



Addressing Conflict amongst Friends

“This is a common fear among Friends, and I am sure many of you share it with me... We do not want to hurt—and so we do not share our differences of thought, word or experience in the open, loving way which would help all of us to grow.”

—Betty Polster¹

“Quakers sometimes confuse tolerance with enabling, and in this way equate enduring hurtful, bad behavior with open-mindedness and liberality.”

—Peter Phillips²

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QUAKERS
Canadian Friends
Service Committee

*Continuing Meeting of
Ministry and Counsel*

Conflicts in our Meetings: underlying challenges and opportunities

Conflicts are inevitable aspects of life, not necessarily signs of a problem. British Friends note in *Faith and Practice* that where conflicts are addressed and their energy transformed, “meetings have sometimes been much richer for the experience.”³

Some disagreements can simply play out without being addressed, so long as they aren’t producing lingering resentments, distrust, or hurt. It is when these feelings are present that a simple disagreement is now something deeper. Addressing these situations within a Meeting can be challenging and uncomfortable, but if navigated with love, it can often lead to the deepening of community.

On the other hand, there are many examples of long-standing and painful conflicts amongst Friends with lifelong commitments to resolving conflicts and building peace. The issue of conflict among Friends is a potentially unpleasant but important one Canadian Yearly Meeting’s Continuing Meeting of Ministry and Counsel has reported that conflicts are not uncommon within Meetings in Canada.⁴

British Friend Susan Robson notes being disquieted by an issue summed up in a cartoon in *The Friend*: The clerk says, “If we cannot agree to alterations to the Meeting House shall we turn to ideas for peace in Kosovo?” This uneasy juxtaposition of

enthusiastic grandiosity in the public sphere with inadequacy in dealing with more personal distress nearer home recurred in my own experience.” This led her to spend years studying conflict among Friends in England.

Susan found that Friends have a strong drive to go outward and “mend the world” but tend to deny the existence of conflicts within Meetings. She feels this comes in part from a sense of shame at being in conflict, as if it is too selfish or makes one a “bad Quaker.” She also notes a striking lack of communication. “Questions were not asked, emotions were not named or expressed, issues were not explored in detail...” and a reluctance to assert authority or to appear too confident about how to address conflicts, as this might be perceived as unQuakerly. She quotes one Friend who told her, “I think I’d be allergic to someone who thought they could [advise on conflict].”⁵

“If we cannot agree to alterations to the Meeting House shall we turn to ideas for peace in Kosovo?”

Sometimes it seems as if Friends behave more disrespectfully toward each other than toward the broader community. Meetings, like families, can experience patterns of interpersonal challenges and dysfunction that build over decades of close interaction. Hurts can pile up and never find adequate voice or healing when processes are not in place for them to be addressed, for everyone involved to be heard and cared for.

A committee of New York Yearly Meeting that studied conflicts found that a common element in ones that aren't successfully transformed is this: *Quaker practice is not followed.*⁶

For example, unity in the Spirit may not be achieved, and a decision may be rushed ahead before some in the Meeting are ready. Joy Belle Conrad-Rice describes cases of perceived “advocacy groups” seeking to sway Friends’ decisions “under the guise of being ‘led’ by Spirit” to get the Meeting to arrive at the decision they want taken. She says, “my experience is that some individuals or groups are often left on their own to swallow the changes they are not ready for.”⁷

Friends have powerful and successful conflict transformation processes

What can happen when Quaker practice is followed? Barry Morley recounts his experience in directing Catoclin, a Quaker camp in Maryland. One winter a *Washington Post* story came out stating that a former counsellor had brought drugs to the camp. Parents were frightened and put tremendous pressure on Barry to put new rules and limitations in place on the counsellors.

Barry started the next summer by explaining the issue to the counsellors and letting them ask questions. Confusion, hurt, anger, and other strong emotions began coming to the surface. Here was a situation that might turn into a bitter conflict and derail the whole summer. “The questions went on for an hour, most arising from

disbelief over implicit lack of trust in their work.” Some counsellors felt the parents were demanding far too much and that it was out of line with the reality of what happened.

Rather than forcing everyone to follow a new policy he would set, Barry invited the counsellors to discuss the matter at another meeting without him, so that they could talk freely. The meeting the next night went on for two hours. Another closed meeting followed the night after. Barry chose not to inquire about those meetings.

What he noted, though, was that the work of opening the camp went more smoothly than in other years. “Spirits and enthusiasm were high. Whatever process counsellors and staff were working their way through seemed to spark their sense of purpose. Assigned jobs were completed. Unassigned jobs were undertaken.” The camp began, and still no one told Barry what had been decided about drugs. One day a counsellor told Barry they needed him at their next meeting.

He arrived with high hopes but was told, “We can’t seem to get anywhere. We’ve started to go around and around,” and that, “People are uncomfortable making rules other people have to obey.”

With Barry’s help, the counsellors realized that what they were doing—asking each other questions—was actually using queries to try to center themselves and understand their differing perspectives and a way forward.

He suggested that a committee be struck to develop these queries further. After the

committee drafted queries, everyone met to clarify their meaning and decide on the right language. This conversation went on for some time until one counsellor said, “We don’t need to nit-pick words any more. We know what our values are.”

Barry recalls: “The meeting fell silent. We had found the sense of the meeting, that place where silence acknowledges God’s presence among us. The silence went on and on. It seemed a shame to end it...” It had suddenly become clear that these queries were the collective sense of the meeting and no further rules were needed. That sense of the meeting was respected for the next six years—the full time that that generation of counsellors worked at the camp.

This process took time and dedication, but it was far more enriching in unexpected ways than was a decision reached the summer before about smoking. That decision had been achieved by consensus (and not sense of the meeting) after an hour and with some pressure from Barry to reach a decision. This apparent ‘solution’ had involved some counsellors giving in and compromising, which they later didn’t fully adhere to.⁸

The importance of sticking with the process

What is vital, then, is how we engage in conflicts. When a conflict comes to light in your Meeting, who first names and addresses it and how? The process must change hearts, not rush to the next item of business or to ‘forgive and forget’ before the parties feel truly changed. Those involved

first need to sense that they are fully seen and heard.

“I trusted that if we remained faithful to Quaker process, waited, and sought God's will, we would be guided in what we did.”

Consider a more painful conflict that has played out in various Canadian Meetings, which is so sensitive because it involves the very *identities* of those involved—the conflict over taking same sex marriages under a Meeting’s care. Rob Hughes, a former clerk of Continuing Meeting of Ministry and Counsel, wrote about this challenge in Vancouver Meeting. “I once was the target of violence from strangers on the street simply because of their perception of the sexual orientation of me and the friend I was with.” He states that to many people who have felt unsafe in this way, faith bodies debating about treating same sex marriages differently from heterosexual marriages is akin to those bodies tacitly condoning such violence.

I felt my personal sense of security, built up over 13 years of active involvement in Vancouver Meeting, jeopardized. I wondered if some Friends’ acceptance of me was conditional on my silence about my sexuality, which I considered to be part of my core being, and as much a part of me as my spirituality.... I was also mindful that there were some Friends whose integrity I greatly respected who held views contrary to mine...

I trusted that if we remained faithful to Quaker process, waited, and sought God's will, we would be guided in what we did. It was important for me, both personally and for the sake of the Meeting, to listen to those Friends who had a different view of the Concern from me and not allow it to rupture the friendships that I enjoyed with them. In doing this on a one on one basis, I was touched by the openness and ability to expose vulnerability to me. I felt committed to honour this trust.

Rob writes that there were a minority of Friends who opposed same sex marriage but says, "I particularly found the contributions of the minority on the Concern to be insightful in guiding us on questions of process." He recalls that Ministry and Counsel facilitated a long process, including a session clarifying Friends' decision-making processes, a review together of relevant Quaker literature, and small worship sharing groups. Reminders were given along the way for Friends to remain open and to let go of preconceived ideas. Still, Rob admits, "I found it personally challenging to be open to the possibility that my own views on the importance of affirming the worth and dignity of committed, loving lesbian and gay relationships were wrong or needed alteration."

"Often, when we are put to the test, our sense of the presence of the Spirit grows stronger."

After a year, a minute was drafted, then objected to by one Friend who wished to stand in the way. Finally, at a very moving

Meeting, all present recognized, "We are not in unity on lesbian and gay relationships. We are, however, in unity in a vision of the Meeting as a family, and those present felt moved to not stand in judgment on lesbian and gay relationships." Rob recalls, "This was one of the most powerful turning points for group discernment of God's will that I have ever experienced in a meeting for worship for business. I, like many Friends present, shed tears during and after the meeting... Often, when we are put to the test, our sense of the presence of the Spirit grows stronger."⁹ Thus, even though not everyone in the Meeting came to personally support same sex marriage, a deep transformation occurred and a way forward was opened, through carefully and faithfully following Quaker practices.

The centrality of worship in transforming conflicts

Our community is embodied in the life and witness of Friends. Our experience of the corporate life of the Meeting community, sitting together in worship to discern the will of God, whether in Meeting for Worship or in Meeting for Business, is a process of being open to the direct guidance of God, aligning ourselves with Divine Spirit and recognizing our place in the order of things. This is what sustains us, binds us together. We meet, and we are a Meeting.

—Chapter 3, *Faith and Practice*,
Canadian Yearly Meeting of the
Religious Society of Friends

Meeting for Worship is meant to have a gathering effect on Friends. It is of utmost

importance to the health of the Religious Society of Friends that Friends understand what this worship is. Worship is foundational to being a Friend.

Worship is not merely a passive sitting in silence, or a calming retreat from daily routines. It is being opened up by the Spirit to experience the Light that shows and reveals. At times when thoughts of conflict arise during Meeting for Worship, we may not want these revelations. We may even go through the motions of sitting in worship while actively trying to resist them! Worship thus entails taking responsibility for at times painful inner work.

Revelations may force us to confront, together in the silence, unhealthy patterns of thought and behaviour, ways that we have fallen short, or issues in our lives that we are called to work on. When we call up a conflict and hold it in the Light, it may be humbling and uncomfortable to experience. Yet doing so can also deepen our spiritual health and maturity, and that of our Meetings.

A commitment to the peace testimony goes much farther than being opposed to war. It requires consciously and carefully responding to the inner battles, the lack of peace within ourselves, which, if unaddressed, can build into a lack of peace within our Meetings.

No testimony or belief—even the peace testimony—is the root of what it means to be a Friend. Worship is. And worship can and needs to be something more than what we do together on Sundays. At any moment, Friends have the potential to sink into the silence. Practicing this as much as possible, again and again in daily life, means that

worship can even become like breathing. With every breath we can be right back there in the space of worship. We can integrate worship into our lives on an ongoing basis and use it as a guide in our decisions, even during conflicts. Worship thus becomes a *part of who we are*.

If we are truly practicing worship, many conflicts will simply fall away or be transformed by love. Still, each of us will have challenges and our base instincts will continually manifest themselves.

As much as we may wish it weren't so, Friends too have internalized from upbringings and from the wider culture, various unhealthy ways of dealing with conflict. The Quaker way is hard to walk, as the demands of work, family, witness, and following leadings can become overwhelming. Little time may be left to contribute toward maintaining and nurturing the life of our Meetings. We are left facing so many factors that push us away from peaceful and constructive decisions in any given moment. We each make thousands of decisions every day, so some will be more peace-oriented than others. This is why the support of the gathered community is invaluable.

The importance of the Meeting community

The Spirit is active within us. We can come into dialogue with it and it can show us the truth about ourselves. In his famous phrase about “that of God” in people, George Fox actually calls Friends to reach that of God. Fox lays something upon Friends. He proposes a way of being in the world and in

community with each other, not just a passive belief that that of God is there in others or in ourselves.¹⁰

There are many voices within us clamouring for attention all at the same time and, as on the radio, the resulting static makes it hard to find the divine one. Meeting for Worship strengthens the voice of the Spirit so it can come through, as long as we ourselves attempt to tune out the irrelevant voices. Being gathered in worship enhances this clarity.

It is the work of everyone in a Quaker Meeting to strengthen the Meeting's worship and to build a vibrant and caring community.

It is the work of everyone in a Quaker Meeting to strengthen the Meeting's worship and to build a vibrant and caring community. Extending unqualified loving concern to all in the Meeting is not a strategy for addressing specific problems or grievances, but it can certainly help to create the conditions for conflict transformation to occur. Making space for Friends to express themselves without being evaluated can help diminish the frequency of conflicts, which often grow out of miscommunication or a lack of communication.

Loving concern includes the basic insight that most people are not out to harm others. If as Friends in a Meeting we lack the trust and faith in each other to remember that, then that lack of trust must be addressed. It is a symptom of the loss of true community. When symptoms like this emerge, they may

mean that the unity in the Spirit has gone. Activities to learn about and feel closer to each other may be needed, which could include pot lucks, fun and games, book study groups, and other community building. In this way Meetings may develop the trust that is lacking and is essential when addressing conflicts.

For any process a Meeting undertakes to address a conflict, it is important to establish what level of confidentiality the parties can expect, and to follow through on that. Being clear about confidentiality and following through is one way to prevent hurt or further conflicts arising from the process of addressing the initial conflict.¹¹ Maintaining confidentiality can be a major challenge, however, because Friends talk to each other and are curious to know about conflicts.

It may also be helpful for Meetings to have a formal written conflict process. Canadian Yearly Meeting and Canadian Friends Service Committee have policies with specific steps to address conflicts, and Vancouver Monthly Meeting is among those that have detailed guidelines. However Rob Hughes cautions, "The best conflict resolution process in the world will not work if the people involved do not enter the process in an attitude of willingness to resolve the conflict and be open to the Light."¹²

The role of Ministry and Counsel

When major conflicts arise, one way that Meetings reach that of God in their members is through the work of Ministry and Counsel. Where there is a Ministry and

Counsel serving a Monthly Meeting, it can both help to support Friends (making it less likely for major conflicts to occur), and also offer guidance in addressing conflicts.

Among other things, Ministry and Counsel provides pastoral care, makes committees of care and clearness available when Friends need them, and helps to mediate in conflicts when necessary.

Where there is no Ministry and Counsel to support a Meeting, these roles may be shared more broadly among Friends or temporarily taken up by an ad hoc committee. It becomes challenging when those named to help transform a conflict are themselves part of the conflict or are seen not to be distant and objective enough. In such cases, these Friends may need to step aside from their roles.

Depending on the nature of the conflict, other important processes are often used by Meetings. These include:

- Worship sharing, where Friends do not respond to each other but speak on an issue, leaving significant silence between speakers;
- Meeting for Clearness, normally used to seek for a way forward on a particular issue or problem facing a Friend. Those present listen and offer queries in a non-judgmental way, rather than telling the Friend what to do;¹³
- Threshing Meeting, “called specifically to work through opposing or controversial issues, without the pressure to reach an immediate decision. Careful preparation is essential so that objectivity and a caring respect are maintained

throughout while feelings are shared and personal animosity acknowledged;”¹⁴

- One-on-one spiritual listening, which is different from listening to try to solve problems or provide therapy. “Spiritual listening is a contemplative discipline that pushes us beyond the immediate impulse to order, to fix... We are pushed to a level of listening beyond our own powers of analysis, to the grace and the gift of divine life itself. We are invited into a realm of apprehension that surpasses our words, plans, schemes, and panaceas;”¹⁵ and
- Meeting for Reconciliation—developed by Friends in the US based on restorative justice principles, this meeting seeks to move the parties toward restored relationships of trust when more informal processes are not working.¹⁶

The role of elders

Elders are those seasoned and centred Friends (usually elderly, but not always) whose ministry is acknowledged as Spirit-led. One way of reaching the Spirit in the parties in a conflict is through eldering them. Elderling is not punishing or scolding people, though it may require taking “unpopular or uncomfortable action.”¹⁷

What is essential is that eldering be done with tenderness, leaving the person feeling truly seen and heard. The Friend doing the eldering perceives a pattern that does not benefit the person being eldered, or the community, and shows care by making the pattern known to them. Sandra Cronk, who taught at Pendle Hill, notes that to elder also means “to make oneself open and

vulnerable to one's own part in the situation," and not to pass judgment.¹⁸

Even if the person being elderd feels defensive and wishes to protect themselves at first, over time they may come to recognize the care that they received through being elderd.

Elders often serve as an anchor for their Meetings. Sometimes what starts as an act of eldering becomes a process of spiritual care and support as the Friend realizes that the behaviour about which they were elderd has come about because of events in their life. The task then may shift to finding ways to support the Friend as much as is reasonable within a Meeting, as they seek to address those events. This needs to be done while still holding the Friend to account for their behaviours.

For those who want to offer spiritual support, it is important to assess the motivation for doing so. When a Spirit-led motivation is present, eldering is done with empathy and tactfulness, recalling that the person being elderd is far more than just this particular behaviour of theirs.¹⁹

Further advices for individuals seeking to engage in conflict in a Friendly way

We have many different experiences of being Quaker. Friends have divergent views not only of what a Friend is, but of how a Friend should behave. In fact, this itself can be a source of conflict. As Susan Robson put it, "Many issues which started out as a difference on a practical matter soon change into exchanges about what a 'proper' Quaker should do..."²⁰

Friends will continue to have differences of opinion on these matters, and will also continue to make mistakes. Friends also know, though, that growth away from what is inauthentic and limiting to us and toward the health and goodness that we truly are, is a process ever open to us.

To know truth, we must have the opportunity to be our full selves.

In the British *Faith and Practice* Sue Norris points out, "I have heard some Friends deny their anger in a silent 'peace' where there is no understanding of each other."²¹ Being in conflict in a Friendly way means going beyond denial. It means listening to ourselves to notice when we feel there is a problem, to understand what we feel and believe, and to seek to understand other parties as well. Once our different feelings and beliefs are clear and are brought into the open, through their interaction Friends usually "discover not that one is right and another wrong, but that truth is complex."²²

To know truth, we must have the opportunity to be our full selves. The entirety of who we are needs to come with us and be welcomed in Meeting. If we feel the need to hold back, the depth of the truth and love present in the Meeting may suffer, never allowing us to reach an understanding of one another. For it to be possible to bring negative emotions to Meeting in healthy ways, the Meeting community must foster a culture of respecting one another even in vulnerability. At times it may be unpleasant to hear strong emotions such as anger or hurt expressed, yet there can be positive and transformative power in making space for this, perhaps using one of the processes

listed above under the section *The role of Ministry and Counsel*.

Listening may be challenging, but is essential. In *Advices and Queries* we are told to:

Listen patiently and seek the truth which other people's opinions may contain for you. Avoid hurtful criticism and provocative language. Do not allow the strength of your convictions to betray you into making statements or allegations that are unfair or untrue. Think it possible that you may be mistaken. (*Advices and Queries* #17)

This approach may help us develop what George Fox called a "sense of all conditions," that is, a holistic perspective, an understanding of the condition of the other parties in the conflict, and of our own condition too.

Past wrongs cannot be undone and we cannot force ourselves to get over them if we are not ready to. We do, however, have the power to do inner work if we wish. Marty Grundy, writing in a document prepared by Friends General Conference, suggests that when Friends are upset with someone:

The first step is to immediately begin to pray for each other, especially those who annoy you the most.... The important thing is to use this prayer... each time a person floats into one's consciousness trailing negative thoughts with her.

The crucial second step is the personal, inner work each of us must do: why does this person, this issue, push my buttons? Why am I so upset? ...Each

person needs to ask the Light to help him or her see what is really going on, internally.... God is waiting to meet us where we are, help us with these burdens, and shower us with unconditional love. Ask!²³

In the British *Faith and Practice*, Mary Lou Leavitt offers these reflections and advices:

Through conflict handled creatively we can change and grow; and I am not sure real change—either political or personal—can happen without it. We'll each handle conflict differently and find healing and reconciliation by different paths. I want nonetheless to offer three keys, three skills or qualities which I've found helpful from my own experience.

The first skill is naming: being clear and honest about the problem as I see it, stating what I see and how I feel about it. What is important about these statements is that I own them: 'I see', 'I feel' (not 'surely it is obvious that ...', 'any right thinking person should...'). This ability to name what seems to be going on, is crucial to getting the conflict out into the open, where we can begin to understand and try to deal with it.

Such a skill is dangerous. It can feel—indeed, it can be—confrontational. It feels like stirring up trouble where there wasn't any problem. It needs to be done carefully, caringly, with love, in language we hope others can hear. We need to seek tactfully the best time to do it. But it needs to be done.

The second skill is the skill of listening: listening not just to the words, but to

the feelings and needs behind the words. It takes a great deal of time and energy to listen well. It's a kind of weaving: reflecting back, asking for clarification, asking for time in turn to be listened to, being truly open to what we're hearing (even if it hurts), being open to the possibility that we might ourselves be changed by what we hear.

The third skill is the skill of letting go: I don't mean that in the sense of giving up, lying down and inviting people to walk all over us, but acknowledging the possibility that there may be other solutions to this conflict than the ones we've thought of yet; letting the imagination in—making room for the Spirit.

We need to let go of our own will—not so as to surrender to another's, but so as to look together for God's solution. It's a question of finding ways to let go of our commitment to opposition and separation, of letting ourselves be opened to our connectedness as human beings.

If we are to do any of these things well—naming, listening, letting go—we need to have learned to trust that of God in ourselves and that of God in those trapped on all sides of the conflict with us. And to do that well, I find I need to be centred, rooted, practised in waiting on God. That rootedness is both a gift and a discipline, something we can cultivate and build on by acknowledging it every day.²⁴

Serious ongoing conflicts

One Meeting in the US, writing anonymously in *Friends Journal*,²⁵ discusses the situation of a Friend whom they dub “Q.” Q was given to regular angry and demeaning outbursts. Some Friends took the painful decision of leaving the Meeting because of how distressing they found Q's behaviour. Many Friends agreed that Q's outbursts degraded the quality of worship.

After decades of this, with various Friends trying to speak with and elder Q, the Meeting “sought counsel and advice from the wider Quaker world, and we began to realize that beyond the ideal of keeping our doors open to anyone is the need to maintain a safe space for all to grow spiritually and socially.” In the end, the Meeting asked Q not to attend for two years. Some Friends were not in agreement with this decision, as they hadn't witnessed Q's outbursts.

A noteworthy aspect of this difficult experience is that a conflict was avoided or engaged only reluctantly in fits and starts by the Meeting, and thus it dragged on for decades. This harmed the vitality of the Meeting. In the case of minor or transient issues, doing nothing and allowing events to run their course is sometimes all that is required, but in more serious cases like that of Q, a proactive approach is needed.

Even though the conflict played out for such a long time—with multiple attempts to address it and with no improvements—when a difficult decision was eventually reached, it was still felt by some to be too hasty or too harsh. This is at least in part because, as is often the case, Q didn't show inappropriate

behaviour to everyone, so some Friends didn't understand what the problem was.

This is a challenging feature of serious conflicts: they tend to undermine our trust in each other, and this can spiral into additional conflicts. While it is important to assume that all parties have good intentions, there are also cases where Friends are (intentionally or unintentionally) manipulative, for instance through choosing who they share what information with.

Each of us is susceptible to bias if we hear and sympathize with only one party's story about the conflict.

Friends need to be aware of, and have trust in, the guidance being provided by the Meeting or by Ministry and Counsel as they seek to address conflicts, and these bodies need to do everything possible to keep Friends informed and to earn this trust. That can be delicate because of confidentiality surrounding conflicts.

Each of us is susceptible to bias if we hear and sympathize with only one party's story about the conflict. This can divide Friends into camps depending on whose perspective is heard or believed. It is wise, then, to try not to make assumptions or hold too firmly to our ideas about conflicts. There are almost always pieces of the story that we aren't aware of. "How often have you and I criticised people, and then been ashamed to discover that some fact unknown to us fully explained why they spoke and acted as they did?"²⁶

The Meeting in this case offers the following advice from their experience:

- In the case of a larger or persistent conflict, your Meeting may want to have a full committee take on the role of eldering, to reduce the possibility of the conflict seeming to be personal or between individuals.
- Record a history of efforts to address conflicts so that this is documented for those who don't know what the conflict is or what has been done about it.

Peter Phillips, who clerked New York Yearly Meeting's Committee on Conflict Transformation writes, "By tolerating... dysfunction in our meetings, we end up enabling bad behavior, and realize too late that we are paying a price: our meeting shrinks; the joy disappears; and our labors become wearisome. We have abandoned the gifts of Light and Spirit."

He notes that Meetings are not therapy sessions and they lack the expertise to help members or attenders address certain serious mental health or other personal issues. He goes on to note queries that Meetings can ask when witnessing behaviour like Q's, including:

- What does that person need that they're not getting? And does the meeting have a role in providing it?
- How can we use this event as an opportunity to change ourselves into a body that is not as susceptible to fostering hurt and anger? How can we advance to a new place in our journey?²⁷

Additional queries

- What are some of the results of conflicts in my Meeting?²⁸
- How are the structures of my Meeting helping Friends to follow Quaker processes and to feel heard early on when conflicts arise?
- How clear are we about confidentiality in our conflict processes?
- If our Meeting cannot positively transform conflicts on our own, where will we turn for help?
- When hearing other's perspectives on a conflict, do I just go through the motions of listening, or am I sincerely willing to be changed?
- What is motivating my reactions? Do I want to punish or otherwise cause harm to those I'm in conflict with?
- What would love have me do?²⁹

What next?

This brief document is not meant to comprehensively cover all areas related to conflicts or all skills required to navigate them. It can be complimented by reading *Advices and Queries*, *Faith and Practice*, and Canadian Friends Service Committee's book *Are We Done Fighting? Building Understanding in a World of Hate and Division*. The latter contains many tips and practical exercises Friends can do together in a retreat. CFSC is able to provide facilitators for such retreats upon request.

Note that this resource has covered conflicts and not abuse, which may require a very different process such as that outlined in Canadian Yearly Meeting's

policies. Depending on the situation, responding to abuse may include a moral or legal duty to involve external authorities like police or children's aid societies.

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¹ Quoted in *Faith and Practice* (Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, 2011), 87.

² Peter Phillips, “When Conflicts Arise: Crisis or Invitation?” *Friends Journal*, March 27, 2013, <https://www.friendsjournal.org/when-conflicts-arise-crisis-or-invitation>

³ *Quaker Faith and Practice: Third Edition* (The Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain, 2005), 10.21.

⁴ Rob Hughes, “Dealing with Conflicts in Our Meetings,” *Report of Continuing Meeting of Ministry and Counsel to Canadian Yearly Meeting*, 2013, <https://quaker.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Dealing-with-Conflicts-in-our-Meetings-Article-Rob-Hughes.pdf>, 1.

⁵ Susan Robson, “Grasping the Nettle: Conflict and the Quaker Condition,” *Quaker Studies* 15(1), 2010.

⁶ Ad Hoc Committee to Address a Conflict Within New York Yearly Meeting, “Addressing Conflict,” in Jan Greene and Marty Walton eds., *Fostering Vital Friends Meetings Part Two: Resources for Working with Quaker Meetings* (Friends General Conference, 1999), R2-39.

⁷ Joy Belle Conrad-Rice, “Conflict in Friends Meetings from My Historical Perspective,” *Western Friend Online*, 2017.

⁸ Barry Morley, *Beyond Consensus: Salvaging Sense of the Meeting* (Pendle Hill Pamphlet 307, 1993), 7-11.

⁹ Rob Hughes, “Reflections On the Concern On Same Gender Marriage in the Experience of Vancouver Monthly Meeting,” *The Canadian Friend*.

¹⁰ Lewis Benson, “‘That of God in Every Man’ - What Did George Fox Mean by It?” *Quaker Religious Thought* 12(2), Spring 1970.

¹¹ Committee on Eldership & Oversight, *Conflict in Meetings*, 29.

¹² Hughes, “Dealing with Conflicts in Our Meetings,” 3.

¹³ The Religious Society of Friends in Australia, *The Handbook of Practice and Procedure Sixth Edition*, “4.4 Clearness Meetings,” 2011, <https://www.quakersaustralia.info/sites/aym-members/files/pages/files/Handbook-Web4.pdf>, 47.

¹⁴ Committee on Eldership & Oversight, *Conflict in Meetings: Volume 4 of the Eldership and Oversight*

Handbooks, 2nd edition (Religious Society of Friends (Britain Yearly Meeting), 2005), 18.

¹⁵ Wendy Wright, “Desert Listening” in *Weavings: A Journal of Christian Spiritual Life*, 1994.

¹⁶ See Steven Davidson, “Meeting for Reconciliation,” in Greene and Walton eds., *Fostering Vital Friends Meetings Part Two*, R2-45.

¹⁷ Committee on Eldership & Oversight, *Conflict in Meetings*, 16.

¹⁸ Sandra Cronk, *Gospel Order: A Quaker Understanding of Faithful Church Community* (Pendle Hill Pamphlet Number 297, 1991)

¹⁹ Leanna Goerlich and Carol Holmes, “Tips on Eldering,” in Greene and Walton eds., *Fostering Vital Friends Meetings Part Two*, R2-28.

²⁰ Robson, “Grasping the Nettle,” 73.

²¹ quoted in *Quaker Faith and Practice: Third Edition* (The Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain, 2005), 20.68.

²² Laurence Lerner quoted in Committee on Eldership & Oversight, *Conflict in Meetings*, 7.

²³ “Inner Work,” in Greene and Walton eds., *Fostering Vital Friends Meetings Part Two*, R2-5.

²⁴ quoted in *Quaker Faith and Practice: Third Edition* (The Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain, 2005), 20.71.

²⁵ Four longtime members of a Midwestern Friends meeting, “Challenging Conflicts in Our Meeting,” *Friends Journal*, December 1, 2017,

<https://www.friendsjournal.org/challenging-conflicts>

²⁶ Charles Carter, *On Having a Sense of All Conditions* (Friends Home Service Committee, 1971), 33.

²⁷ Phillips, “When Conflicts Arise,” *Friends Journal*.

²⁸ Sara Keeney, “Quakers and Conflict,” *Western Friend*, January, 2020,

<https://westernfriend.org/article/quakers-and-conflict>

²⁹ Continuing Meeting of Ministry and Counsel, “Resources for Meetings/Individual Friends in Conflict,” Canadian Yearly Meeting, 2012, <https://quaker.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Conflict-Resources-CMMC-2.pdf>, 3.