in the Light, Friends are open to learning from nature and from the Spirit, from people with authority and from those without a voice. Friends sponsor First Day Schools for both

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## **Education** [Original] *continued*

individual understanding of the Inner Light, teaches us to be guided by it, and helps us foster that understanding in others. Friends have been pioneers in providing equal educational opportunities for all people as a means toward full participation in the Society and in the wider world. In our awareness of the Light that lights everyone who comes into the world, Friends are open to listening and learning from the oppressed, the deprived, and the excluded. We look upon education as a lifelong process. Because knowledge and inspiration do not lie solely in one religion, group, or text, we search widely for diverse contributions to a corporate truth. Coupled with our concept of continuing revelation of Truth is a belief that we have a continuing need to study and open ourselves to new learning.

## **Education** [Proposed revision] *continued*

children and adults, along with a variety of study groups, retreats, and workshops at Monthly Meetings, Yearly Meeting, and those held by Wider Quaker Organizations. Friends welcome critical exploration of all topics, recognizing that God's Truth does not lie in one religion, group, text, or point of view.

[4] Friends have had and continue to have a special interest in children, recognizing that the relationship with the Inward Light is present in the very young, and can be greatly affected by the adults with whom the children have relationships. Because parents, teachers, and other adults with whom the child has contact all have a role in shaping the child, Friends are deeply involved in education as teachers and administrators at all levels and as advocates for schooling that reflects Friends values of equality, simplicity, and nonviolence. Friends have been supportive of a wide range of educational institutions, including Friends' schools, public schools, home schooling, vocational education and training, as well as post-secondary colleges and universities. God's gifts are recognized as coming in many forms, and different institutional arrangements may be needed to draw out and develop these gifts.

[5] Our testimonies describe the environments we would like to provide for our children: peaceful, simple, equitable, infused with the spirits of community and integrity. We reject punishment as a means of control; instead we seek to help children learn from their mistakes creatively and with compassion. We seek to encourage cooperation rather than competition, and we attempt to cultivate sensitivity to social

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### **Education** [Proposed revision] *continued*

problems and injustices and the concern to do something about them. We try to foster in ourselves and our children a steady growth in self-discipline, respect for the rights and needs of each individual, and celebration of differences.

[6] Guiding all these efforts is the attempt to foster in ourselves, our children, and others an inward sense of Spirit-guided values. All children are home-schooled, no matter where they attend "school." We recognize that values are taught both consciously through instruction and unconsciously through the examples of our lives.

*approved by the Faith and Practice Committee, 7/31/2010*

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## Earthcare [original proposal]

*"It would go a great way to caution and direct people in their use of the world, that they were better studied and known in the creation of it. For how could [they] find the confidence to abuse it, while they should see the Great Creator stare them in the face, in all and every part thereof."*  
-William Penn, 1693

[1] Our care of the earth is rooted in our profound love of God and the gift of Creation. It has emerged as a natural, spirit-led extension of Friends' long established witnesses in response to the rapidly increasing destruction of Earth's ecological systems.

[2] In accordance with our testimonies of integrity, peace, equality, and simplicity, /we recognize the sacredness of all life, the interconnection of all living things, and the balance required to sustain the whole community of life. We recognize that the human violence directed against our fragile biosphere is ultimately suicidal. In response, we are led to educate ourselves and to witness both personally and publicly.

[3] We educate ourselves by learning the far-reaching "consequences of the activities of our daily lives — our use of energy, our housing choices, our modes and distances of travel, our diets, and our consumption habits. We witness personally by living more in harmony with the earth and sharing its bounty equitably with our fellow beings, and in doing so we become patterns and examples of Earthcare for Friends and others. We witness publicly by advocating for cultural changes and institutional and government policies that are consistent with our Earthcare testimony.

## Harmony with Nature [revised proposal]

*I have known landholders who paid Interest for large sums of money, and being intent on paying their debts by raising grain, have by too much tilling, so robbed the earth of its natural fatness, that the produce thereof hath grown light.... The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age.*

John Woolman, Conversations on the true harmony of mankind and how it can be promoted, 1772

*Only when we see that we are part of the totality of the planet, not a superior part with special privileges, can we work effectively to bring about an earth restored to wholeness.*  
Elizabeth Watson 1996, Your God is too small

[1] Friends' concern for the earth is a spirit-led extension of our established testimonies in response to persistent overuse and consequent disruption of Earth's ecological systems. It is rooted in our profound awareness of and love for the Divine indwelling within the material world.

[2] Friends have long understood the relationship between habits of consumption and human misery. Friends were some of the first to boycott products that were made with slave labor. They understood that the way they lived had an impact on others, even if those who suffered were far away and unknown to them. Friends' championship of birth control in the early part of the twentieth century was only in part to free women. It also grew from a concern over stretching the Earth's capacity to support life.

[3] We recognize the sacredness of all life, the interconnection of all living things, and the delicate balance required to sustain the community of life. We acknowledge that human aspirations

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### **Harmony with Nature** [revised proposal] *continued*

for peace and justice depend upon restoring earth's ecological integrity. We promote these truths by being patterns and examples, by communicating our message, and by providing spiritual and material support to those engaged in the compelling task of transforming our relationship to the earth.

[4] While many SAYMA Friends are supportive of these general statements, we do not have uniformity in the way we respond. Instead we adopt a variety of approaches to the challenges of right living. Individually and corporately, we seek to learn the full consequences of our behavior. We are called to find more effective ways to live harmoniously as a part of the natural world. The precariousness of our present position impels us to continuing corporate discernment and to action in witness for the earth.

*approved by Faith and Practice Revision Committee, 7/30/2010*

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### 3. Meeting for Threshing [new proposal]

Friends believe that the Light is accessible and within each of us, thus they make group decisions with faith in the united guidance of the Divine Spirit. Strains can develop, however, when troublesome issues arise.

Rather than avoiding issues which may be difficult or controversial, it is better for Friends' meetings to allow full opportunity for differences to be aired and faced. Dealing with issues of a complex nature often entails information with which some Friends may be unfamiliar, so it is often helpful to hold one or more "threshing meetings." In these meetings, no decision is made, but through them the chaff can be separated from the grain. Such meetings can clear the way for later action on the issue.

It is essential that full notice of a threshing session be given, and special efforts made to see that Friends of all shades of opinion can and will be present. To the extent that Friends of a given view are absent, the usefulness of such a meeting will be impaired. If factual material needs to be presented, persons knowledgeable about the topic should be asked to present it and be available to answer questions.

The clerk or moderator of a threshing session makes it clear at the start that the meeting not only expects, but welcomes expressions of wide differences of opinion. Friends are urged not to hold back what troubles them about the issues at hand. Hesitancy to share a strong conviction because it may offend someone reflects a lack of trust. The clerk's job, then, is to draw out the reticent, limit the time taken by too-ready talk

ers, and see that all have an opportunity to speak. Clerking a threshing meeting takes great sensitivity and care.

Threshing is an activity undertaken by a community to achieve communal ends. Friends must have a care that expressions of strong opinions and feelings do not spill over into personal attacks. Periods of silence can help Friends hear each other more clearly. Friends need to remain mindful that a threshing session is not just an opportunity to speak but also to listen carefully and deeply.

It is useful to ask someone to take notes of the meeting for later reference. At times the threshing meeting may forward a recommendation to the Meeting for Business.

#### Guidelines for Threshing Meetings

1. Speak from personal experience.
2. Do not reply directly to or rebut others.
3. All ideas and thoughts on an issue are welcome for consideration.
4. Everyone should have a chance to speak.
5. Friends have a responsibility to the meeting to make dissenting views known during a threshing session.
6. A threshing session is not an invitation to elder.
7. Passion is permitted!
8. Corporate decisions are not made during a threshing session.
9. The threshing meeting clerk reports on the session to Business Meeting where action may be taken.

*approved by Faith & Practice Revision Committee 7/30/2010*