

Birth of the Friends Church: Session #1 - **The World Turned Upside Down** (background & beginnings)

Quakerism was born in the mid-17th century in England. This was a period of great political and religious turmoil. The country was wracked by three civil wars between 1642 and 1651. After King Charles I was tried, convicted of treason, and beheaded in 1649, England entered its only period of being a republic, as opposed to being a monarchy.

There were many different small religious movements that sprang up at this time. A few of these survived (as Friends did). but most disappeared. George Fox was born in 1624 in a strongly Puritan village about a hundred miles north of London. His father was a weaver and man of deep faith, known as "Righteous Christer". George was apprenticed to a sheep owner and carpenter. He went through a period of seeking and spiritual turmoil at age 18. He began public preaching at age 23, gathering a handful of followers. An older woman, Elizabeth Hooten, is often considered Fox's first collaborator in building the new Quaker movement.

There was an informal movement in the late 1640's and early 1650's in Northern England known as the [Westmorland Seekers](#). They rejected many of the structures of the established church at the time and were looking for a rebirth of a more vital faith. In 1652, Fox had a vision looking northward from the top of a steep hill called Pendle Hill of a "great people to be gathered." He continued traveling northward to the area where these Seekers held their gatherings. On June 13, 1652, he preached for three hours to an outdoor gathering of a thousand Seekers in a windy open field called Firbank Fell. Many leaders of the Seekers became "convinced" by the spiritual power of Fox's message, and the new Quaker movement was born.

Quakers sent out men and women preachers, known as "The Valiant Sixty," throughout the British Isles, as well as to the Continent of Europe and the new American colonies. About 3000 Friends suffered imprisonment, with hundreds dying due to very unsanitary conditions, including several of the movement's most important leaders. Four Friends were executed in Massachusetts Bay Colony. The movement grew rapidly from 1652 through the Act of Toleration in 1689, when Friends in England numbered roughly 1% of the population (around 50,000 Friends out of an English population of around five million).

Characteristics of the early Quaker movement: They:

- Were "evangelical" - They actively recruited others into their movement, interrupting church services, preaching in market places, and were sharply critical of most other Christian groups at the time.
- Considered themselves to be returning to a primitive form of Christianity as practiced in the age of the Apostles (the time of James, Paul, Phoebe, etc. during the first century after Jesus' birth).
- Rejected set Anglican liturgies (mass, congregational reading of psalms), outward sacraments, and paid clergy.
- Believed that formal theological training was neither necessary nor sufficient for inspired preaching and leadership in the church. Many early leaders were of the working class with little formal education.
- Insisted that women play an active leadership role in the new church, rejecting arguments that it was wrong for women to preach or participate in church decision-making. Roughly 12 of the chief traveling preachers known as the "Valiant Sixty" were women. Many of these women wrote religious tracts.

Reflection questions:

1. How would you react if a leader such as George Fox came to your church and challenged the beliefs and practices that everyone assumed were right?
2. Do you find the writings of early Friends exciting? strange? moving? disturbing?
3. Why do you think Friends grew so quickly and won so many adherents, in spite of terrible persecution?
4. Why do you think established church leaders (both Puritans and Anglicans) were so enraged and threatened by the Quaker message?
5. Do you think Friends today are practicing the same kind of religion as first generation Friends?

Further reading:

Journal of George Fox: [Testimony of Margaret \(Fell\) Fox concerning her late husband George Fox...](#)

Journal of George Fox, [Chap 6: A New Era Begins 1651-52](#) (on Pendle Hill vision & Firbank Fell)

[New England Yearly Meeting Interim Faith & Practice](#) pp.49-51

John Punshon, *Portrait in Grey: A Short History of the Quakers*

Session #2 - Christ Has Come to Teach His People Himself

Early Friends wrote thousands of tracts. Here are some characteristics of early Friends' beliefs:

Direct revelation. They believed that every person has access to guidance from Christ in the present time.

“The Seed, or Grace of God, is small in its first Appearance, even as the Morning Light; but as it is given Heed to, and obeyed, it will increase in Brightness, till it shine in the Soul, like the Sun in the Firmament at its Noon-day Height.” - Elizabeth Bathurst, 1655-1685

“Art thou in darkness? Mind it not, for if thou do it will fill thee more, but stand still and act not, and wait in patience till light arise out of darkness to lead thee.” - James Nayler, 1616-1660

“Sweet is this state, though low: for in it I receive my daily bread, which is given of the Lord; for I cannot live to him, but as he breathe the breath of life upon me every moment.” - Mary Penington, 1623-1682

“I declared Truth amongst them, and directed them to the light of Christ in them; testifying unto them that God was come to teach His people Himself, whether they would hear or forbear.

I directed the people to their inward Teacher, Christ Jesus, who would turn them from darkness to the light.

Therefore I exhorted the people to come off all these things, and directed them to the spirit and grace of God in themselves, and to the light of Jesus in their own hearts, that they might come to know Christ, their free Teacher, to bring them salvation, and to open the Scriptures to them. - George Fox's *Journal*

“The testimony of the Spirit is that alone by which the true knowledge of God hath been, is, and can be only revealed.” - Robert Barclay *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*

Role of the Bible. Friends recognized scripture a critical source of divine revelation. They believed it was impossible to understand the meaning of Bible and its messages for us unless one is living in the “life and power” in which the scriptures were originally given forth. They believed that their religious opponents misunderstood important parts of the Bible because they were **not** living in this same direct, living relationship with God in the present time.

See: Jack Smith (Ohio YM Conservative) “The Scripture as Understood & Used by Conservative Friends”, talk at QuakerSpring 2007 <http://quakerspring.org/about/resources/other-documents/>

“I told them the gospel was the power of God, which was preached before Matthew, Mark, Luke and John or any of them were printed or written; and it was preached to every creature (of which a great part might never see or hear of those four books), so that every creature was to obey the power of God; for Christ, the spiritual Man, would judge the world according to the gospel, that is, according to His invisible power. When they heard this, they could not gainsay, for the truth came over them. I directed them to their teacher, the Grace of God, and shewed them the sufficiency of it, which would teach them how to live, and what to deny; and being obeyed, would bring them salvation. So to that grace I recommended them, and left them.” - George Fox's *Journal*

Universal priesthood. Everyone has access to guidance from Christ. It is not restricted to ordained clergy or to those who receive formal religious training. They felt that the “Seed” (inward presence of God) acted in the lives not only of Christians but of those like Muslims or Native Americans with no knowledge of Jesus or the Bible.

“Oh you Rulers & Judges, do you think to overcome us by keeping [our teachers and ring leaders] in prison?. Nay, Christ is our teacher, and he cannot be removed into a corner... The Lord does not speak to us in an unknown tongue, but in our own language do we hear him perfectly, whose voice is better than life... We cannot own the teaching that is of this world, but that which cometh immediately from God, and that is pure and refresheth the soul...and it causeth us to meet together, to worship the Lord as we ought to do.”

- Esther Biddle *The Trumpet of the Lord Sounded Forth unto These Three Nations*, 1662

See account of Mary Fisher's trip to Sultan <http://www.quakersintheworld.org/quakers-in-action/187>

Language. Early Friends referred to this direct inward guidance from God in the heart of the believer using a variety of different terms: Inward Christ, Inward Light, The Seed, and "leadings".

The word Christ is Greek for "messiah" or savior. Early Quakers believed that Christ is and always has been one with God the Creator and that Christ continues to be present and active in guiding the church in our own time - teaching, healing, liberating, and leading the community of believers. They made no distinction between their present-time relationship with Christ and Christ as encountered in the man Jesus in biblical times. As a result, Christ's role of savior is viewed as not only a one time act of sacrificial death on the Cross but an ongoing process of transformation and redemption.

Friends found these concepts in the Bible, especially the Gospel of John (often called the "Quaker Gospel"):

"In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it...The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world."

(John 1)

The Comforter or Holy Spirit that God promised to send after Jesus' death.

"I shall always be with you, even to the end of time."

"Emmanuel" ("God-with-us")

"living water" (John 4:10)

"the Light of the World"

"true vine" (John 15).

The "Offices of Christ". Friends experienced God as touching and shaping their lives in a number of distinct ways. They had an odd-sounding (to us) way of referring to this: namely, the "offices of Christ". These "offices" (or roles) included king, prophet, counselor, comforter, shepherd, redeemer, mediator, reconciler, teacher, etc. These are all ways of talking about how God or Christ Jesus works in our lives in our own day (i.e. not only through redemptive acts of God in Jesus' birth, death and resurrection). The point was that they believed that God spoke to them, led them, upheld them, guided them, healed them, lifted them up when they were discouraged, reproved them when they strayed from the truth, held them accountable to be faithful disciples, etc.

See: Sandra Cronk, *Gospel Order: A Quaker Understanding of the Faithful Quaker Community*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet #297, 1991 (pp.17-20 on the "offices of Christ")

Reflection questions:

1. When (if ever) have you experienced Christ touching you or speaking to you directly? Was this a comforting experience or a disturbing one?
2. What verbs would you use to describe your experience of God/Jesus touching or influencing your life?
3. In your experience of other faith communities besides Friends, do you feel this idea of Christ is similar to or different from the ideas about God at the heart of other churches?
4. If this immediate and direct relationship with Christ is at the heart of Friends practice (our approach to worship, church government, our response to social issues, etc.), do you see this as being true in your experience of practice in your own church? In your yearly meeting?

Further reading: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (1676): 2nd & 3rd propositions (on immediate revelation and on scripture)

Samuel Caldwell, *The Inward Light: "How Quakerism Unites Universalism & Christianity"*. (Phila. YM Relig. Ed. Comm., 1997) (http://www.angelfire.com/dc/universalism/Inward_Light.html)

Thomas Kelly: *A Testament of Devotion* (section on Inward Light).

Colin Saxton "[Christ Has Come to Teach Us Himself](#)" (QuakerSpeak interview)

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Session #3 - **Worship in Spirit and in Truth** (new approaches to worship)

How did early Friends worship? How did this form of worship evolve?

- They believed that spoken messages or vocal prayer should be directly guided by God's spirit rather than being prepared in advance, particularly as part of a fixed liturgy. (Barclay cited John 4:19-24.)
- They rejected outward rituals like holy communion and water baptism, seeing communion and baptism as inward spiritual experiences rather than liturgical ceremonies.
- The ability to provide effective preaching and teaching in worship was based on inward gifts rather than on formal religious training at a university or on being formally ordained by church hierarchy.
- Many of their worship gatherings at least began with a significant period of silent waiting.
- Early Friends probably did not engage in choral singing, certainly not the singing of psalms as a group. Individuals did apparently sing if led to do so by Christ's spirit during their meetings for worship.

“And this is the manner of their worship. They are to wait upon the Lord, to meet in the silence of the flesh, and to watch for the stirring of his life, and the breakings forth of his power amongst them. And in the breakings forth of that power they may pray, speak, exhort, rebuke, sing, or mourn, and so on, according as the spirit teaches, requires, and gives utterance.”

- Isaac Penington 1681

The early Quaker theologian Robert Barclay says that he was won over to the Friends movement primarily by the power of its worship. He writes: "I myself... who not by strength of arguments, or by a particular disquisition of each doctrine, and convincement of my understanding thereby, came to receive and bear witness of the truth, but by being secretly reached by this life; for 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, whereby I might feel myself perfectly redeemed." "The Lord of Heaven and earth we found to be near at hand, and, as we waited upon him in pure silence, our minds out of all things, his heavenly presence appeared in our assemblies, when there was no language, tongue nor speech from any creature. The Kingdom of Heaven did gather us and catch us all, as in a net, and his heavenly power at one time drew many hundreds to land. We came to know a place to stand in and what to wait in; and the Lord appeared daily to us, to our astonishment, amazement and great admiration, insomuch that we often said one unto another with great joy of heart: 'What, is the Kingdom of God come to be with men? And will he take up his tabernacle among the sons of men, as he did of old? Shall we...have this honour of glory communicated amongst us, which were but men of small parts and of little abilities?' And from that day forward, our hearts were knit unto the Lord and one unto another in true and fervent love, in the covenant of Life with God; and that was a strong obligation or bond upon all our spirits, which united us one unto another. We met together in the unity of the Spirit, and of the bond of peace, treading down under our feet all reasoning about religion. And holy resolutions were kindled in our hearts as a fire which the Life kindled in us to serve the Lord...and mightily did the Word of God grow amongst us."

- Francis Howgill (one of the Westmoreland Seekers), 1663

“The first that enters into the place of your meeting...turn in thy mind to the light, and wait upon God singly, as if none were present but the Lord; and here thou art strong. Then the next that comes in, let them in simplicity of heart sit down and turn in to the same light, and wait in the spirit; and so all the rest coming in, in the fear of the Lord, sit down in pure stillness and silence of all flesh, and wait in the light... Those who are brought to a pure still waiting upon God in the spirit, are come nearer to the Lord than words are; for God is a spirit, and in the spirit is he worshiped.... In such a meeting there will be an unwillingness to part asunder, being ready to say in yourselves, it is good to be here; and this is the end of all words and writings—to bring people to the eternal living Word.” - Alexander Parker, 1660

In his *Apology for Christian Divinity* Robert Barclay lays out in detail the biblical justification for vocal prayer and ministry being Spirit-guided. <http://www.qhpress.org/texts/barclay/apology/prop11.html>

Early Friends made a distinction between two forms of worship:

1. **Threshing Meetings.** These consisted in public preaching, often at great length, by Friends who were recognized as having a special gift of prophetic preaching. These sermons (which could often last an hour or more) were often delivered in public places such as fairs, markets, or even pubs. They were delivered spontaneously without pre-planning, believing that Christ would provide the words needed. Although the person delivering such a spoken message would usually be accompanied by other Friends, the purpose of this kind of worship was largely to carry the truth that Friends had discovered to those not yet part of the Quaker movement.

Friends also often felt led to enter parish churches and deliver messages to those gathered. It was considered acceptable practice at the time to speak after the priest's sermon was completed during a time of open sharing, but Friends often interrupted the priest's sermon. This could lead to the Friend being beaten or arrested.

2. **Retired Meetings.** These gatherings were primarily (although not exclusively) for those who had already become "convinced" of the truth of the Quaker message, that is for those already part of the Friends group. They might be held in homes or barns or in public buildings such as pubs. It seems likely from quotes such as Alexander Parker above that Friends gathered in silence and took some period of time to allow hearts to become close knit together before anyone delivered spoken messages. Friends felt it was important that messages be limited to what the Holy Spirit directed. They saw danger of "running beyond one's Guide" – i.e. speaking one's own thoughts or ideas rather than what the inward guide Christ Jesus directed to be spoken.

In the 19th century many Friends Meetings began to plan worship services in advance including choral singing of hymns, planned readings from scripture, and prepared sermons. Meetings also often hired pastors. In many cases pastors planned worship services and delivered sermons during worship.

Friends still believe it is essential that the Holy Spirit guide those planning worship and fill the hearts of those leading the service and those taking part in the congregation.

Reflection questions:

1. Do you feel the approach early Friends took to worship has relevance for how worship is planned and carried out in your church today?
2. Have you felt your heart turning towards God as you entered worship (as described by Alexander Parker)? Is it hard to move your thoughts away from busy-ness and worries to an attitude of living worship of Jesus?
3. Do you feel you have experienced your heart being knit deeply with others present and with God?
4. If you have participated in planning or leading worship, how often do you feel Christ's spirit is guiding you as you prepare or lead worship, preach, or offer vocal prayer?
5. Do you experience the preaching in your church as being directed by Christ's spirit?

Further Reading:

"Excerpts from various YM disciplines on the subject of Spirit-led Vocal Ministry"

http://www.inwardlight.org/excerpts_on_vocal_ministry.html

Peter Blood "[Biblical Roots of Quaker Worship](http://www.inwardlight.org/biblical_roots_of_quaker_worship.html)" (about Robert Barclay's 11th Proposition concerning Worship) http://www.inwardlight.org/biblical_roots_of_quaker_worship.html

"[Nurturing Gospel Ministry](#)" a minute summarizing an evening of reflection at QuakerSpring 2008

Session #4 - **This Is Our Testimony to the World** (witness, ways of living, sufferings for truth)
Part 1: Truth & Sufferings

Early Friends did not talk about social concerns as is often done today. Early Friends did certainly live a way of life that was radically separated from non-Friends around them, leading initially to severe persecution.

Integrity. The main differences between Friends' and non-Friends' way of living and what led them to being persecuted fall primarily under what are often referred to today as the "Testimony on Integrity". [Romans 12:1-2](#)

"Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations wherever you come; that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone; whereby in them you may be a blessing, and make the witness of God in them to bless you." - Statement of 1656, from *The Works of George Fox* (1831)

Friends strongly emphasized the necessity of living in a manner fully in keeping with their beliefs.

Speaking truth was extremely important. The admonitions to avoid oaths ([Matthew 5:33-37](#)) got them in trouble when they were asked to either swear that they did not support the king or (later) to support the king. Friends like Fox were often administered such loyalty oaths at their release, landing them right back in prison again. The Letter of James also talks about limiting what we say to what is really essential.

Other applications:

- They believed it was wrong to speak in the plural to refer to persons of higher social status (i.e. addressing people with "ye" or "you" rather than "thou" and "thee". They considered this a form of lying.
- They held their worship services in public rather than in secret (as some dissenting groups did), which often led to imprisonment.
- They felt it was wrong to pay tithes to support hired clergy they rejected. Their property was often seized.
- They charged fixed prices for goods rather than reaching a price via bargaining (or "haggling").
- Friends (and also often Puritans) felt it was wrong to use the names of pagan gods that they didn't believe in to refer to days of the week and of the month.
- They also shared with Puritans rejection of church holidays such as Christmas and Easter not specifically mentioned in scripture. They did, however, honor the Sabbath ("First Day") as a day set aside for rest.

Reflection Questions

- **Do you at times push the limits at times of what is really honest (for example on paying taxes)?**
- **Does your meeting discuss issues of personal ethics together?**
- **Would you ever tell a friend you disagree with something she or he did that is dishonest or unethical?**
- **Is being scrupulously honest as important today as it was in the 17th century?**
- **Where might you not be strictly committed to truth-telling (e.g. hiding runaway slaves or Anne Frank)?**
- **Do you think Friends still have a public reputation for honesty?**

Thousands of Friends were sent to prison for keeping to their beliefs on issues like loyalty oaths and holding non-Church of England worship services in public. Many, perhaps hundreds, died in prison. Others including George Fox had their lives shortened by repeated imprisonment in extremely unhealthy jails.

Four Friends (including one woman, Mary Dyer) were hung on Boston Common for returning to Boston and preaching publicly what they believed to be truth in spite of being banished by the Puritan government. Many lost their property for refusal to pay tithes.

- **Do you think that Friends today are being called to prophetic faithfulness around issues such as peace, climate or racial justice?**
- **Why do you think far fewer Friends have faced imprisonment or death for their beliefs since the 17th century (though some Friends do still face severe penalties for acts of conscience & witness today)?**
- **Are there any issues that are so important to you that you would risk imprisonment or even death?**

Session #5 - **This Is Our Testimony to the World** (witness, lifestyle & sufferings)
Part 2: Purity, Peace, Equality, Stewardship of the Earth

Purity (or “Simplicity”). Friends believed it was important to discern if recreational pursuits, clothing, or other possessions, got in the way of being able to be connected to God and hear God’s voice in their hearts. Margaret Fell Fox wrote that she felt the objection to brightly colored clothing was a “silly gospel”. cf. [Matthew 6:19-34](#).

Friends shared Puritans’ rejection of the use of musical instruments, plays, and dancing.

- Why do you think early Friends were so concerned about being separated from the world around the issues of widely practiced holidays like Christmas, instrumental music, dress, plays, or dancing?
- Can you think of modern day ways we might learn from 17th century Friends’ concerns about these kinds of activities?

Peace. Many early Friends had fought for Oliver Cromwell in the English Civil War. Friends made several public declarations in 1660 rejecting outward fighting as a way of distinguishing themselves from the Fifth Monarchist religious insurrection (the attempt to fight against the restoration of King Charles II). However it was not uncommon for Friends to enlist in the army or navy even after these declarations. [1660 Declaration to King Charles II](#) Note: Margaret Fell penned an earlier declaration on this subject six months before George Fox did so. See also: [Barclay on Jesus’ teachings re violence](#).

Early Friends writings about war referred more often to the passages in the Epistle of James about how outward fighting springs from greed (“lust for things”) than to the passages in the Sermon on the Mount about turning the other cheek. (cf. John Woolman’s later teaching that the “seeds of war” are in our possessions.)

Equality. Friends were centuries ahead of their time in encouraging women to take active leadership in the faith community. They not only allowed women to preach but wrote many tracts justifying this. First Friends also took a strong stand against class oppression, insisting that God could speak as readily through unschooled working people as through those from the upper classes who received formal theological training in a university.

On the other hand, many Friends in the American colonies owned slaves, including William Penn. The [1688 Germantown Statement](#) is considered perhaps the first official statement from a religious group stating principled objection to slavery as being inconsistent with Christianity.

Although some Friends were deeply involved in antislavery work in the 19th century, this kind of political activity was very controversial among Friends. Only a very small percentage of U.S. Friends were involved in the Underground Railroad (helping slaves escape to Canada) or political work against slavery. Friends of African descent were required to sit in a separate seating area in the back or in the balcony of many meetinghouses.

- How do you think Friends were able to be so enlightened on the God working through women and those of lower classes but so blind to the contradiction between slaveholding and Friends beliefs?
- How does the early Friends belief in the universal access of all people to the inward light of Christ inform our own reflections and work today around gender, race, and class?

Stewardship of the Earth. Both George Fox and John Woolman were very aware of the close connection between faith and the creation. Both also had respectful relations with Native Americans who lived close to the earth.

“Now I was come up in spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God. All things were new, and all the creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter.” - George Fox, 1648

“To know the secrets of nature is to know the works of God; and to know the works of God within the creation is to know God himself, for God dwells in every visible work or body.”

- Gerrard Winstanley, leader of the Digger community, later a Quaker, 1652

Session #6: Gospel Order as a Blueprint for the Church Community

“Gospel Order” is an old-fashioned Quaker term for the radical transformation and re-ordering of lives and relationships that results from the close relationship between the Church and Christ. Consistent with Matthew 18, Gospel Order seeks to preserve and strengthen loving relationships within the faith community while moving towards unity in our understanding of God’s will for us.

- “Order” refers to the many concrete changes that are made in our lives and relationships - not just an inward feeling but a way of life expressed in virtually every area of living.
- “Gospel” refers not to a creed or dogma, but to a close active relationship with living spirit of Christ in our midst. The central focus is not right beliefs or right actions but life and power in God.

As Fox says: “Many have had the letter but lost the life, the notion but lost the possession, the profession but lost the substance, Christ Jesus.” This is the “true sap” which Jesus describes so vividly in [John 15](#) (which, significantly, is also the chapter from which “Friends” took their name for themselves.) Fox also wrote: “Therefore take heed of the world’s fashions, lest ye be moulded up into their spirit, and that will bring you to slight truth, and lift up the wrong eye, and wrong mind, and wrong spirit, and hurt and blind the pure eye, and pure mind, and quench the holy spirit.”

Further reading:

Sondra Cronk “Gospel Order: A Quaker Understanding of Faithful Church Community” [Pendle Hill Pamphlet #297](#). (provides wonderful examples of how issues are addressed & resolved in a traditional Quaker meeting community)

Lloyd Lee Wilson, *Essays on the Quaker Vision of Gospel Order*. [order from FGC Books](#)

In the late 1660’s George Fox began devoting more and more time to setting up monthly, quarterly and yearly meetings across Britain, on the Continent, and in the American colonies. There were a number of reasons he felt called to do this:

Sufferings. Friends experienced imprisonment for following their faith up until the late 1680’s when King James II began to end religious persecution (presumably to protect his fellow Catholics). In some cases an entire meeting might be in prison. Others lost property because of refusal to pay tithes to support the “hireling priesthood”.

There was no formal membership in the 17th century. Meetings drew up lists of those needing support and this evolved much later into formal membership. The representative meeting of London Yearly Meeting is still known as “Meeting for Sufferings”.

Support for Ministers. Friends felt the need to provide spiritual oversight and support for those carrying out public ministry, including providing elders to accompany those called to journey to spread the Friends message and provision for spouses or families who stayed behind.

Second Day Morning Meeting: This group may have begun as an informal gathering of those who felt a special calling or gift to vocal ministry on Second Day (i.e. Monday) in London to share with each other their experiences of worship the previous day (or perhaps week) - presumably involving many of those identified as part of the Valiant Sixty. It later came to play a much more institutional role and actually had a role of approving or censoring proposed publications by Friends. It was roundly criticized by some Friends who felt this was a usurpation of power by some individuals over other Friends.

Eventually, those who had a recognized gift of vocal ministry began to meet regularly in each meeting with those who were recognized as having a gift for nurturing spiritual gifts (“elders”). Meetings of Ministers & Elders were held on the monthly, quarterly & YM level. These are the predecessor of today’s Ministry & Worship Committees.

“Eldership: Nurturing Others’ Spiritual Gifts” - a lot of different resources on this subject collected & posted by Peter Blood on his website at <http://www.inwardlight.org/eldership.html>

Clarity of Message. Friends strongly emphasized inward leading (“experimental” knowledge). Many argued that no one else should judge others’ leadings. But some leadings endangered the safety of the entire Quaker community, or at the minimum risked confusing others’ about Friends message.

Several events led many Friends to see a strong need for corporate testing of individual Friends’ leadings:

- In 1656 a leading Friend, James Nayler, entered Bristol re-enacting Christ’s entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. He narrowly escaped the death sentence in his blasphemy trial before Parliament.
- A number of Friends took part in the abortive Fifth Monarchist uprising against King Charles II in 1661.
- Hat Controversy (John Perrot & others) 1661-early 1670s – Friends refused to take off their hats before others as a form of idolatry. But it became a practice of men to remove their hats when someone offered vocal prayer as a sign of respect for God. Others felt this was a form of programming of worship.

Further reading “Tradition vs. Innovation: The Hat, Wilkinson-Story, and Keithite Controversies” in *Quaker Studies*, 8:1. (<http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1004&context=quakerstudies>) (discusses the controversy between original emphasis on individual leading and desire of many to provide corporate limits on individual leading. [Matthew 18:15-22](#))

Corporate Discernment. Fox wanted a form of durable structure for the passionate movement that he helped launch to help it endure over the long run. Traditionally decision-making has been made in one of two ways:

- Hierarchical (e.g. Catholic Church: pope, archbishop, bishop, parish priest)
- Democratic – votes taken within the local congregation, where autonomy largely rests (Congregational, Methodist, Baptist, etc.)

Our form of “church government” as embodied especially in the practice we call “meeting for business” represents a radical departure from the above two methods of reaching decisions. Discernment of God’s will for the meeting body through a clerk who discerns the sense of the meeting arising from meeting for business where hearts are gathered together in the Holy Spirit is a practical way that Christ our leader can provide similar direct guidance over church decisions via guidance in the hearts of Friends present.

Women’s & Men’s Meetings. Separate meetings for business were set up in each meeting for women and men. This was at least as revolutionary as allowing women to preach openly. Women were “recorded” (officially recognized) as having a gift of vocal ministry and also served as elders of the meeting.

There was controversy over the fact that women’s meetings had a primary role in discerning the rightness of couples marrying. Even if women’s meetings did not always consider all the same items as the men’s meetings, they provided huge opportunities for women to develop and exercise leadership skills which led Quaker women to play active roles in many social movements in the 19th century.

Further reading: “Quaker View of Women” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quaker_views_on_women) describes significance of holding separate women’s meetings for business for first 250 years of Quakerism.

Reflection questions:

1. To what extent have you experienced Friends meetings for business or committee meetings as a form of worshipful waiting upon Divine Guidance in your local church? In your yearly meeting?
2. What do you see as some of the major roadblocks to this form of decision-making working as it is intended? What do you see as possible barriers in yourself to your own fruitful and prayerful participation in this process?
3. What specific gifts or skills contribute to successful service as clerk in helping the church discern God’s guidance? What do or could churches do to nurture the skill of clerking as a critical gift in the life of the church?
4. What are the pros and cons of a church formally recognizing spiritual gifts exercised within the local meeting?
5. Many Friends in the 20th century have emphasized an individualistic understanding of faithfulness as opposed to a communal or “corporate” view of faithfulness. Do you think this has been a good thing or a bad thing? How much was it the result of Friends being influenced by “the world” (i.e. values in the larger surrounding culture that emphasize individualism as opposed to shared life together.)