

# **Friends Seminary** **Essential Principles, Practices and Procedures**

## **Preface**

More than two centuries ago, members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in New York City founded a school to educate their own children. Over the years it evolved into Friends Seminary, which, under the care of the New York Quarterly Meeting, has become a nationally recognized school that educates students of all faiths from kindergarten through twelfth grade. It aspires to be a place where education occurs within the context of the Quaker belief in the Inner Light—that of God in every person—and where Quaker silent worship, testimonies and practices support a community in which all those present are valued equally and their individual gifts are nourished. In 2012, the School adopted its own *Faith & Practice*, a written statement, developed with input from the entire School community, of its foundational beliefs, along with queries and advices about how to act on them within the School and in the wider world. It was at once a reflection of the School’s current reality and an expression of its aspirations as an educational community informed by Quaker values.

Friends Seminary has long lived together with—indeed shared space with—the Fifteenth Street Monthly Meeting, one of the active meetings for worship that make up the New York Quarterly Meeting. This intimacy is a part of the School’s identity, a source of strength, and an ongoing challenge to both Meeting and School. It also provides an exceptional opportunity for the continual deepening of their spiritual care relationship, so that it may remain an enduringly vital partnership between a living Friends Meeting and a thriving Friends School.

## **Essential Principles, Practices and Procedures**

The Principles, Practices and Procedures set forth below are intended to provide guidance for the governance of Friends Seminary as it continues to live into its mission as a Quaker school whose values, principles and practices reflect those of the Religious Society of Friends and to support the mutual spiritual care relationship between the Fifteenth Street Monthly Meeting and the New York Quarterly Meeting on the one hand and Friends Seminary on the other.

The language seeks to strike a balance between spiritual guidance and the need for legal clarity, keeping always at the forefront the shared commitment to Quaker testimonies and practices and to one another, in the certain belief that divine light and truth reside within each one of us.

## Queries

Since the time of George Fox, it has been the practice of Friends to use queries to assess the state of their Society and remind them of the ideals they seek to attain. Queries are a guide to self-examination, a framework within which to clarify, and consider in a Spirit-led way, the direction of the life of the community.

Friends have developed the queries brought forward here to guide the practice of those charged with the nurture of Friends Seminary.

1. Do we honor nurture, and sustain Friends Seminary's Quaker roots and the testimonies and practices of the Religious Society of Friends? Do we seek to live into these testimonies in our relationships with one another: students, faculty, staff, parents, alumni, members of the Monthly and Quarterly Meetings, neighbors, and the wider community?
2. How are Friends' values of service, simplicity, integrity, diversity, equality, community, stewardship of the environment, and nonviolence reflected in the life of the School? How do these values influence our programs?
3. How do we build policies and create institutional structures that reflect the testimony of equality, which is grounded in the recognition of that of God in every person?
4. How do our School's programs and our partnership with the Meetings embody our commitment to truth-seeking, respect for community, and the Divine Spark within each person?
5. How do Quakers from the New York Quarterly Meeting and, particularly, the Fifteenth Street Monthly Meeting, contribute to the life of the School? How does the School contribute to the life of the Meetings? How do our communications with the Meetings support these relationships?
6. What are the School's practices in regard to meeting for worship and decision-making in the manner of Friends? How are members of the School community (students, faculty, staff, parents) assisted in the process of understanding and valuing Friends worship and decision-making?
7. How do we work with other Friends institutions, and how do these relationships help us serve the broader community of Quaker education? How do we join with

other Friends organizations in the struggle for peace, equity, justice, and a sustainable world?

8. How do we balance the need for openness with the need for confidentiality with respect to sensitive information?
9. Do we appreciate how the testimony on integrity calls us to truth-telling, authenticity and wholeness? Are we faithful to the demands that the testimony of integrity makes upon us, as individuals and as a collective body, the Governing Board, as we carry out our responsibilities and duties?
10. Do we value all our varied skills, experiences and wisdom? Do we encourage inclusion? Do we create opportunities for synergy—particularly between members of the Religious Society of Friends and those who are not?  
Do we realize the opportunity we have here?

### **Practices and Procedures**

1. Friends Seminary will continue to be a Friends (Quaker) school, and the certificate of incorporation will reaffirm this. The School's values, principles and practices will reflect those of the Religious Society of Friends, as expressed in the then current *Faith and Practice* of the New York Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends.

The School will operate in accord with these Essential Principles, Practices and Procedures, which shall be included in the by-laws of the separately-incorporated School, and may be amended only with the approval of both the New York Quarterly Meeting, or its successor meeting, and Friends Seminary.

Meeting for worship shall be a central element of the educational experience in ways that take into account the developmental stages of students, and will occur at least weekly.

Given the Friends Peace Testimony and longstanding opposition to war, military recruiting and training is incompatible with Friends testimonies and shall not occur on the premises of, or with the involvement of, the School.

Friends Seminary shall continue to embrace the widely held concern of Friends that investments be made in businesses which serve beneficial purposes in a well-ordered society and that investments not be made in those businesses which raise concerns by reason of their products, management, employment and personnel practices, environmental practices, or their practices regarding respect for human rights, community relations or conservation of natural resources.

The School shall maintain membership in good standing in the Friends Council on Education.

2. It shall continue to be a fundamental goal of Friends Seminary to foster an atmosphere consistent with Quaker testimonies, and to serve the Quaker community within the parameters of the School's educational mission. Therefore, priority shall be extended to qualified Quaker applicants in decisions on admission and financial aid. Qualified Quaker teachers and administrators shall be actively sought.
3. To foster a right relationship between the School and the Meetings, the Care Relationship Committee of the Fifteenth Street Monthly Meeting and Friends Seminary (hereafter, the Care Relationship Committee) shall be established.

The Care Relationship Committee shall facilitate communication between the Meetings and Friends Seminary, create opportunities for working together, and initiate mutually beneficial projects.

In addition, so that the relationship may be harmonious, productive and mutually supportive, members or committees of any of the monthly meetings of the New York Quarterly Meeting and members of the School's Governing Board (see Paragraph 4 below), may bring to the Committee concerns that might hinder or enhance the right relationship between the School and the Meetings, and the Committee may season those concerns. The Committee also shall hear concerns related to the School's adherence to these Essential Principles, Practices and Procedures. (See Paragraph 12 below for the process to be followed in seasoning these concerns.)

At its discretion, the Committee may choose to forward a concern to an appropriate committee of the Fifteenth Street Monthly Meeting, the New York Quarterly Meeting, or the School for seasoning and clearness, and will minute that decision.

The Committee shall consist of a minimum of six members, who shall include a representative of the School's administration and a representative of Quarterly Meeting Trustees. There shall be an equal number of members appointed by the Fifteenth Street Monthly Meeting and by the School Community, the latter including at least one member of the School's Governing Board.

For specific projects, the Committee may seek the participation of other members of the New York Quarterly Meeting and/or the School Community and consult with "outside experts" as necessary.

4. In order to carry out the mission of Friends Seminary as a Friends school, a Governing Board shall be established, to consist of no fewer than twelve members. The Board shall determine policy and oversee the operation of the School in accord with these Essential Principles, Practices and Procedures, so that the spiritual,

educational and financial health of the School may be ensured. In carrying out its responsibilities, the Governing Board shall maintain a close working relationship with the Fifteenth Street Monthly Meeting and the New York Quarterly Meeting, their various committees, and the Care Relationship Committee.

5. Half the members of the Governing Board of Friends Seminary shall be members of the Religious Society of Friends appointed by the New York Quarterly Meeting after conversation with the Governing Board. One of these appointees shall be nominated by the Fifteenth Street Monthly Meeting.

The Governing Board shall have responsibility for the appointment of the other half of its members, after conversation with the New York Quarterly Meeting.

The conversations between the New York Quarterly Meeting and the Governing Board are forums for the exchange of information, and in no way imply that one body has any control over the appointments of the other.

6. The clerk of the Governing Board, or one of two co-clerks, shall be a member of the Religious Society of Friends.
7. The Governing Board shall conduct its business in accord with these Essential Principles, Practices and Procedures and in the manner of the Religious Society of Friends, guided by the then current *Faith and Practice* of the New York Yearly Meeting and the then current *Governance Handbook for Friends Schools*, published by the Friends Council on Education. The Board shall also consult the then current *Handbook* of the New York Quarterly Meeting, which is a necessary reference for understanding the Quarterly Meeting's committee structure and procedures. In order to ensure that it will be so guided, one of the responsibilities of the Board shall be to educate its members on these Essential Principles, Practices, and Procedures and on the values and practices set forth in the publications referenced above; it shall be the responsibility of all members of the Board to make use of these documents as they go about their work.
8. The Governing Board and its constituent committees shall strive to conduct their meetings in a spirit of worship in the manner of Friends, where each member endeavors to speak their own truth and to hear that of others. Decisions shall be reached not by voting, but by coming to a sense of the meeting on the matter at hand, when those in attendance at the meeting have reached unity on both the substance and the wording. Such decisions shall be recorded as Minutes of the meeting, which shall be the official record of the Board's decisions. Where appropriate, a statement of concerns may also be recorded as a Minute by a similar process of coming to a sense of the meeting.

Notes on the Board's deliberations may be kept, and if kept, circulated within the Board and to those whom the Board determines should have access to them. Such Notes do not constitute decisions.

Minutes of decisions shall be made available upon request through the main office of the School, except for those in which a specific need for confidentiality has been explicitly stated.

9. The Governing Board shall be asked to weigh the need for confidentiality in light of Friends' spirit of openness and integrity in business.

Although meetings of the Governing Board are not generally open, when it is possible, the Clerk or co-Clerks of the Board shall honor requests to attend from members of the School and Meeting communities.

Friends are disposed towards openness in decision-making. The Governing Board shall therefore disclose to the Meetings in a timely manner plans and issues under consideration that may directly affect them.

10. At any meeting of the Governing Board, a quorum for the transaction of business shall require that more than half the New York Quarterly Meeting appointees be in attendance.

11. The Governing Board shall make an annual report to the New York Quarterly Meeting, including summary financial information; a current list of members of the Board, their positions on the Board, and their committee memberships and positions; and information on how the School is living into its mission and Friends testimonies and practices. The School shall faithfully consider concerns forwarded to it by the New York Quarterly Meeting, and the Quarterly Meeting has committed to doing likewise for those concerns forwarded to it by the Governing Board.

12. A concern regarding the School's adherence to these Essential Principles, Practices and Procedures may be brought to the Care Relationship Committee by any member of the New York Quarterly Meeting or any Friend regularly attending one of its constituent monthly meetings. Any Friend holding such a concern shall follow the process stated here:

Said Friend shall first seek clearness by requesting the establishment of a clearness committee through an appropriate committee of their monthly meeting.

Having weighed the concern with the clearness committee and having reached clearness that the concern should go forward, the Friend, with the support of the clearness committee, shall then bring the concern to the Care Relationship Committee for further seasoning and clearness.

Any member of the School's Governing Board may also bring to the Care Relationship Committee for seasoning and clearness a concern regarding the School's adherence to these Essential Principles, Practices and Procedures, if after laboring with the Governing Board that member still feels the weight of the concern.

The Care Relationship Committee, after laboring with the concern, may forward its minuted suggestions and recommendations to the Governing Board, and shall inform other concerned parties.

The Governing Board shall give serious consideration to any minuted concerns and suggestions that may be brought to it by the Care Relationship Committee. The Board shall minute its response and forward it to the Care Relationship Committee, which shall be responsible for communicating with concerned parties.

If a serious concern regarding adherence to these Essential Principles, Practices and Procedures remains unresolved, it may be brought by the Care Relationship Committee or by concerned Friends to the Committee on Ministry and Counsel of the New York Quarterly Meeting, which shall labor with the Governing Board to seek clearness, and to resolve the situation. In such case, the Governing Board or the Ministry and Counsel Committee may seek the participation of other committees or individuals as they deem appropriate.

13. If the Ministry and Counsel Committee of the New York Quarterly Meeting is in unity that an unresolved concern about Friends Seminary's serious and persistent failure to adhere to these Essential Principles, Practices and Procedures rises to the level of the failure of the School to remain a Quaker School, as described and defined herein, they may bring the matter to the New York Quarterly Meeting as a whole.

If, having labored worshipfully with the concern, it is the sense of a meeting of the New York Quarterly Meeting attended by no less than 25% of its members that the School is no longer a Quaker school because of its serious and persistent lack of adherence to these Essential Principles, Practices, and Procedures, the Meeting shall minute the ways the School has failed and may direct its Trustees to take whatever steps are necessary to bring the School back into compliance with these Essential Principles, Practices, and Procedures.

During this meeting, those with deep personal convictions on the matter at hand may need to consider whether they can be open to the Spirit and, if they cannot, may be led to withdraw from participation in the decision.

**The following paragraphs numbered 14, 15 and 16 have not been considered further.**

**The Working Group has made no attempt at discernment in connection with the paragraphs and issues noted below, which are the lawyers' purview.**

14. The merger of the School with another institution, a disposition of all or substantially all of the School's assets, or the occurrence of a functional equivalent of any of these, will require prior approval of New York Quarterly Meeting, in addition to any other approvals as may be required by law. **[From BFS Bylaws]**
15. In the event the school takes any of the actions specified in Paragraph 15 above without the prior approval of the New York Quarterly Meeting, or in the event of the dissolution of the school, its corporate assets, net of liabilities, will be distributed to the New York Quarterly Meeting or its successor. In the event of the dissolution of the New York Quarterly Meeting, all rights of the Quarterly Meeting with respect to the school shall be assigned to its successor. **[From BFS Bylaws]**
16. Contingency Paragraph to be added? **[Would be new]**