I. Introduction

1. About this Manual

   Audience
   A manual of Quaker faith and practice is a book used by a group of Quakers, members of the Religious Society of Friends, as a brief guide to Quaker life. Generally, a Faith and Practice is written and approved for use by a regional body called a Yearly Meeting. (The definition of a Yearly Meeting will be provided in Section IV.) Sometimes, however, individuals or groups of Friends may desire a book that speaks more directly to their condition; this manual is offered to such Friends.

   This book is intended primarily for use by Quakers in what is known as the liberal tradition. Liberal Friends, while accepting of broad theological diversity, tend to maintain some connection with early Quaker thought and to preserve the historic practices of silence-based, unprogrammed worship and free ministry. Today, liberal Quakers’ views range from traditional Christian theology to spirituality without belief in God. Many Faith and Practice books, however, were composed when the Society was more united in a traditionally Christian theological perspective. Revisions of those books have not always been able to reach the heart of that which still unites us as Quakers. It is hoped that this manual can serve as a resource for discussion and development of ways of expressing our faith that are true to both the original Quaker genius and contemporary experience. For that reason, the manual will focus on basics, encouraging Friends to elaborate the insights expressed here and their applications in various circumstances.

   Approach
   This manual uses a variety of brief excerpts from the writings of earlier Friends, particularly of the first generation, as well as passages from the Bible. One reason for that is that liberal Friends today continue to turn to early Friends and (if less often) to scripture for inspiration or to explain or justify a belief or practice. But the principal reason is that the founding Friends, as they tell us in their own writings, were led by scripture to a radically world-changing spiritual power.

   If we wish to understand and share in that unique power, we must do our best to set aside our preconceptions and to allow those first Friends, and the scriptures that guided them, to speak to us across the centuries. But that is not to say that we must attempt to believe exactly as early Friends, or early Christians, did. Their writings, although conditioned by time and culture, reflect something much deeper and more self- and world-changing than a belief system: they point us to a dynamic spirit of just and peaceable relationship that is crucially important for our time.
In our postmodern era, which is characterized by distrust of all-encompassing myths and systems that profess to liberate but end up oppressing human beings, we are rightly suspicious of truth-claims, whether theistic or not. That does not mean that we deny the existence of truth, but that we recognize that truth is not absolute: we see that any way of understanding the world is conditioned and tentative. In these times, Quakerism, a voluntary way of relating rather than a creed-based, authoritative system, can have an important role. For what Quakers have meant by “Truth” is not an ideology but the spiritual wisdom and power that Friend John Woolman, known for his gentle but persistent work against slavery, called “universal love.” Quakerism calls us to go beyond our perceived limits, to allow our beliefs and presuppositions to be illuminated, questioned, and transcended by that love’s light. When thus enlightened, we are led to just and peaceable living and empowered for the sacrifices such a life entails. The primary purpose of this manual is to help Friends discover and live that wisdom and power.

Format
The initial plan, which is subject to change, is that the manual will have six sections. After this introduction, a section called “The Life of the Spirit” will present the spiritual basis of Quaker faith and practice. That will be followed by a brief treatment of Quaker history. The fourth section will describe organization, practices, and procedures. The fifth will offer “queries,” a traditional Quaker means of asking — and challenging — ourselves about our lives. The final section may include appendices and an index. Succinctness is a goal for all sections: it is the author’s hope that the core material presented here will provide starting points for further exploration.

2. A Basic Theology for Friends

The Heart of Quaker Thought
In this early part of the 21st century, Quakers’ belief systems range from biblical monotheism to panentheism to ways of thinking that are not theistic. But Friends tend to agree that there was something uniquely real and powerful, something that remains fundamental for us, in the lives of the first Quakers. Indeed, it is evident that early Friends were animated by a spiritual “life and power” that overturned society’s normal values, replacing them not simply with alternative values but with the “universal love” (as Friend John Woolman would put it) that was evident in the life and ministry of Jesus. Life in that Christ-spirit (whether or not we think of that spirit as a supernatural entity) is the locus of our unity-in-diversity and the heart of our faith and practice. We need, therefore, to specify that particular spirit, of all the spirits to which human beings might give themselves, when we point to the source and center of our lives as Friends.
To that end, this manual offers the following succinct theological foundation statement for present-day Quakerism, a statement that respects the nature and power of the faith of our founders while being informed by contemporary thought.

**A Faithful Contemporary Foundation**

The Quaker movement constituted a radical simplification of Christian religion: it was hyperfocused on discerning and living in the spiritual power that produces lives of justice, mercy, and peace. To bring that vision into the 21st century requires no elaboration but, on the contrary, invites further simplification. The vision has been transmitted through scripture, many elements of which are seen as mythical by some Friends today: such elements may be (not discarded, for the message is embedded in them, but) bracketed as we focus on the vision’s existential core. Setting aside, too, more recently incorporated elements such as lists of values or “testimonies” and ideologies ranging from American evangelicalism to New Age mysticism, we find that Quakerism is, at heart, quite simple. Today, a foundational Quaker theology — upon which various conceptual structures might rest — needs but four brief points.

1. “God” signifies love — in biblical Greek, *agapē*.  
2. “*Agapē*” signifies behavior, empathetic encounter with and response to the actual *other* in her actual *need*.  
3. Each of us has, here and now, a degree (“measure”) of the power of *agapē*.  
4. That *agapē*-power will shape our lives if we allow it to do so — if, that is, we commit ourselves to it, discern how we are impeding it, and get out of its way.

The essential Quaker message is, then, not only simple but also practical: put your faith in, and commit yourself to, God/*agapē* as that which moves you to respond justly and generously to the other, even at cost to you, and then pay attention to that love’s movement in your heart and allow it to guide and empower you; anything else is distraction and therefore anti-religion, anti-spirituality. In keeping with that, the first Friends announced the end of religion-as-we-know-it, emphatically including the end of teachers, techniques, and speculations. Their theology, like the biblical exegesis supporting it, served their knowledge that God-who-is-love had come to guide his people himself: it was a sign directing human beings to the motive power of *agapē* within. In this contemporary distillation of their theology, we follow in that spirit.

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1. See the letters of John; e.g., 1 Jn. 4:8b: *ho theos agapē estin*. On love as the nature of God, see Isaac Penington’s “Concerning Love.” That doctrine is taught as well by traditional Christian writers such as Augustine of Hippo, who wrote in his *On the Trinity* that “Love … is of God and is God….”
2. That divine love means beneficial action for the other, even the enemy, is amply documented in the Christian scriptures; see, for example, Matthew 5:38-48.
Faith and Practice

Because the core of Quaker theology points directly to the working of agapē in the heart, there should be no question of translating theory into action. As the apostle James reminds us, faith and practice cannot be separated. To be a believer, said George Fox, is to be — actually, not forensically — “passed from death [i.e., sinfulness, or living harmfully] to life [i.e., righteousness, or living justly].” The apostle John (recalling the story of Cain and Abel) wrote, “And we are aware that we have passed out of death into life because we love our brothers; whoever is not loving their brother is remaining in death.”3 In traditional terms, “believers,” those who put their faith in God-who-is-agapē’s guidance and power, enter into the divine life of love, become “partakers of the divine nature,” as they are made just through that faith: love is their resurrection and their life.4 In contemporary terms, it is through a particular form of faith, commitment to agapē as supreme value and trust in its continuing guidance, that we are saved from the darkness of destructive narcissism. A properly Quaker theology simply points to the possibility and nature of such faith.

Our core Quaker theology is realized in the fidelity of individual Friends to the continuing influence of agapē, in the fidelity of the community gathered in that love, and in the responsive work of agapē in the world. Always, as we will see in detail in the next section of this book, this faith-and-practice is one. And always, because of that oneness, it is simple, simplicity itself — as are our lives when we embrace it.

3. On faith and works, see James 2. The quotation from John is 1 Jn. 3:14. From the Journal of George Fox: “About the beginning of the year 1646 … a consideration arose in me, how it was said that all Christians are believers, both Protestants and Papists; and the Lord opened to me that, if all were believers, then they were all born of God and passed from death to life, and that none were true believers but such ….”
4. “Partakers of the divine nature” is from 2 Peter 1:4. In the Quaker version of salvation by faith, when we trust in the Light, the guiding and empowering work of the spirit of Christ in the heart, we are incorporated into Christ here and now, “that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21), for “now the justice/righteousness of God apart from the law has been made to appear … through Jesus Christ’s faith into all and upon all the ones having faith, for there is no distinction” (Romans 3:21-22). The final biblical reference in the paragraph is to John 11:25, in which Christ the divine Logos, the visible form of God-who-is-love into whom believers are incorporated, says, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he were dead, shall live....”
II. The Life of the Spirit

1. Introduction to Section II

This section presents an introduction to Quaker life. In order to provide context for Quaker concepts and to convey something of the unique spiritual power of the first Friends, each part includes excerpts from early Quaker writings or the scriptures that inspired them. When reading those excerpts, you are encouraged to suspend your preconceptions and open yourself to unexpected levels of meaning. To thus “feel where the words come from” (as a native American said in his own language after hearing Quaker John Woolman speak in English) is to encounter the hearts and souls of the writers. In that way, you may allow the texts to communicate their spiritual depth across centuries and cultures. In order to facilitate that process, we begin with discussion of a Quaker approach to reading religious writings.

2. The Bible and Historic Quaker Writings

And the scriptures, which [are] writings, outward writings, with paper and ink, are not … infallible, nor are they divine, but human, and [people] get a human knowledge from them; and so writings with paper and ink are not infallible, nor is the scripture the ground of faith, but [the living] Christ [is the ground], who was before the scripture was written; this the scripture tells you, and that God is divine; and the scriptures are the words of God, which Christ, the [W]ord, ends, who is the author of the faith. (George Fox, 1659)

Founders of the Quaker movement had encyclopedic knowledge of the Bible, but they interpreted it in a very untraditional way. For them, the scriptures were useful primarily as pointers to events within the human heart. The source of spiritual revelation was not the Bible but Christ the living “Word” who, scripture had taught them, is the power and wisdom of divine love abiding within us. Inspired by the Word, the Bible could be correctly interpreted only by someone living in that same power and wisdom. Therefore, scripture could not, any more than could a church hierarchy, be the ultimate moral authority: that authority could only be the Christ-spirit working in the faithful person’s heart.

Following in that tradition, Quakers today can cherish both the Bible and the writings of early Friends as pointers to the dynamic reality of divine love within. Friends are reminded that those works should be read in their proper contexts and without bias. Meetings (congregations) are encouraged to explore our biblical and Quaker literary heritage together, helping each other to engage with the texts both critically and receptively. To reclaim and share our tradition’s treasures in that way is to continue the powerful work begun by our spiritual ancestors.
And because we do not with the misty ministers of the mere letter own the bare external text of scripture entire in every tittle, but say it hath suffered much loss of more than vowels, single letters, and single lines also, yea, even of whole epistles and prophecies of inspired men, the copies of which are not by the clergy canonized nor by the Bible-sellers bound up, and specially because we do not [acknowledge] the said alterable and much altered outward text, but [rather] the holy truth and inward light and spirit to be the Word of God, which is living [and] the true touchstone, therefore they cry out against us. Yet the scriptures are owned by us in their due place, and the letter is acknowledged by us full as much as it is by itself, to have been written by men moved of God’s Spirit, and to be useful, profitable, serviceable, etc., to be read and heeded. (Samuel Fisher, 1660)

3. The Quaker Experience

“The kingdom of heaven is at hand,” said John the Baptist (Mat. 3:2). “It is come unto you,” said Christ (Mat. 12:28). That power of life which was made manifest in him, [that] was [the kingdom]; “and this Kingdom is also within you,” said Christ to the Pharisees (Luke 17:21). The Pharisees demanded of him when the kingdom of God [would] come. It cometh not, saith he, with outward show or observation; it cometh not that way you look for it; to wit, by the manifestation of an outward glorious king, … but the kingdom is within you. How was it within them? Christ explains to them in another place; it was in them like a grain of mustard seed; it was the least of all the seeds in their hearts. There were many great seeds of darkness there, but yet there was also one little seed of light. It was there as well as the rest (though less than them all), and did sometimes cast some glimmerings of light, and of its shining in the darkness, though the darkness could not comprehend it. (Isaac Penington, 1660)

The Religious Society of Friends arose from the conviction that, as George Fox put it, “Christ [is] come to teach his people himself, by his power and spirit in their hearts.” Early Friends knew from scripture that the word Christ signifies “the power and wisdom of God” (1Cor 1:24), and that the word God signifies that universal love, called in biblical Greek agapē, which seeks to meet the basic human needs of all, of both “the just and the unjust alike” (Mt 5:45). And they knew to look within their hearts for that love’s power and wisdom, because “that which can be known of God is manifest within” (Rom 1:19). When they did so, Friends found confirmed in their experience what they had discerned in scripture: a measure of unselfish, Christic love lives within each of us, and as we learn to entrust ourselves to its empowering guidance, we become increasingly just and peaceable people in whom divine love thrives.

Friends have referred to the spiritual power and wisdom abiding in the human heart by a variety of names, including Christ; the Light within; the Holy, or Divine, Spirit; the Seed; the Word (or
Logos); Truth; gospel; the life; that of God in everyone. But as James Nayler wrote in 1656, “the name of Christ consists not of letters and syllables, but in righteousness, mercy and judgment, &c.” In other words, Friends have found that ultimately it is not the name but the dynamic reality of agapē in our hearts that matters. Words, even the scriptures, are but more or less helpful pointers to that divine reality.

But the anointing you received from him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone should teach you, for the anointing is teaching you about all. It is true and not falsehood, and as it is teaching you, you will be abiding in him. (1Jn 2:27) And we have known and trusted in the love God has in us: God is love [agapē], and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in them. (1Jn 4:16)

And in all things we found the light which we were enlightened withal (which is Christ) to be alone and only sufficient to bring [us] to life and eternal salvation; and that all who did [acknowledge] the light in them which Christ hath enlightened every [one] withal, they needed no [one] to teach them, but the Lord was their teacher, by his light in their own consciences, and they received the holy anointing. (Edward Burrough, 1658)

Early Friends found that the light they knew as Christ would, when they turned to it in faith, illuminate and re-form their consciences while liberating them to live lovingly. As a consequence of that discovery, they adopted forms of worship, vocal ministry, and decision-making that unite us even today in going beyond naming to discerning, surrendering to, and acting in the power and wisdom of agapē.

4. Meeting for Worship

[When I came into the silent assemblies of God’s people, I felt a secret power among them, which touched my heart, and as I gave way unto it, I found the evil weakening in me, and the good raised up, and so I became thus knit and united unto them, hungering more and more after the increase of this power and life …. (Robert Barclay, 1678)

Inspired by Jesus’ call to “worship in spirit and in truth” (Jn. 4:24), unprogrammed Quaker worship is based in silence. Sometimes called “expectant waiting,” it is essentially passive. We enter into stillness of body and mind in order to feel the divine spirit of love — agapē — within and among us, to give ourselves over to it, and to discern what it would have us do in our lives. In so doing, each person is already expressing agapē by helping others in the room to do the same. As our communion deepens, we find within and among us the world-changing “power and life” of which Barclay wrote long ago.
Spiritual and truthful worship entails a sometimes difficult passage from conventional to divine wisdom. It requires first of all an acknowledgment of our tendency to “transgress” love; that is, a feeling-sense of our failure to allow agapē to thoroughly re-shape our hearts and minds. As George Fox put it,

None worship God but [those] who come to the principle of God, which they have transgressed. None are ploughed up but he who comes to the principle of God in him, that he hath transgressed. Then he doth service to God; then is the planting, watering, and increase [i.e., growth] from God.

To “come to the principle of God, which [you] have transgressed” is to put one’s trust in the light of love by which conscience is called into question and ultimately re-formed. That light, if we allow it, exposes in us that which we have hidden not only from others but even from ourselves. It was in part because early Friends trembled under such scrutiny that they came to be called “Quakers.” Worship in spirit and in truth brings peace, power, and wisdom through purification of heart. It requires faith and courage.

What, in a very practical sense, does one do in worship? It can be as simple as forming the intention to be open to the illumination of agapē in one’s heart and then sitting with that intention in silence, perhaps helped by an unobtrusive technique such as watching one’s breathing. There is no need to strive for anything. To worship in the Quaker manner is simply to acknowledge the divine light within as that “universal love” which we normally repress, and then to wait faithfully — that is, in trust and perseverance — upon its revelation of our condition and our calling. George Fox’s advice to Elizabeth Cromwell Claypole, written in 1658, can still be helpful today:

[B]e still awhile from thy own thoughts, searching, seeking, desires, and imaginations, and be stayed in the principle of God in thee, that it may raise thy mind up to God, and stay it upon God, and thou wilt find strength from him, and find him to be a God at hand, a present help in the time of trouble and of need. And thou being come to the principle of God [within], which hath been transgressed [by thee], it will keep thee humble; and [to] the humble God will teach his way, which is peace …. Now as the principle of God in thee hath been transgressed, come to it …. Then thou wilt feel the power of God, which will bring nature into its course …. There the wisdom of God will be received (which is Christ, by which all things were made and created) and thou be thereby preserved and ordered to God’s glory. There thou wilt come to receive and feel the physician of value, who clothes people in their right mind, whereby they may serve God and do his will.

Isaac Penington, using the metaphor of the Christ-seed, expressed it similarly:
Give over thine own willing; give over thine own running; give over thine own desiring to know or to be any thing, and sink down to the seed which God sows in the heart, and let that grow in thee, and be in thee, and breathe in thee, and act in thee, and thou shalt find by sweet experience that the Lord knows that, and loves and owns that, and will lead it to the inheritance of life, which is his portion.

Silent worship is powerful, and at times some of us, like Elizabeth Claypole, will need help and encouragement from others in the light. So Quaker meeting for worship is not always silent: sometimes the divine power and life will lead one or more of us to offer spoken ministry out of the silence.

5. Vocal Ministry

[W]ith diligence meet together, and with diligence wait to feel the Lord God to arise, to scatter and expel all that which is the cause of leanness and barrenness upon any soul; for it is the Lord [who] must do it, and he will be waited upon in sincerity and fervency of Spirit .... Let charity and ... compassion abound among you, as becometh the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; and let none be hasty to utter words, though manifest in the light, in which ye wait upon the Lord; but still wait in silence, to know the power working in you to bring forth the words, in the ministration of the eternal [W]ord of life, to answer the life in all; and if this be not known, retain in your vessels what is manifest unto you, and it shall be as bread in your own houses. (Stephen Crisp, 1663)

Friends have always known that divine revelation did not end with the closing of the scriptures but continues in the present. Because we are intentionally receptive during silent worship, that is often a time when inspiration is recognized. Some revelations received during worship speak solely to the condition of the individual to whom they come. At times, however, a Friend may discern that a revelation has arisen in order to “answer the life in” — that is, to respond to the spiritual condition of — others who are present.

Such discernment is a skill that develops over time. Its essential criterion is the worshiper’s motivation: does the impulse to speak this inspiration arise mostly from concern for self (including, but not limited to, a desire to express oneself), or is it born of loving concern for the welfare of others in the room? If the former, then the revelation should not be spoken; one should silently acknowledge it and then return to receptive waiting. If the latter, then one might stand and speak when the message has crystallized sufficiently to be coherent and succinct. Other criteria sometimes suggested, such as a sense of urgency or a pounding heart, are unreliable: they are as likely to arise from self-concern as from loving sensitivity to others.
Distinct from self-expression, then, vocal ministry is the responsive communication of spiritual power and wisdom received in purifying worship.

From an inward purifying, and steadfast abiding under it, springs a lively operative desire for the good of others: all the faithful are not called to the public ministry; but whoever are, are called to minister of that which they have tasted and handled spiritually. (John Woolman, d. 1772)

Vocal ministry is the fruit of a process of inspiration and discernment that takes place during a particular time of worship. Therefore, no one should go to a meeting for worship with a prior intention to speak or not to speak; one’s only intention in worship is to be open and responsive to the illumination of agapē (love) in one’s heart. The gift of ministry is freely received and freely given (Mt. 10:8). One neither seeks it nor expects recompense beyond the opportunity to be of service to the gathered community. Like the silent worship from which it is born, such ministry is the work of the holy spirit of agapē.

6. Meeting for Business (Quaker Decision-making)

And in your … [business] meetings, you are in and about the Lord’s business, and not your own; and therefore let the Lord be in your eyes, that all of you his presence, and power, and wisdom, and judgment may receive, to do, and act, and speak in. (George Fox, 1674)

Most local Quaker congregations are called Monthly Meetings because they meet once each month to conduct business together. (Business meetings may also be held at other times as necessary, and some regional Quaker associations meet only quarterly or annually for business.) The meeting for business is when matters needing corporate consideration are discussed and decided upon, but those terms can be misleading: it is not a time for arguing opinions or positions, nor is a vote ever taken. Our objective in business meeting is not simply to dispatch business but to act together in the power of agapē (divine love). As matters are brought before us, we hold them in the light of agapē. When we are gathered into unity of spirit, we may discern that a way forward has opened.

In your meetings together to do service for the Lord, be every one of you very careful and diligent in watching to [God’s] power, that ye may have the sensible, living feeling of it, each of you in your own hearts, and in the hearts one of another; and that ye may keep within the limits of it, and not think, or speak, or act beyond it. And know, oh! wait more and more to know, how to keep that silence, which is of the power; that in every one of you [whatever] the power would have silent may be silent. Oh! take heed of the forwardness of the flesh, the wisdom of the flesh, the will
of the flesh, the talkativeness of the flesh; keep them back, oh! let them for ever be kept back in every one of you, by the presence and virtue of the power.

The power is the authority and blessing of your meetings, and therein lies your ability to perform what God requires; be sure ye have it with you. Keep back to the life, keep low in the holy fear, and ye shall not miss of it. You will find [that it is] easy to transgress, easy to set up self, easy to run into sudden apprehensions about things, and one [person] to be of this mind and another of that; but feel the power to keep down all this, and to keep you out of all this; every one watching to the life, when and where it will arise to help you, and that ye may be sensible of it when it doth arise, and not in a wrong wisdom oppose it, but be one with it. (Isaac Penington, 1678)

The meeting for business is, then, like the meeting for worship in that Friends’ primary duty in both is to open ourselves to agapē, especially toward those gathered with us; to wait silently for inspiration in that spirit, willing to having our preconceptions overturned; and to share such inspiration when love leads us to do so. Indeed, sometimes the phrase “meeting for worship with a concern for business” is used to emphasize the underlying unity of our decision-making process and our worship.

[S]ee that all … meetings are preserved by the wisdom of God in the unity of the spirit, the bond of peace, and the fellowship of the holy ghost; being ordered by the pure, gentle, heavenly, peaceable wisdom …. And that all may be careful to speak short and pertinent to matters in a christian spirit; and despatch business quickly, and keep out of debates and heats; and with the spirit of God keep that down, which is doting about questions and strife of words, that tends to parties and contention: which in the church of God there is no such custom to be allowed. And likewise not to speak more than one at a time, nor in a fierce way ... but as the apostle saith, “Be swift to hear, and slow to speak”; and let it be in the grace, which seasons all words. (George Fox, 1690)

For procedural details about Quaker business meeting, please see Section IV.

7. The Meeting as Caring Community

And dear friends, dwell all in the everlasting power of God, and his life, in which is ... unity, order, peace, and fellowship; and wait in the fear of the everlasting God, that his wisdom you may receive, which is pure and gentle from above, by which all things were made, and by which wisdom you may order all things to the glory of God. The poor, the sick, the widows, the fatherless, the prisoners be tender of, and feel every one’s condition as your own, and let nothing be lacking amongst you,
according to the apostle’s doctrine to the church of God of old time; and if nothing be lacking, then all is well.

And ... know in all your meetings who is sick, and weak, and in want, and widows, and fatherless, and aged people, that cannot help themselves; and such as God hath distributed unto, of that which God has distributed, to lay aside for the necessities of others, as you are moved and commanded of the Lord God by his power and spirit; for [one who] gives to the poor, lendeth to the Lord; and he loves a cheerful giver. (George Fox, c. 1669)

As members of a Quaker community, our primary responsibility is to “dwell all in the everlasting power of God, and his life” — to live in agapē. Living in that love, we are moved and empowered to care for each other’s fundamental human needs, both physical and spiritual. Accordingly, a healthy Friends meeting actively discerns the needs of its members and addresses them by such means as religious education, spiritual support, and material assistance. It has been found effective to designate committees or other formal groups to coordinate that work. In addition, frequent opportunities for fellowship and service — such as shared meals, work days, and activities in service of peace, justice, and relief of suffering in the greater community — help us to know each other’s needs and gifts.

‘By this all shall know that you learn of me: that you love each other.’ (Jn 13:35)

All aspects of Quaker life being characterized by surrender of self to divine love, caring for each other is as natural and essential an expression of our spirituality as are our worship, vocal ministry, decision-making, and social activism. Indeed, the measure of our active caring for each other is the measure of our spiritual life and fidelity.

Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand .... (Isaac Penington, 1667)

8. The Use and Nurture of Gifts

Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ... For by one Spirit we all are baptized into one body .... For the body is not one member, but many. (1 Cor 12)

Indeed, several gifts of the Spirit were given, some to one, some to another, according to the pleasure of the giver, and diversities of manifestations and operations of the same inward life and power: but [all] received so much of the Spirit as to make [them children of God, empowered] to cry Abba, Father, and to wash
[them]. And this is the one washing which all the flock are washed with, and so baptized into the one pure, living body .... (Isaac Penington, pub. 1671)

We recognize that one divine spirit of agapē works in us diversely, through what Friend Caroline Stephen, writing in 1891, called the individual’s “natural temperament and special gifts.” Whether in visitation, administration, instruction, vocal ministry, or other forms of service, all Friends are invited and called to exercise their gifts “toward equipping the saints for the work of service and the building up of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12). Invited, because in offering their gifts for the sake of others, givers benefit as well; called, because the meeting community, being one body, needs the strength and contributions of all its members.

Each Quaker community has a responsibility, therefore, to discern, encourage, and help develop and apply the spiritual gifts of its members. In doing so, the body is “built up” in spiritual power and wisdom through the exercise of gifts according to each person’s measure of life in universal love. And each member has a responsibility to discover her talents, develop them to the fullest, and offer them to her Quaker community and the wider world as appropriate.

Let the time past suffice, that you have hidden the talent in the earth which you have received from the Lord to profit withal. … Consider one another, and provoke one another to Love and to good works, not forsaking the Assembling of yourselves, but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as you see the day approaching. Dwell in love and unity, in the pure eternal Light; there is your fellowship, there is your cleansing and washing. (Margaret Fell, 1656)

9. Personal, Family, and Community Life

Oh! that [people] were awakened to consider of things as indeed they are! For religion is not such an outward form of doctrine, or worship of any sort, as [people] generally ... are too apt and willing to apprehend; but it consists in Spirit, in power, in virtue, in life: not in the oldness of any form that passeth away; but in the newness of the Spirit, which abideth for ever; in being born of the Spirit, in abiding in the Spirit, in living, walking, and worshipping in the Spirit; yea, in becoming and growing into Spirit, and into eternal life: for “that which is born of the Spirit, is Spirit” [Jn 3:6]. Oh! that [people] would hearken, that they might taste of the sweetness and riches of the goodness which the Father in his free love hath opened in the spirits of many, and hath let the spirits of many into! Oh! that [people] would suffer the wearing out of [the] earthly spirit and wisdom, that they might become like God, be formed into and live in his image! (Isaac Penington, 1660)

All aspects of Quaker life are subsumed under one rubric: continual submission to the life and power of the divine love, agapē, dwelling in one’s heart. Such submission leads us into
“becoming and growing into Spirit”; that is, it changes our hearts in a fundamental way, re-orienting us from self to agapē, “until we all come,” as Paul wrote, “… unto a mature person, unto a measure of stature of the fullness of the Christ” (Eph 4:13). The Quaker’s vocation is nothing less than to be the body of Christ, the human form of God-who-is-love, in this world.

To live into that vocation is to learn increasingly to be faithful to the measure of divine love in one’s heart. One develops the habit of turning to the Spirit of agapē within, especially at times of difficulty, and allowing oneself to be guided by that Spirit rather than acting on a “natural” impulse that may be motivated, if unconsciously, by self-centeredness. That habit carries over into all areas of life, shaping our interactions with others, from family members to neighbors to people whom we will never meet but whose needs become known to us – and shaping even our relationship to ourselves. All of life is “redeemed,” made holy, in the Spirit of agapē.

God is righteous, and he would have his people to be righteous, and to do righteously. God is holy, and he would have his people holy, and to do holily. God is just, and he would have his people to be just, and to do justly to all. God is light, and his children must walk in his light. God is an eternal, infinite spirit, and his children must walk in the spirit. God is merciful, and he would have his people to be merciful. God’s sun shines upon the good and the bad, and he causes the rain to fall upon the evil and the good; so should his people do good unto all. God is love, and they that dwell in love dwell in God. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour, therefore, “Love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. xiii. 10). The apostle saith, “All the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Gal. v. 14). “As the Father hath loved me, so I have loved you; continue ye in my love” (John xv. 9). This should be the practice of all God’s people. (George Fox, 1687)

10. Meditative Prayer

Pray without ceasing. (1Thess 5:17)

Likewise, the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself pleads for our sake with inarticulate groanings. (Rom 8:26)

Friends know from experience that an hour of group worship once a week is not sufficient for a deep and mature spiritual life. In order to live consistently in the Spirit of agapē, we need to develop the habit of openness to the revelation of that Spirit within the heart. As we do that, we become more and more attuned to the promptings of universal love — to, in traditional terms, the will of God. A principal means of cultivating that habit is regular practice of meditative prayer.
Quaker meditative prayer is characterized by radical receptivity to the inward working of the Spirit. It is, therefore, a form of worship “in spirit and in truth.” (See Section II-4, “Meeting for Worship.”) Like group worship, solitary prayer is grounded in the intention to be silent and open to inspiration, to attend in stillness of body and mind to the calling and answering of Spirit within us. Such prayer deepens our capacity for inspiration, increases our measure of divine virtue, and shows us where love would have us go. The more we engage in its practice, the more united we are with the motions of agapē in our hearts — and the more sensitive and generous, therefore, to family and community.

God, by the breath of his Spirit, begets a [person] out of the spirit and likeness of this world into [God’s] own image and likeness. … [M]any are the daily wants of that which is [thus] begotten by the breath of God, in its state of weakness, until it be drawn up into the unity of the body, where the full communion with the life is felt, the heart satisfied, and the wants drowned.

Now the breathing of this child to the Father from the sense of these wants … is prayer; nay, though it be but a groan, or sigh, which cannot be uttered, or expressed; yet that is prayer, true prayer, which hath an acceptance with the Lord, and receiveth a gracious answer from him. And [God] that begetteth the child teacheth him to pray, even by the same Spirit which begat him. In watching daily to the Spirit, the child is kept sensible of the will of the Father, and in his light he sees the way wherein he is to walk ….. And thus watching to the Spirit, the life of a Christian is a continual course of prayer: [one] prays continually. This is the living prayer of the living child, which consists not in a form of words, either read out of a book or conceived in the mind; but in feeling the breath of its nature issuing out from the principle of life in it to the living spring, which is the Father of it; who by causing his virtues to spring up in it, nourisheth it to everlasting life. (Isaac Penington, 1660)

11. Practical Expression of the Life of the Spirit

For as the body without spirit is dead, so faith without acts is dead. (James 2:26)

Our gracious Creator cares and provides for all His creatures; His tender mercies are over all His works, and so far as true love influences our minds, so far we become interested in His workmanship, and feel a desire to make use of every opportunity to lessen the distresses of the afflicted, and to increase the happiness of the creation. Here we have a prospect of one common interest from which our own is inseparable, so that to turn all we possess into the channel of universal love becomes the business of our lives. (John Woolman, 1754)
A life entrusted to *agapē*, universal love, becomes by its very nature just, generous, and peaceable. Quaker faith is not, then, a matter of holding beliefs, ideals, or values that must be translated into actions, but of trust in the working of the Spirit of *agapē* within our hearts. Our practice — to allow that Spirit to animate us in every moment of our lives — is one with that faith.

Friends sometimes speak of *testimonies* such as peace, integrity, and simplicity. Quaker testimonies differ from credal or moral imperatives: testimonies, unless they are expressions of self-deception or hypocrisy, are simply descriptions of one’s actual life. “Let your lives speak” — allow your manner of living to be an expression of the divine “Word” (Jn 1) — is a classic Quaker exhortation. The spiritually mature Friend lives justly, mercifully, and peaceably more by nature than by design; that is, the inner life of the *agapē*-centered Friend is the life of the Christ-spirit, and his or her way of relating to others gives testimony to that substantial unity.

‘[Whoever] is in Christ is a new creature’ [2Cor 5:17], and is not distinct from him …. And Christ is justification, sanctification, wisdom, and righteousness; and if he be not within you, ye are reprobates [2Cor 13:5]. And where Christ is, he is not without righteousness. Therefore they are not without righteousness, and wisdom, justification, and sanctification, if Christ be within [them]; for, where he is, that is not wanting. (George Fox, 1659)

For Friends, there is no distinction between faith and works: we know that whoever is joined in faith to the Spirit of *agapē*, as if engrafted to a vine, cannot but yield good fruit (Jn 15:5). Jesus’ warning, “Beware of false prophets, who appear in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves: by their fruits you will know them” (Mt 7:15-16), applies first of all, therefore, to ourselves. Our way of relating to others testifies to our degree of surrender to the Spirit. That is one reason why silent worship, in which we allow conscience (our sense of right and wrong) to be critiqued by and joined to the Christ-light, is at the heart of Quaker spirituality.

[P]ut your salvation into effect with holy fear and quaking, for it is God who is working within you both to will and to do the good. (Phil 2:12b-13)

12. Social Justice

Let all those fines that belong to lords of manors be given to the poor people, for lords have enough. … Let all the poor people, blind and lame, and cripples be provided for in the nation, that there may not be a beggar in England nor England’s dominions …. And so let all great gifts given to great men be given to the poor [instead]. Let the receiver deny it, and the giver return it to the poor; for the rich may give to the rich, but the poor cannot give it him again, so mind Christ’s doctrine. (George Fox, 1659)
From the beginning of the Quaker movement, Friends have had a strong concern for social justice. That concern, arising from Friends’ inner life in divine love, has manifested itself in many ways. Friends have been in the forefront of movements toward justice in areas such as gender, race, mental health, education, labor, economics, and peace. Such efforts continue today. Contemporary Quakers are particularly active in work for racial, sexual, and ecological justice.

Our commitment to justice entails a willingness to be searched, judged, and guided continuously by the light of Christ within. Friends recognize that promoting justice means, first of all, living justly, allowing our own way of life to be shaped by the needs of other beings as seen in the light — which includes, among many other things, helping to preserve the ecosystem by living simply and working for responsible social policies. As William Penn said of the first Quakers,

They were changed [people] themselves before they went about to change others. Their hearts were ripped open as well as their garments changed, and they knew the power and work of God upon them. This was seen by the great alteration it made, and their stricter course of life, and more godly conversation, that immediately followed upon it.

13. Mercy and Generosity

Is not this the fast that I have chosen? … Is it not to deal your bread to the hungry, and that you bring the poor that are cast out into your house? When you see the naked, that you cover them, and that you hide not yourself from your own kind? Then shall your light break forth as the morning, and your healing shall spring forth speedily; and your righteousness shall go before you, and the glory of the Lord shall be your rearward guard. (Isaiah 58:8)

Care of the poor, the oppressed, the sick, and the sorrowful is a fundamental expression of that Spirit of love to which Quakers surrender ourselves. Friends are moved to care not only for those who are members of our communities but also for the stranger: “universal love” excludes none in need, even enemies. When we deny ourselves pleasure, comfort, and security in order to share our resources with those in need, we express the Christ-spirit in the world. Sometimes even contravening cultural norms, as when it moves us to avoid unnecessary travel out of concern for the environment or to act in other unconventional ways, agapē leads us to “let your light shine” (Mat 5:16).

Dear friends,—Something was upon me to write unto you, that [those] among Friends who marry and provide great dinners, that instead thereof, it will be of a good savour on such occasions that they … give something to the poor that be widows and fatherless and such like, to make them a feast or to refresh them. And
this, I look upon, would be a very good savour, to feast the poor that cannot feast you again …. (George Fox, 1690)

14. Peace and Nonviolence

From whence come your battles and fighting? Do they not come from the lusts that war in your members? You covet and don’t have; you kill and you are jealous, and [yet] you cannot obtain; you fight and war, yet you don’t receive because you don’t ask. [Or] you ask and don’t receive because you ask amiss, so that you may consume it upon your lusts. (James 4:1-3)

I told them [that] I knew from whence all wars arose, [namely] from the lusts, according to James’s doctrine; and that I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars. (George Fox, Journal for 1650)

Quaker pacifism is not so much a doctrinal or moral stance as an expression of life in fidelity to the Christ-spirit, the Spirit of *agapē* within. To abide in that holy Spirit, Friends have found, is to live in the grace of that divine life and power which frees the heart of reasons for war.

Our *pacifism* should not be confused with *passivism*: Quakers work for justice, mercy, and peace in nonviolent but active ways. Friends are engaged in spiritual warfare, “the Lamb’s War,” discerning and overcoming evil with good in the Spirit, first within themselves and then in the world as well. James Nayler explained it forcefully in 1657:

Christ hath a war … against all the powers of darkness of this world: and all things of this old world, the ways and fashions of it will he overturn; and all things will he make new which the god of this world hath polluted, and wherewith his children have corrupted themselves and do service to the lust and devourer; this the Lamb wars against, in whomsoever he appears, and calls them to join to him herein, in heart and mind, and … *he lights his candle in their hearts*, that they may find out every secret evil that the man of sin [2 Thess 2:3] hath there treasured up, even to every thought and intent of the heart, to cast out the enemy with all his stuff, and to subject the creature wholly to [the Lamb], that he may form a new [person], a new heart, new thoughts, and a new obedience, in a new way, in all things therein to reign, *and there is his kingdom*.

As narrativized in Jesus’ expulsion of merchants and money changers from the Jerusalem temple, the Christ-spirit casts out the cupidity that pollutes the human heart, the living temple of God. Then the liberated soul can help overcome evil in the world. But we overcome evil with good (Rom 12:21): the Lamb’s War is the work of love. Our struggle is with the darkness of self-centeredness that imprisons and corrupts human hearts and minds. Nayler continued,
The Lamb’s quarrel is not against the creation, for then should his weapons be carnal, as the weapons of the worldly spirits are: “For we war not with flesh and blood” [Eph 6:12], nor against the creation of God; that we love; but we fight against the spiritual powers of wickedness, which wars against God in the creation, and captivates the creation into the lust which wars against the soul, and [we fight] that the creature may be delivered into its liberty prepared for the [children] of God. And this is not against love, nor [against] everlasting peace, but that without which can be no true love nor lasting peace.

Nor, however, is Quaker pacifism a self-righteous or doctrinaire activism. While work for peace can be a powerful expression of universal love, our peace testimony does not require that others, particularly governments, be completely nonviolent. Friends are led by the power and wisdom of love within to live nonviolently, willingly bearing the suffering that such living can bring, as members of a “kingdom [that] is not of this world” (Jn 18:36). It is our hope that others will be invited into that realm by the witness of our lives. In the meantime, we acknowledge that their pursuit of justice may include the conscientious use of force. As Isaac Penington put it in 1661,

I speak not … against any magistrates’ or people’s defending themselves against foreign invasions, or making use of the sword to suppress the violent and evil-doers within their borders (for this the present estate of things may and doth require, and a great blessing will attend the sword where it is borne uprightly to that end, and its use will be honorable …); but yet there is a better state, which the Lord hath already brought some into, and which nations are to expect and to travel towards.

Having been brought into that better state, Quakers let our lives testify to what love can do. From early on, Friends have been moved by the Spirit of agapē to live peaceably amidst the violence of this world, sometimes at great personal cost. A classic statement of Friends’ commitment to nonviolence is “A declaration from the harmless and innocent people of God, called Quakers …” of 1660/61, a “testimony unto all the world of the truth of our hearts.” Presented to Charles II in an effort to clear the Friends of the charge of violent revolutionism, it says in part,

Our principle is, and our practices have always been, to seek peace, and ensue it; to follow after righteousness and the knowledge of God; seeking the good and welfare, and doing that which tends to the peace[,] of all. We know that wars and fightings proceed from the lusts of men, as Jam. iv. 1, 2, 3 [teaches], out of which lusts the Lord hath redeemed us, and so out of the occasion of war. The occasion of war, and war itself (wherein envious men, who are lovers of themselves more than lovers of God, lust, kill, and desire to have men’s lives or estates) ariseth from the lust. All bloody principles and practices we, as to our own particulars, do utterly deny, with
all outward wars, strife, and fighting with outward weapons for any end, or under any pretense whatsoever; this is our testimony to the whole world.

15. Ecumenism and Universalism

The humble, meek, merciful, just, pious and devout souls everywhere are of one religion; and when death has taken off the mask, they will know one another, though the diverse liveries they wear here make them strangers. (William Penn, 1693)

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 brethren. (John Woolman, 1754)

Although some Quakers have taken exclusive doctrinal positions, Friends’ reliance on the spirit of agapē as known within has given us, from early on, an essentially universalist sensibility. That is not to insist that all are saved, that all religions are one, that all spiritual paths converge, or that one reality or truth is experienced by all seekers or mystics. But our life in the Christ-spirit gives us a deep appreciation of the working of agapē in the hearts of all people who sincerely seek to heed its call. Friends are active in dialogue with other faith traditions as well as nonreligious ways of thought. We engage with others in an effort to know them and to “answer that of God” — to respond to agapē — in them.

Friends also work with others of good will in furtherance of justice, mercy, and peace. And although Quakers from different traditions may hold widely varying beliefs, we can come together in ecumenical conversation and work toward common goals. We know that, despite real differences, we are ultimately united in the inner life of divine love.

Even in the apostles’ days, Christians were too apt to strive after a wrong unity and uniformity in outward practices and observations, and to judge one another unrighteously in these things. And mark; it is not the different practice from one another that breaks the peace and unity, but the judging one another because of differing practices. He that keeps not a day, may unite in the same Spirit, in the same life, in the same love with him that keeps a day; and he who keeps a day, may unite in heart and soul with the same Spirit and life in him who keeps not a day; but he that judgeth the other because of either of these, errs from the Spirit, from the love, from the life, and so breaks the bond of unity. (Isaac Penington, 1660)
16. Summary: James Nayler’s Statement

In 1656, Friend James Nayler suffered cruel public punishments after being found guilty of blasphemy. He was brutally scourged, receiving 310 lashes. His tongue was bored through with a red-hot iron, and his forehead was branded with the letter “B.” Through all of that, he remained meek and forgiving, even embracing the torturer at the end. Nayler was then imprisoned in solitary confinement, fed on bread and water, and made to perform hard labor. Released in 1659, he was mugged and left bound in a field in the eighth month (October) of 1660. He was found there and taken to the home of a Quaker physician, where he died, aged 44, on the following day. Nayler’s final words included this powerful expression of the Quaker spirit:

There is a spirit which I feel, that delights to do no evil, nor to avenge any wrong, but delights to endure all things in hope to enjoy its own in the end. Its hope is to outlive all wrath and contention, and to weary out all exaltation and cruelty, or whatever is of a nature contrary to itself. It sees to the end of all temptations. As it bears no evil in itself, so it conceives none in thought to any other: if it be betrayed, it bears it; for its ground and spring are the mercies and forgiveness of God. Its crown is meekness, its life is everlasting love unfeigned, and takes its kingdom with entreaty, and not with contention, and keeps it by lowliness of mind. In God alone it can rejoice, though none else regard it, or can own its life.