

QUERIES

Friends have assessed the state of this religious society through the use of queries since the time of George Fox. Rooted in the history of Friends, the queries reflect the Quaker way of life, reminding Friends of the ideals we seek to attain. From the Christian tradition, Friends have taken as a standard the life and teaching of Jesus, not only as recorded in the New Testament, but even more importantly as revealed inwardly, as we seek God's truth and its expression through our lives today. Friends approach queries as a guide to self-examination, using them not as an outward set of rules, but as a framework within which we assess our convictions and examine, clarify, and consider prayerfully the direction of our lives and the life of the community.

Over the years, the content of the General Queries has changed, as each generation finds its own voice. The earliest General Queries of London Yearly Meeting asked for specific facts and figures: which Friends imprisoned for their testimonies had died, which present prisoners there were, and what sufferings. Even in the more abstract question, "How does Truth prosper among us?" there was an expectation of a quantifiable answer—in this case, the number of new Friends. Today, queries that are looking for specific factual answers are not included in the general queries. Rather, they are considered supplementary to the queries (see the checklist, pp. 188-190) and their focus is the 'right ordering' of the monthly meeting organization.

The language of the General Queries today is language that encourages the probing-in-depth of an issue or a concern. While changes in specific focus and language are inevitable over time, the queries have been marked by consistency of convictions and concerns within Friends testimonies—simplicity, peace, integrity, stewardship, equality and community—as well as by strength derived from worship, ministry, and social conscience.

Meetings consider the General Queries in a variety of ways. Some Meetings value the preparation of written answers; some use them as an aid to inward reflection; some make them part of the meeting for worship, some of the meeting for business. Friends may consider each in turn, or may consider several together that meet a current need. There may be times when a Meeting will reword a query or contemplate a new one to

meet its particular situation. Friends will benefit from review of the full cycle of queries over a year or two. It has been common practice to use the responses to the queries addressed to Meetings as a basis for reports to the quarterly meeting. Whatever the approach, Friends' faithful attendance to the queries in openness to the Spirit enriches the life of the Meeting.

The following General Queries are arranged with a set for the Meeting and a set printed in italics for the individual. In addition, within the section of *Care for One Another* there is a set for the family to consider. While some Meetings read aloud and consider both the corporate and individual sets, others consider only the corporate sets, leaving the individual sets for personal reflection and response.

GENERAL QUERIES

1. Meeting for Worship

Are our meetings for worship held in stilled, expectant waiting upon God?

As we worship is there a living silence in which we are drawn together by the power of God in our midst?

Is the spirit of our worship together one that nurtures all worshippers?

How does our Meeting respond when the vocal ministry seems inappropriate, or when the meeting for worship is consistently not gathered?

Do I faithfully attend meeting with heart and mind prepared for worship, clear of any predetermination to speak or not to speak, and expecting that worship will be a source of strength and guidance?

Does worship deepen my relationship with God, increase my faithfulness, and refresh and renew my daily life, both inwardly and in my relationship with others?

Have I experienced in worship that direct leading to listen or to speak, and have I been faithful to my own experience?

2. Meeting for Business

Is our meeting for business held in the spirit of a meeting for worship in which we seek divine guidance?

Are we careful to keep in the spirit of worship each of the concerns that emerge, whether of nurture, of Spirit, of social concerns, of property, or of finance?

Are Meeting decisions directed by prayerful consideration of all aspects of an issue and are difficult problems considered carefully with patient search for truth, unhurried by the pressures of time?

How do we respond if we notice the meeting has lost an understanding of the presence of God?

Do we recognize that we speak through our inaction as well as our action?

Do I regularly attend meeting for business and in a spirit of love and unity? If unable to attend, how do I attend to my responsibility?

Do I consider prayerfully the many concerns that are lifted up on any issue, acknowledging that the search for truth in unity involves what God requires, being open to personal transformation as the community arrives at the sense of the meeting?

3. Spiritual Nurture, Ministry, and Religious Education

Does our Meeting encourage the ministry of both word and deed? How does our Meeting recognize, develop, and nurture the gifts of our members and attenders of all ages?

Does our Meeting prepare all its members and children for worship and for a way of life consistent with the principles of the Religious Society of Friends? How do we teach about Quaker practices in business and worship and their importance to the functioning of our Meeting community?

In what ways do we support each other in order to seek God's will and act upon our understanding of truth? Is there opportunity in our Meeting to share the excitement of religious discovery and the possibility of religious transformation?

Does our Meeting provide opportunities for all in the Meeting to learn about:

-the Inner Light, the living Christ within, the Bible, the writings of Friends, our Christian heritage, other religious traditions and their respective roles in the history and formation of Friends' principles?

-the common testimonies Friends declare?

-the variety of expression Quaker faith takes today?

Do I maintain as part of my personal and family life those daily practices that focus on continued spiritual growth, with disciplined worship, inward retirement, and communion with the divine spirit?

Do I frequently read the Bible and other religious literature, including the records of the lives and experiences of Friends? Do I take the time to explore these resources with others, and likewise encourage my children?

Do I share my own faith and spiritual journey, and encourage such sharing within my family?

4. Care for the Meeting Community

Care for one another

Are love and unity maintained among us? When conflicts exist, are they faced with patience, forbearance, and openness to healing? Are avenues for exploring differences kept open? To what extent does our Meeting ignore differences in order to avoid possible conflicts?

Is the Meeting a safe, loving place? When we become aware of someone's need, do we offer assistance? Are the meetinghouse and the Meeting property physically accessible to all?

Do all adults and children in our Meeting receive our loving care and encouragement to share in the life of our Meeting, and to live as Friends? Do we truly welcome newcomers and include them in our Meeting community?

When a member's conduct or manner of living gives cause for concern, how does the Meeting respond?

How does our Meeting keep in touch with all its members?

Am I ready to offer assistance as part of my religious community serving its members? Am I equally willing to accept graciously the help of others?

Do I recognize and face disagreements and other situations that put me in conflict with others? Do I manifest a spirit ready to give or receive forgiveness?

Do I treat adults and children alike with respect and without condescension? Is my manner with visitors and attenders to my Meeting one of welcome?

Care in my home

(This set of personal queries may be helpful for the family to consider within the family setting. Families may also wish to explore other General Queries as part of regular family worship.)

Is my home a place where all members of the family receive affection and understanding, and where visitors are welcome? Do I choose recreation and a manner of living that enriches the body, mind, and spirit; and shows a high regard for family, community, and creation?

Is our family prepared to discuss such sensitive topics as death, faith, money, even sex and drugs, in a manner that allows openness and honesty, and also direction?

How do I help to arrange life at home so that there is an opportunity for all to learn and absorb by example what it means to live a life of Spirit-led commitment?

5. Education

What is our Meeting's role in the life and support of Friends' education? If supporting or maintaining a Friends school, have we developed an appropriate relationship of Meeting and school? What is our role in the spiritual life of the school and its maintenance of Friends' principles?

What does our Meeting do to support education in the wider community?

What help do we provide for the children and adults in our Meeting to pursue the education they seek, whether academic, technical, or vocational? Do we make provision for children in our Meeting to attend a Friends school?

How do I show my concern for the improvement of public education in my community and in the world?

Am I aware of what Friends schools are doing and of their plans for the future? How do I show encouragement and support?

6. Equality

How does our Meeting help to create and maintain a society whose institutions recognize and do away with the inequities rooted in patterns of prejudice and economic convenience?

Is our Meeting open to all regardless of race, ability, sexual orientation, or class?

What steps are we taking as a Meeting to assure that our Meeting and the committees and institutions under our care reflect our respect for all and are free from practices rooted in prejudice?

Do I examine myself for aspects of prejudice that may be buried, including beliefs that seem to justify biases based on race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, class, and feelings of inferiority or superiority?

What am I doing to help overcome the contemporary effects of past and present oppression?

Am I teaching my children, and do I show through my way of living, that love of God includes affirming the equality of people, treating others with dignity and respect, and seeking to recognize and address that of God within every person?

7. Social Responsibility and Witness

How does our Meeting work:

-to overcome social, legal, economic, and political injustices, locally and in the wider world?

-for the funding of community services that does not rely on gambling income?

Does our Meeting serve the community through action on concerns for civic improvement? What actions are we taking to assure everyone equal access to education, health care, legal services, housing, and employment as well as equal opportunities in business and in the professions?

When a member has lifted up a concern, how does our Meeting respond?

Does our Meeting encourage those seeking clearness for their convictions of conscience to hold up such convictions with prayerful openness to the Light?

Am I mindful of how my lifestyle and my investments can contribute to the improvement of the human condition, or to the exploitation of others?

Am I open to seeking clearness on matters of conscience and to assisting others in doing so? How do I respond and support one who acts out of a clear leading when I am under the weight of another?

What am I doing to work for the betterment of my community to assure the maintenance of effective public services which do not rely on funding from gaming?

Do I fulfill my civic responsibilities when they do not conflict with divine leadings?

8. Peace

How does our Meeting act to advance peace, to oppose violence, and to support the constructive use of authority in our community, our nation, and the world?

What are we doing as a Meeting:

— to free our nation from militarization, so evident in our society and in its economy?

— to understand the causes of war and violence and to work for the development of the attitudes and institutions of peace?

— to recognize and correct the causes of violence within our communities, and to work toward overcoming separations and restoring wholeness?

— to increase the understanding and use of nonviolent approaches for the resolution of conflicts?

Do I live in the power of that Life and Spirit that takes away the occasion of all wars?

How do I maintain Friends' testimony that military training and all participation in war and its preparation are inconsistent with the teaching and the spirit of Christ?

Do I work for the establishment of alternative ways of settling disputes? Am I aware that to build a world community requires that we all face our differences honestly, openly, and in trust?

Do I treat conflict as an opportunity for growth, and address it with careful attention? Do I seek to recognize and respect the Divine in those with whom I have a basic disagreement? Do I look for ways to reaffirm in action and attitude my love for the one with whom I am in conflict?

9. Ministry of Outreach

Outreach

What are we doing as a Meeting to communicate our presence and our principles to the community around us? Does our Meeting's ministry of outreach lead Friends to share their spiritual experiences with others?

What are we doing to invite persons not in membership to attend our meetings for worship and to encourage their continued attendance? How does the Meeting welcome visitors? Are we sensitive to the needs and hesitations of each visitor?

Are we tender to the needs of isolated Friends and Meetings, and to nearby Meetings seeking support?

How do I ground myself in the understandings of my faith? Am I clear about my beliefs? How do I prepare myself to share my faith and beliefs with others?

Does my manner of life as a Friend attract others to our religious society?

Do I seize opportunities to tell others about the Religious Society of Friends and invite them to worship with us?

Is my manner with visitors and attenders to our Meeting one of welcome?

Collaboration

In what ways does our Meeting respond to opportunities to join with other faiths in worship, in social action, and in spiritual dialogue?

How does our Meeting encourage its members to seek opportunities to meet and work with Friends world wide?

What opportunities have I taken to know people from different religious and cultural backgrounds, to worship with them, and to work with them on common concerns?

What opportunities have I taken to know, to work, and to worship with Friends outside of my own Meeting?

10. Stewardship of the Environment

Is the Meeting concerned that human interaction with nature be responsible, guided by a reverence for life and a sense of the splendor of God's continuing creation?

Are the decisions of the Meeting and its committees relating to the uses of property, goods, services, and energy made with sensitivity toward the environmental impact of those choices?

How does our Meeting learn about environmental concerns and then act in the community on its concerns?

How am I helping to develop a social, economic, and political system which will nurture an environment which sustains and enriches life for all?

Am I aware of the place of water, air, and soil in my life? Do I consider with care the necessity of purchasing substances hazardous to the environment? Do I act as a faithful steward of the environment in the use and disposal of such hazardous substances?

Do I choose with care the use of technology and devices that truly simplify and add quality to my life without adding an undue burden to essential resources?

11. Stewardship of Resources

Does our Meeting serve social and economic justice in its uses of property and money?

How does our Meeting engage its members in the support of the Meeting's work, its ministry, and the upkeep of its property?

How does our Meeting engage its members in the support of the quarterly and yearly meetings and other Quaker organizations?

To what extent does our Meeting rely on current members for financial support, and what role does endowment income serve? Does the Meeting consider carefully the appropriate role of invested funds?

Am I clear that I am the steward, not the owner, of property in my care?

Do I simplify my needs, making choices that balance self-sufficiency (to avoid unnecessary dependence on others) and fair sharing of resources? Do I make choices as a consumer that support the equitable distribution of income?

Do my employment and other activities allow for use of time and energy in spiritual growth and in service to the Religious Society of Friends?

Do I contribute generously within my means to the funding of the work of Friends in my Meeting, in the yearly meeting, and in the wider world of Friends?

12. Integrity and Simplicity

What does our Meeting understand to be the meaning and implication of our testimonies on simplicity and integrity?

How do our Meeting's actions demonstrate this understanding?

As a Meeting, what are we doing to encourage members to embody integrity and simplicity in their everyday lives?

How do I strive to maintain the integrity of my inner and outer lives—in my spiritual journey, my work, and my family responsibilities? How do I manage my commitments so that overcommitment, worry, and stress do not diminish my integrity?

Am I temperate in all things? Am I open to counsel and advice on overindulgence and addictive behavior, such as gambling? Do I take seriously the hazards associated with addictive and mood-altering substances?

Am I careful to speak truth as I know it and am I open to truth spoken to me? Am I mindful that judicial oaths imply a double standard of truth?

Do I refrain from membership in organizations whose purposes and methods compromise our testimonies?