

DRAFT Testimony Chapter for NEYM Faith and Practice

We appreciate feedback that reflects how your meeting as a community is responding to the text.

A number of monthly meetings have taken the time to write minutes that reflect the sense of the meeting concerning a draft. We encourage more of this kind of discerned feedback from the meeting as a body, which is more useful to the committee than transcripts from a group discussion. We do also welcome responses from individual Friends.

Questions for Group Discernment

1. Does the definition of testimony in the first two paragraphs of the text resonate with your experience of the Spirit's guidance?
2. Does anything else need to be included in the eight paragraphs of text?
3. We offer text describing the spiritual basis of testimony, followed by extracts giving examples of lived testimony, and then Advices & Queries. Do you find this organization of the material helpful?
4. Extracts are chosen to give the range of Friends' responses to their experience over time. Are these extracts helpful? Which strike you as most interesting and thought-provoking? Are there any you would leave out? Are there others you might suggest?
5. Do the Advices & Queries speak to you individually and to your meeting as a whole?
6. What works well for you in the chapter as written? Is any part of the chapter unclear?
7. Try to remember your initial encounters with Friends, and how you learned about Friends' beliefs and practices. Which parts of this document might have been particularly helpful to you then? Or, if you are new to Friends, how helpful is this document in addressing the questions and concerns you have about Friends?
8. Does this document adequately reflect the diversity of Friends in your meeting and in your experience of New England Yearly Meeting?

Testimony: The Fruits of the Spirit

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.”

Galatians 5:22–23

“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth … you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”

John 14:16–17 New International Version

“Take heed, dear Friends to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life.”

Quaker Faith & Practice, third edition,
Britain Yearly Meeting

Introduction

[1.] The basis of Friends' lives is trust that the Light can touch the heart of each individual and change us inwardly. Being open to the Spirit may bring us to see the world and our actions in new ways, prompting changes in how we live our lives and interact with others. These changes flow from our new insight—a vibrant experience of the Spirit rising up in us. An individual or gathered community may feel led to act from a sense of conviction and clarity. This witness in the human heart by God was referred to by early Friends as Truth's Testimony.

[2.] The fruits of this openness to the Light are sometimes called “testimonies” since they testify to the work of the Spirit. The consistencies in the faithful lives of Friends through the ages reflect their origin in the same Source. Peace, simplicity, equality, community, and integrity, among others, are some of the ways to name these changes. They are neither goals nor standards, but manifestations of the internal work of the Divine to which Friends have borne witness in the past. We are invited to experience the same Spirit that spoke to them.

Leadings

[3.] Friends often speak of times in our lives when we feel nudged by the Spirit into new ways of living into our faith. Sometimes the nudge is deeply challenging or disorienting. This awakening is called a leading. A Friend may recognize the stirrings of a leading themselves, or an experienced Friend may recognize the shift and encourage them to explore it. In learning to hear and trust the still small voice of the Spirit by following leadings that at first seem small, we prepare ourselves to recognize that voice which may lead to the possibility of bigger life-changing actions. The inspiration to deliver a message in meeting may, over time, become to a call to ministry beyond one's home meeting. The desire to be active in the meeting may lead to work beyond the meeting. At times Friends have found they need support in discerning how to live into a leading. They may wish to ask Ministry & Counsel to help them find clarity on how to respond to the call and to discern what is their work to do.

[4.] A Friend may sense they have been released from a leading they have followed for some time. Perhaps a specific body of work is completed, or the work is now being carried forward well by others. It may be that the need continues for this work, but the Friend no longer feels called to it. A Friend may turn to Ministry & Counsel for help in discerning that the leading has come to an end.

Ministry and Witness

[5.] When a leading is sustained, particularly when it involves interactions with others either within our Religious Society or in the wider world, we call it a ministry, or in some cases, a witness. The Friend carrying such a leading may be referred to as a “public Friend.” While there is not always a distinction, we often think of ministry as a form of service, such as intervisitation, while witness is a public statement or action in support of social justice. When individuals are faithful to divine prompting, the meeting may be lifted up by witnessing God at work in its midst, especially as it engages in support of the discernment and work of its member.

Corporate Witness

[6.] A monthly meeting may find itself called to a corporate witness by a concern brought forward by an individual member or a group within the meeting. The monthly meeting may take up the concern to find if they can embrace and commit to the witness as a community. Sometimes this is easy, as the concern is clearly one shared by the meeting as a whole. Sometimes this work is arduous, calling Friends into a discernment that stretches them beyond their cultural comfort into a spiritual understanding of the concern. Patience, attention to information presented, and humility are important to the discernment of God's will.

[7.] There is often a sense of rejoicing when, after listening with great care to each other, the members of a community can reach unity to engage in a corporate witness, feeling they are giving voice to a fresh expression of the Spirit among them. The meeting's regular revisiting of the commitment allows it to gauge whether the leading is still strong and to seek clarity on how to proceed. There are times that a meeting supports an individual's concern, but does not feel called to carry it as a body. In this tender time the meeting continues to recognize the faithfulness of all involved.

Faithfulness

[8.] Shaping our lives in response to divine leading is a matter of spiritual integrity. While we hope our witness will bear fruit in the world and be of benefit, the greater importance is to follow divine leading, neither holding back through fear nor outrunning our Guide. Friends through the ages have described a sense of peace, of grace, even in times of great difficulty, when they live faithfully by the Light they are given.

Testimony Extracts - Pages 7 to 24 - Link below

The draft *Testimony: The Fruits of the Spirit* can be found and downloaded at the New England Yearly Meeting website on the *Faith and Practice* Revision Committee page

<https://neym.org/texts-currently-under-discussion>.

Testimony Advices

1. Bring the whole of your daily life under the ordering of the Spirit. Maintain integrity in word and deed.
2. Consider whether your patterns of consumption detract from a life of the spirit, or contribute to injustice or ecological destruction—cherish the gift of the world and all its inhabitants in their beauty and variety.
3. Open yourself to the Spirit of Truth from which “the traditional Quaker testimonies” arose. Let that Spirit guide you. Bear its witness faithfully in large and small matters as it is laid upon you.
4. Keep your witness clearly grounded in faith, and regularly test your leadings with other Friends. Humility requires us to consider that our discernment may be flawed.
5. Keep your spiritual roots watered and nourished. They will wither if you rely solely on your own energy.
6. Take care that your perspectives are not led astray by the trends and biases of the broader culture. Find the strength to be faithful when called to step out of the mainstream.
7. Do what the Spirit reveals to you. Through our faithful actions we become witnesses to God’s desires for our lives and for this world.
8. “As we grow in the faith God expects us to take a larger role in our ministry in discernment of right action. But we are not without assistance at any time. Let us use the assistance we are given so that we might be faithful in the service we are offered.” *Lloyd Lee Wilson*
9. “Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come; that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them. Then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one; whereby in them ye may be a blessing, and make the witness of God in them to bless you.” *George Fox*

Testimony Queries

1. *How do I embody my Quaker faith? Is my life my witness?*
2. *Do I regularly examine my own life for the roots of violence and fear?*
3. *Have I, perhaps unwittingly, participated in a culture that does not reflect my commitments to equality and justice?*
4. *Do I treat each person I meet as a beloved child of God? How do I work to do this in difficult interactions?*
5. *Do my commitments and activities interfere with a focus on my spiritual life?*
6. *Do I strive to stay in right relationship with people with whom I do not agree?*
7. *Do I stay open to the guidance of the Spirit and what it puts before me?*
8. *Do I bear witness to truth in love?*
9. *Am I mindful of the Source of the testimony to which I bear witness?*
10. *How do I know when I have outrun my Guide? What helps return me to faithfulness?*
11. *Has the time come that this work is no longer Spirit-led for me? How will I know?*
12. *Do I uphold those who are acting under concern, even if their way differs from mine? Can I lay aside my own wishes and prejudices while seeking with others to find God's will?*

Note: These queries may be used for individual reflection or, by changing "I" to "we," may be