



Practices within middlebury friends meeting

Brief Descriptions of Friendly Practices
Within Our Monthly Meeting
including...

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MEETING FOR WORSHIP

At the center of Quakerism is Meeting for Worship when Friends sit in silence opening their minds and hearts to the leadings of the Spirit. Middlebury Friends Meeting is an **Unprogrammed Meeting** which means there is no minister or designated leader. We believe that God is the **Inner Light** that dwells within each of us and that this Spirit may move any one of us to give **vocal ministry** (deliver a short, divinely inspired message). We are all equal in the Light and equally share in manifesting the life of the Spirit.

After arriving on First Day (Sunday) morning, we find a seat in the circle and settle into quiet meditation. During the first few minutes of worship, the Greeter invites Friends to join in a **Healing Circle** at which time we say the names of persons whom the Meeting holds in the Light. As the worship hour progresses, there often is a profound deepening of connection to God and among those sitting in silence. This “gathered meeting” can have a transformative effect as we drink from the wellspring of the Living Presence. Sometimes one or more Friends offers vocal ministry as they are moved by the Spirit. At other times, Friends may remain in silent communion with God throughout the Worship hour and there is no vocal ministry.

At the close of Meeting, the Greeter will initiate holding hands around the circle and welcome everyone. It is our custom to go around the circle so that everyone present can introduce themselves and later make announcements. The First Day School children often join us at this time and share what they have done. Sometimes we may sing a song together and, on most Sundays, there is hospitality at the rise of Meeting.

FAITH AND PRACTICE, QUERIES AND ADVICES

Middlebury is one of many Monthly Meetings that meets weekly for worship. Around the world, there are a number of Yearly Meetings of Friends consisting of Monthly Meetings within a certain geographical area. Yearly Meetings gather for a few days each year to share in worship, fellowship and decision-making. Each Yearly Meeting prepares

a written guide called *Faith and Practice* that gathers excerpts illustrating Quaker Faith and Life, Advices and Queries, and Practice and Procedures. *Faith and Practice* is not a rule book, but a means of providing Friends with historical grounding, information, and inspiration. The importance of divinely led guidance instead of human-made rules was expressed by Balby Friends in 1656: “Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all, with the measure of light which is pure and holy, may be guided: and so in the light walking and abiding, these may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not in the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.”

The **Queries** are groups of questions used for meditation and guidance by individuals, or by Monthly, Quarterly and Yearly Meetings, to help in the prayerful consideration of how the conduct of our lives bears witness to our faith. The twelve groups of Queries in *Faith and Practice of New England Yearly Meeting of Friends* cover such areas as Spiritual Life, The Meeting Community, Home & Family, Stewardship, Vocations, and Social Responsibility. Each of these groups of queries provides a focus to help us engage in the ongoing process of exploring our lives as they manifest and express our deepest held beliefs. The Queries are used for self examination and contemplation, not for judgment.

Accompanying the Queries are brief statements, called **Advices**. Synthesizing over 300 years of Quaker thought and writings the Advices provide guidance in our meditation on the expression of our faith in our daily lives. They are not presented as authoritative doctrine or dogma, but as beacons to help light the path of living our lives in a fully-conscious and Spirit-led way. Quaker founder George Fox counsels us to “be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come... then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.”

In Middlebury Friends Meeting, we read one or more Queries once each month, usually on the third Sunday. These Queries read at the beginning of Meeting for Worship and often provides kindling for meditation and vocal ministry.

COMMITTEES

As an unprogrammed Quaker Meeting, we have no minister who oversees the spiritual life and personal needs of those within the Meeting. Instead, we have two co-clerks and six committees to assure that all facets of Meeting life are appropriately supported and attended to. Each committee is made up of three or more Meeting participants serving alternate two-year terms. Terms may be extended.

The Co-Clerks are appointed for overlapping two-year terms. They carry the concern for the Meeting overall and are responsible for overseeing all Meeting operations

Worship and Study Committee: Responsible for monitoring the spiritual life of the Meeting and the quality of worship, providing spiritual education for adults, arranging intergenerational and other special meetings for worship, and overseeing the First Day School, library, and music program.

Pastoral Care Committee: Oversees and supports the individual needs of Middlebury Friends, often addressing confidential issues, arranging clearness committees, weddings, and memorial services.

Fellowship Committee: Responsible for matters pertaining to the social life of the Meeting such as potlucks, hospitality for worship and special occasions, Friendly Eights, men's and women's groups, and oversees the newsletter production.

Outreach and Social Concerns: Addresses peace and social justice issues, promotes relations between the Meeting and the wider non-Quaker community as well as other Quaker groups and official entities.

Finance and Budget Committee: Reports on and makes recommendations to Business Meeting on the state of Meeting's finances and prepares the annual budget.

Nominating Committee: Considers Friends for various offices and tasks within the Meeting and invites Friends to serve.

THE TESTIMONIES

There are five principle testimonies that Quakers witness to in their daily lives that reflect fundamental Quaker values and experience. They are the testimonies on Peace, Integrity, Equality, Simplicity, and Community.

One of the cornerstones of Quakerism is the Peace Testimony. Based on our belief that there is that of God in all persons, and guided by the principle and power of love, we eschew all actions that cause harm to or violation of another. As Conscientious Objectors to war, Quakers seek paths to resolve conflicts in non-military, non-violent and constructive ways that acknowledge the needs of all involved in conflict. We recognize that peace is far more than the absence of war. Violence manifests itself not only in overt killing, but in many other experiences such as poverty, discrimination, exploitation, oppression, and prejudice. We strive to address the root causes of violence and to practice compassion and conciliation at all levels of our lives: within our homes, our Meeting, our communities, our nation and our world. To this end, Quakers tend to be socially active in many different ways.

Many Middlebury Friends are involved, in their daily lives, as peace activists. Friends serve on community committees, volunteer or work within social services organizations, write letters to local papers and policy makers, participate in peace vigils, practice simplicity and ecological stewardship, and strive to speak truth to power.

Discussions of the other testimonies may be found in *Faith and Practice*, Pendle Hill pamphlets, and other resources in our Meeting library.

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

We joyfully welcome families with children into all aspects of Meeting life.

We appreciate the silent presence and vocal ministry of children during Meeting for Worship. We are comfortable with the coos and quiet cries of lap babies, the occasional questions and songs of toddlers,

and the still or wiggly presence of older youngsters. Teenagers are encouraged to attend and we can help to arrange transportation if needed.

Children are invited to attend **First Day School**. Curriculum for the year is selected annually at a meeting attended by all interested persons. Recently our program has been based on the core values of many religious traditions such as love, sharing, peace, and reverence. During the summer months, First Day School is replaced by a more informal children's group, typically led by a teenager or college student. Child care is available during Monthly Meeting for Business if requested in advance.

Older children often find it stimulating to be involved in the wider circle of **Young Friends** (grades 9 and higher). The Meeting can support a child with information, transportation, and financial assistance for Young Friends Retreats, Quaker summer camps, Quarterly and Yearly Meetings, Youth Quake, or Youth Sessions at the United Nations.

Youth membership: Middlebury Meeting lists the names of children of Meeting participants in the Meeting directory. As they grow into spiritual maturity, they may elect to apply to Worship and Study to record their membership in the Meeting. For purposes of Selective Service registration, young men in the Meeting who are Conscientious Objectors are encouraged to place a letter describing the basis of their belief in the Meeting records.

Raising children is a joyful and challenging task and many people are available to support families in this effort. A **Quaker Parenting Group** has met in the past and can be reactivated if there is interest. If you would like more information please speak with the co-clerks or someone on the Worship and Study or Pastoral Care Committees. They can direct you to the person(s) currently involved with a particular aspect of our programs for children, parents, and Young Friends.

Families with young children bring a special joy and spontaneity to our Meeting community. We welcome *all* kinds of families to join us on First Day each week, and for any of our other activities.

MEMBERSHIP

All persons who attend Meeting for Worship and Monthly Meeting for Business may participate fully in the life, activities and responsibilities of Middlebury Meeting. Some may wish to have their membership recorded by the Meeting and are encouraged to do so. Anyone wishing to pursue recorded membership should make this known in writing to one of the Co-Clerks, who then appoints a Clearness Committee to explore with the individual the extent to which they are in unity with Friends' principles and their commitment to and support of the Friends community. Following approval, the membership is minuted and recorded by Monthly Meeting. Middlebury Friends Meeting does not discriminate between participants in the Meeting who have recorded their membership and those who have not.

Anyone interested may sign up to have a name tag, receive our monthly eNewsletter (or a printed copy if you prefer), and get notices on our email listserve. Forms are on the greeting table.

CLEARNESS COMMITTEES

The Clearness Committee is a Quaker practice of helping Friends seek clarity and spiritual guidance. A Clearness Committee is always convened when a couple requests to be married under the care of Middlebury Meeting and when an individual requests formal Membership in the Meeting. Other times a Clearness Committee may be called are when an individual wants to "test" a leading, during a life transition, or when an individual or family is experiencing a dilemma. As in other forms of Quaker worship, the members of the Clearness Committee sit with the person and thoughtfully listen. They do not offer advice or problem-solve, but join with the person in their search for spiritual guidance. In this practice of prayerful seeking Friends may experience divine guidance, collective support and healing.

If an individual (or couple) wishes to have a Clearness Committee, they may ask a member of Pastoral Care to help organize a Committee, or they may ask other Friends, directly, to meet with them as a Clear-

ness Committee. There should be a designated convener of the Clearness Committee to organize the gathering of the Committee and to help participants in the process.

Except for Clearness Committees for Marriage and for Membership (the outcomes of which are reported back to Monthly Meeting), Clearness Committees are confidential. Only the person requesting the Clearness Committee decides if it will be mentioned or discussed more widely. A Clearness Committee session usually lasts from 1.5 to 2 hours, at a time and location convenient to all participants. If requested, a follow-up session may be scheduled at a later date.

DECISION-MAKING, MONTHLY MEETING FOR BUSINESS, AND SUPPORTING THE MEETING

Middlebury Meeting holds a **Monthly Meeting for Business** to discuss matters pertaining to the operation of the Meeting and to make decisions about actions to be taken. In the Meeting for Business decisions are made in the same expectant waiting upon the Spirit as in Meeting for Worship. In searching together for the will of God in matters before Meeting for Business, Friends seek the Truth so that all may join in its affirmation. It is important for all individuals in the meeting to join in this search by speaking plainly and directly to the point and to listen thoughtfully and non-judgmentally to all who speak to the matter at hand. When the clerk feels that unity has been reached, they will state their understanding of the “sense of the Meeting” about the issue. Participants then express their approval or reservations. The matter continues to be considered until the Meeting, as a whole, has reached unity. For those not familiar with this practice, attending a few Monthly Meetings for Business will provide a direct experience of how this works. Monthly Meetings are open to everyone, newcomers and visitors, as well as regular participants.

As an unprogrammed, **non-pastoral Quaker Meeting**, we do not have a minister or designated leader. This allows for all participants in the Meeting to share their gifts of leadership, guidance, caring, facilita-

tion and wisdom. Each year, a number of participants in the Meeting are asked by the Nominating Committee to serve the Meeting on any of various committees or as co-clerk, newsletter editor, First Day School teachers, treasurer, recorder, librarian, and representatives to outside groups such as the Addison County Clergy Association. If you are interested in serving in any of these capacities, please let your interest be known to a Nominating Committee member.

Monthly Meeting Finances: Middlebury Friends Meeting maintains a simple and practical budget. We pay for the maintenance of the Meeting; we contribute to Quaker organizations to which we are directly connected; and we support certain benevolences. As a tax-exempt organization all contributions are deductible. Friends contribute to the Meeting as they are able. Contributions may be made directly to the treasurer or placed in the “Discreet Donation Box.”

Friends support the Meeting in many different ways. All those that are able are encouraged to contribute financially. Some Friends serve on committees or in a specific role such as co-clerk, librarian, or First Day School teacher. Friends may volunteer to provide hospitality, help with a special event, host a potluck or Friendly Eight, hold the Meeting in prayer, visit other Meetings or visit local Friends who are unable to come to Meeting. All forms of contributing and serving are performed as Friends feel led to act - and all manifestations of support to the Meeting are greatly appreciated.

These are a few of the practices within Middlebury Friends Meeting. If you would like to discuss or learn more about our Meeting, or the Society of Friends, please feel free to approach any Middlebury Friend. Our Meeting Library contains a selection of helpful books, pamphlets and videos available for borrowing. We welcome your presence at Meeting and are very happy to answer any questions you may have.

Middlebury Friends Meeting

meeting for worship
10 am every first day (sunday)

Havarah House, 56 N. Pleasant St. (Rt.7), Middlebury

For information and directions call 388 1961

www.middleburyquakers.org