

Integrity Testimony

Swear not at all... let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no.' Matthew 5:34, 37 If our inward leading is to be "doers of the truth", then integrity needs to be at the center of our being, at the center of our consciousness, and at the center of our outward witness. Wilmer Cooper, "The Testimony of Integrity"; 1991 Integrity means wholeness. For Friends, this wholeness is rooted in Truth and available to those willing to open every aspect of life to that transforming influence. One of the original names of Quakers, "Friends of Truth," implies Friends' understanding that the light of Truth reaches into every corner of our lives. These private understandings through corporate discernment were and are later affirmed by the collective wisdom of the meeting community. Integrity remains central to the public and personal witness of Friends and speaks of our willingness to seek and respond to divine guidance in all activities. Integrity requires consistency of action and straightforward and honest speech. "Do all aspects of your life bear the same witness?" is a modern query, yet reflects an approach harkening back to the earliest years of the Religious Society of Friends. From the beginning, Friends have sought a unity in their private way of acting, their public stance and their relation to the natural world, seeking to live under divine guidance. Integrity requires a willingness to live a life that testifies to the divine reality, even in harsh, threatening, and uncomfortable situations. Historically, Friends commitment to integrity led to imprisonment for refusal to swear oaths and to ostracism for refusing to say "sir" or "madam" or doff one's hat to those who thought themselves deserving of these honors, even parents. Currently, SAYMA Friends risk harsh criticism and loss of income for their activities for social and racial justice, marriage equality for all couples, and for their opposition to patriarchy, war, violence, and torture. Integrity for Friends is grounded in relationship to Spirit as Ultimate Reality, which is larger than our egos. The testimony of integrity is not simply telling the truth; it is speaking and acting in and from the divine in each situation. It means awakening to God as the center of one's life rather than being dominated by one's desires, anxieties, vanities, possessions or the esteem of others. Never perfect, but learning from our mistakes, Friends assist each other to live with integrity through the power of example, through shared worship, and through loving conversation.

Peace Testimony

We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fighting with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretense whatsoever. And this is our testimony to the whole world. The 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. Declaration from the Harmless and Innocent People of God, called Quakers (1661)

Our peace testimony is grounded in our faith and understanding of God's way. Early Quakers believed they were led by the Christ within and by the Christ of the New Testament to love those people who considered them enemies and to refrain from all wars and fighting. Though individual Quakers have participated in wars since then, Friends still affirm that the best way to relate to people is to appeal to that of God within them. Trusting in the leadings of the Spirit and respecting the Inward Light in all others can avert violent conflict.

In attending to this divine leading, we try to live in ways that promote justice and avoid the causes of war; we deny its legitimacy and seek creative alternatives; and we undertake, with impartiality, to aid those who suffer from violence and war's devastation.

Materialism, oppression, and narrow nationalism lead to war. Friends oppose materialism by living simply and working to re-order priorities toward global justice and well-being. We work to remove oppression at home and abroad by trying to reach the common humanity in both oppressor and oppressed, challenging the assertion of dominance upon which oppression is based. We reject narrow nationalism and support programs to increase our understanding of other cultures and to work for more effective world government.

Denying the legitimacy of war, Friends support those led by the Spirit into conscientious objection to military service, resistance to conscription or a military draft, war tax resistance, or other acts of civil disobedience that witness against war making. Friends do not recognize "just" wars, since war represents a refusal to pursue other ways of resolving conflict. We work to gain wider support for nonviolent solutions.

Friends aid victims of war and other violence out of the belief that each person is

uniquely valuable. Support for refugees, programs for worldwide economic justice, and similar efforts serve not only to remove the causes of war and to aid the victims of violence and oppression, but also to encourage non-violent means of solving world problems.

We recognize that violence can manifest itself in words as well as deeds. As Friends, we endeavor to bring all aspects of our lives into harmony with our testimony. The peace we seek starts in the individual heart and its relation to God. It is expressed in our relations to parents, spouses, children, friends, and indeed in all our actions. In our daily lives, our employment, our recreation, our investments, and our relations to institutions and governments -- we commit ourselves to follow God's command to be peacemakers above the demands and enticements of the secular society. In doing so, our aim is to live God's truth.

The challenge of the peace testimony is to find ways for all people to live nonviolently in a world where violence remains and ever-present threat. Friends as individuals and as a Society continue to struggle with this challenge.

Simplicity Testimony

Simplicity frees one of the clutter that interferes with communion with God. - Martin Cobin, "The Value System of Friends", Southern Appalachian Association of Friends, Crossville, Tennessee (May 1-3, 1970)

To the earliest Friends, simplicity meant freeing oneself of all that was unnecessary and worldly. Just as all ritual, program, clerical functions were seen as a hindrance to worship, so elaborate and insincere speech, as well as ornamentation of dress, were seen as distractions to the right ordering of life. Adding an economic reason for simplicity, William Penn said that "the very trimmings of the vain would clothe all the naked ones."

Simplicity leads us to be honest and straightforward in mind, tongue, and heart. It can assist Friends in focusing on the essentials of life, in being open to spiritually, and in following the path of love. For some Friends, this commitment has required a radical break with the conventional way of life in our materialistic age. For all of us, seeking the inner light leads to a removal of distractions and an ordering of priorities so that we may be more open to the leadings of the Spirit.

Simplicity need not mean a start denial but can create joy and beauty in our lives. In use of time, habits of consumption, sharing of world resources, and indeed every aspect of daily life, simplicity is central for us because it both mirrors and deepens spiritual centeredness.

The Meeting Community Testimony

As many candles, lighted and put in one place, do greatly augment the light, and make it more to shine forth, so when many are gathered together in the same life there is more of the glory of God - Robert Barclay (1678)

Friends are bound together in community by a continual process of common seeking and experience of the Light within. The community provides spiritual and emotional nurture. It also stimulates our thinking and challenges us to put into practice our convictions. In the meeting, we share fundamental ideals and values, and the meeting affirms and inspires us.

Within this fellowship, divergent leadings are often present. Friends seek a balance between the needs of the individual and those of the group. Open recognition of and respect for differences, forthright sharing, and sincere reflection can lead individuals to new insight and strengthen the meeting as a whole. It is possible to resolve differences either directly by the individuals involved or with the meeting's assistance. Unity emerges not only from agreement but also from a common search for the truth conducted in a spirit of loving concern.

Friends strive to be sensitive to others' spiritual and material needs. Both requesting and giving assistance are essential aspects of Friends' life together, and taking a warm, personal interest in one another's welfare strengthens the meeting and individuals alike. Friends also provide spiritual support by holding in the Light those experiencing special hardship or joy. In mutual service and support, we express our love for God and reflect God's gifts to us.

All forms of sharing - spiritual, economic, domestic, co-operative service - enhance meeting unity. These experiences within the meeting enable Friends to envision new possibilities for community living and suggest practical ways to build community beyond the meeting.

Yearly meetings and other gatherings are opportunities for Friends from different areas to nurture spiritual growth and fellowship. The scattered company of SAYMA seeks to build the living community of the spirit.

Equality Testimony

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, or what nation soever, they become [brothers and sisters] in the best sense. John Woolman, "Consideration on Keeping Negroes" Works (1774)

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 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.

Equality, the earliest social testimony of Friends, led early Friends to eliminate any behaviors that implied one person was superior to another. These included the use of honorific titles, the distinctions of roles in home and community, and "that honor", removing one's hat as a sign of deference. Even plain language was adopted to avoid the 17th-century practice of distinguishing between classes by the use of "you" or "thee" and "thou".

In seeking to apply this testimony, Friends have often been in the forefront of social change. Recognition of inherent human equality despite individual or group differences has often caused Friends to live and act contrary accepted societal norms, rejecting 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.

We believe all are equally empowered by God and encourage all to speak for themselves, expressing their own experiences and goals. We must speak the truth to others as it is revealed to us, and we must listen for the truth that is in them, lest we miss it. Understanding others' perspectives can change us and inform 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 seek a world where laws and customs foster human dignity. We encourage all people to realize their full potential as human beings bearing the light of God.

Nurture of 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. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."
- Luke 18:16-17 (RSV)

To watch the spirit of children, to nurture them in Gospel Love, and labour to help them against that which would mar the beauty of their minds, is a debt we owe them; and a faithful performance of our duty not only tends to their lasting benefit and our own peace, but also to render their company agreeable to us. - John Woolman (1758)

The foundation of spiritual life is laid in the family. As members of the family foster their own spiritual growth, children come to sense the presence of God. This foundation gives them an assurance and security that helps them order their relationships with God, with others, with nature, and with themselves. By consistently practicing Quaker principles of simplicity, honesty, creative response to conflict, nonviolence, service and love, parents instill these values in their children and also foster the essential attitudes of self-worth, self-confidence, and self discipline.

A Quaker family, whatever its configuration, is rooted in the wider community of Friends. Grounded in love, it seeks 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. We believe that through the family we learn that the source of human love is God's love for us.

This environment provides a context in which children learn morality. Parents have the responsibility to set limits and to make themselves heard as well as to listen. We often have the task of clarifying Friends' values in relation to societal influences and pressures. Friends 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.

We bear corporate and individual responsibility for children within the meeting, who learn from all their experiences with Friends. Although the activities of children sometimes may 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 call each other by first names or full names, avoiding titles, and regard each other with mutual respect.

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 - as individuals, families, and meetings - we shape the Religious Society of Friends and witness to the wider world. It is a responsibility we do not take lightly.

Education

We shall never thrive upon ignorance - Joseph John Gurney (1831);^[L]_[SEP]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. - ^[L]_[SEP]Gerald K. Hibbert (1930)

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.^[L]_[SEP]

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.^[L]_[SEP]

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.^[L]_[SEP]

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 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.^[L]_[SEP]

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^[L]_[SEP]study and open ourselves to new learning^[L]_[SEP]

Government

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)^[L]_[SEP]

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.^[L]_[SEP]

Conscientious Friends take this commitment in various directions: some work within government, some work to influence public officials or actions, some withdraw from participation, some resist or oppose government claims. Recognizing that the exercise of authority intensifies the spiritual struggle for those who work within government, we seek unity in the Truth with those we want to influence and believe this unity may be reached if we remain faithful in our witness. 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 and call them to the standard of^[L]_[SEP] Truth in their actions.^[L]_[SEP]

Friends often are led to withhold their assent from harmful governmental policies and to work to change them through individual action, meeting action, and support for the Friends Committee on National Legislation. Many Friends communicate frequently with governmental representatives to encourage their support for positive legislation, and many work to elect candidates who hold^[L]_[SEP] positions acceptable to Friends.^[L]_[SEP]

As a body, the Religious Society of Friends has never recognized the claims of government as absolutes, for we seek to live the truth beyond human institutions. Friends traditionally have refrained from swearing oaths - instead, we affirm the truth. We encourage mediation and negotiation rather than litigation to resolve disputes. Friends have supported conscientious objection to the military service. Individual Friends have felt it right, under

the leadings of the Spirit, to develop these positions and have challenged the corporate body of Friends to consider new testimonies, such^[L]_[SEP]as resisting war taxation and noncooperation with certain governmental policies. In such cases, Friends' steadfast and faithful witness has an influence that often transcends its initial effect.^[L]_[SEP]

While we work to see our principles reflected in governmental decisions and actions, we realize that government even 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, daily live the life of the peaceable kingdom.

Sexuality

The mystery of sex continues to be greater than our capacity to comprehend it, no matter how much we learn about it. We engage in it, in often too frantic efforts to enjoy it but, more subtly, also to try to fathom its ever recurring power over us. Surely this power and its mystery relate to the mystery of God's relationship to us. Mary Calderone, *Human Sexuality and the Quaker Conscience* (1973)

Friends regard life as a whole, to be lived in the Spirit. At all stages of life, sexuality is an important part of that whole; it is capable of tapping an individual's deepest feelings, often yielding a sense of dimension transcending the individual.

Recognizing the power of sexual feelings, we as Friends seek to know ourselves and to express our own sexuality in loving ways, calling and answering to that of God in others. We recognize that responsible sexuality varies, and we hold that that which is of God is not to be condemned by the children of God. Accordingly, Friends seek to deal with sexuality as an expression of the love of God within humankind. We refrain from offering judgment upon any given manifestation of sexuality unless it is harmful in its personal or societal results.

Exploitation and manipulation of others for selfish ends have no place in the lives of Friends, nor does casual disregard for one's own feelings or those of others. When violence or abuse erupts in sexual relationships, the wound may be deep and lasting. Although we live in a society where sex is heavily exploited in the marketplace and where many countenance infidelities and casual encounters, we hold to the principle that sexuality is not a commodity but a powerful force that can transform life in ways we cannot predict. Realizing that both sadness and joy may be attendant upon human sexuality, Friends stand ready to provide comfort and support.

We encourage education about all aspects of sexuality at the earliest appropriate ages. We encourage openness, honesty, and mutual respect, which promote healthy personal growth and prevent mistakes with long-term individual and social consequences.

Families, whatever their configuration, deserve the meeting's love and care. Although Friends regard the creation of life as sacred, we also feel that every child has a right to be wanted and loved. As a yearly meeting, we have not reached full clarity on the elective termination of pregnancy. Those facing this choice may find help through trusted Friends or a clearness committee. Further reflection and insight opened by the Spirit may lead the way for growth and maturation for the meeting as well as individuals.

In the context of the light, we are called to examine whether all aspects of our lives bear consistent witness. Friends seek to love and understand, not to condemn. We trust that each other's sexuality will be expressed in loving and responsible ways.