

## **Attachment G: Faith and Practice Proposals**

Equality *As approved*

Children *As approved*

Order of topics in Section IV *As approved*

Government *As proposed: NOT approved*

### **Equality**

*There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath had different names. It is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion nor excluded from any where the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nation soever, they become [brothers and sisters] in the best sense.*

John Woolman, "Considerations on Keeping Negroes," Works (1774)

*...one universal God hath given being to us all; and that God hath not only made us all of one flesh, but hath also, without partiality, afforded us all the same sensations, and endowed us all with the same faculties; and that however variable we may be in society or religion, however diversified in situation or color, we are all of the same family, and stand in the same relation to God.*

Benjamin Banneker,

Letter to Thomas Jefferson (1791)

Friends believe that all people have the capacity to bear and respond to the Light and that all forms of human relations should reflect this spiritual truth. Deeply concerned that every individual, as a beloved child of God, be respected and afforded equal access to social opportunities, Friends believe that we are called to work toward an end to prejudice and oppression. Each of us has God-given gifts. Each of us can grow in tenderness. Our differences provide openings that allow God's grace to shine through us in unique ways.

A commitment to equality, the earliest of Friends social testimonies, was partly an assault on pride. In keeping with the teaching of the New Testament, early Friends held the radical belief that God could speak to every person, regardless of gender, race, class, age, or formal education. This led Friends to eliminate behaviors that granted superiority based on social status or wealth. They rejected the use of honorific titles, provided expanded leadership roles for women in their communities, and eschewed "hat honor", removing one's hat as a sign of deference. Friends retained the traditional "thee" and "thou" to avoid the emerging seventeenth century usage of granting an undue distinction to an upper-class individual with a plural "you". For these beliefs, they sometimes paid with their property, and sometimes with their lives.

Our ability to both bear and respond to the Light can be affected by social prejudices that dim awareness of God's leadings. Friends believe that we are called to work to end prejudice and oppression. Modern Friends have wrestled with our awareness of what equality demands in its continued application in our daily lives. In order for individuals to follow their leadings, and exercise their God-given gifts, social and physical barriers often must be broken down. In the last two centuries, many Friends have worked and are working toward honoring and expanding the rights of women and people of color.

More recently, Friends are beginning our work to expand equal rights regardless of sexual orientation. Friends reject stereotyping, discrimination, and artificial barriers that separate people from one another. Equality has been the foundation of Friends' approach to each other and the world. Friends recognize that much work still needs to be done within ourselves, within the society at large, and within our meetings, where privileges of educational attainment and social status too often prevail.

We believe all can be empowered by God and encourage all to speak for themselves, expressing their own experiences and understandings of God's leadings. We must lovingly speak the truth to others as it is revealed to us, and we must listen for truth that is in them, lest we miss it. Other's perspectives can change us and help our meetings discern the actions we take to work toward equality. In our continuing spiritual search, we are open to revising our approach to social change as new insights arise.

We are blessed by the myriad differences that are found among us, and are grateful for the efforts Friends and others have made in uncounted ways that bring forth that of God in all.

### **Children**

*But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come unto me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God."*

Luke 18:16 (RSV)

*Our children are given to us for a time to cherish, to protect, to nurture, and then to salute as they go their separate ways. They too have the light of God within, and a family should be a learning community in which children not only learn skills and values from parents, but in which adults learn new ways of experiencing things and seeing things through young eyes.*

Elizabeth Watson, 1980, 'Parents and Children in the Quaker Home'

The foundation of a child's spiritual life is laid in the family. As family members share their lives in the Spirit, children's innate sense of the presence of God is nourished and strengthened. This helps children develop the assurance and security to order their relationships with God, with themselves, with others, and with the world around them. By consistently practicing Quaker principles of simplicity, honesty, nonviolence, creative response to conflict, service and love, parents model these values for their children and foster the essential attitudes of self-worth, self-confidence, and self-discipline.

A Quaker family, whatever its composition, is rooted in the wider community of Friends. Grounded in love, Friends seek to nurture every member through full acceptance, respect for each other's choices, and common experiences characterized by caring, compassion, open and supportive communication, understanding, and a sense of humor. Friends seek to strengthen and learn from the child's sense of wholeness. Through family and meeting we learn that the source of human love is God's love for us.

Children are nourished by their family's and meeting's love and care, both of which provide an environment in which children develop a sense of morality. Parents have the responsibility to establish limits through communication, teaching by example how to speak and to listen with love. Friends often have the task of clarifying our values in relation to societal influences and pressures. We often express the peace testimony, for example, by refusing to buy war toys and refraining from corporal punishment. It is essential that Quakers educate their children about creative responses to conflict, the consequences of violent behavior, discernment in sexual activities, and the dangers of addiction. We see loving and teaching, rather than punishing, as the focus of discipline.

Within the meeting, we share corporate and individual responsibility for children, who learn from all their experiences with Friends. When the activities of children conflict with the need of Friends for silence in meeting for worship, we seek solutions that foster growth in the Spirit for all. In recognition of each member's equality in the Light, Quaker children and adults regard each other with respect, calling each other by first names or full names and avoiding titles.

A monthly meeting alive with the Spirit provides support for children, parents, families, caregivers, and teachers, all of whom need loving care. We often fall short of our ideals. However, in nurturing our children and youth, we provide for them a more hopeful life, and together we shape the Religious Society of Friends and witness to the wider world. It is a responsibility we do not take lightly. Children are a gift from God and our care of them as they grow to adulthood is our gift to the future.

#### **Order of topics in Section IV:**

Testifying to the Life of the Spirit

Introduction

Testimonies

Integrity

Peace

Simplicity

Equality

Community

Areas of Witness

Children

Education

Government

Sexuality

#### **Government**

*As proposed. This section WAS NOT approved and will be revised and presented at a future session.*

The power and dominion of the conscience are the province of God, [who] alone can properly instruct and govern it. No one whatsoever may lawfully force the conscience of others regardless of the authority or office he [or she] bears in the government of this world.

Robert Barclay, Apology (1676)

American government, endorsing the principles of equality, freedom, and justice, emerged from an intellectual and political climate influenced significantly by Friends. Today, though governmental policies and decisions often pose difficult problems for Friends, we affirm our corporate and individual commitment to influence governmental actions through thoughtful witness or considered resistance.

Some Friends are led to withhold their assent or resist harmful governmental policies and many work to change them through individual or meeting action or support for Wider Quaker Organizations. Individual Friends often communicate with governmental representatives to encourage positive legislation and support candidates who uphold the values expressed in Quaker testimonies.

Recognizing that the responsibilities of authority sometimes create spiritual dilemmas for those in government, we seek unity in Truth with those we want to influence and believe that this unity may be reached if we remain faithful in our witness. We therefore seek to encourage government officials to listen actively to a diversity of voices and negotiate to find mutually helpful solutions. As human beings, all of us sometimes find compromise expedient, even necessary; but the decisions of government officials affect far more lives than their own. We therefore seek to encourage them and call them to the standard of Truth in their actions.

When Friends discern discordance between conscience and governmental action, we are called to act on behalf of justice and peace, even when that means questioning or disobeying worldly government. Historically, when conscience has demanded it, Friends have often opposed governmental authority. From refusing to swear an oath in a court of law to hiding people escaped from slavery in our homes to providing sanctuary to undocumented immigrants, Friends have a long tradition of civil disobedience.

We encourage mediation and negotiation to resolve disputes. Friends support conscientious objection to military service. Individual Friends under the leadings of the Spirit have challenged the corporate body of Friends to consider witnesses such as war tax resistance and opposition to patriarchy, as well as support for marriage equality and fair immigration policies. Friends also support the making of decisions on reproduction and family planning by individuals, based on accepted medical practice and unhindered by legal proscriptions. To be true to our experience of the Spirit, Friends do not hold any human institution to be higher than corporately discerned Truth.

Friends' steadfast and faithful efforts often have an influence that transcends initial expectations. While we work to see our principles reflected in governmental decisions and actions, we realize that government at its best can only provide a framework to foster justice, peace, and respect for human differences. These ideals become reality only when individuals, under the conviction of love, live daily the life of the peaceable community