

Nurturing Faithfulness to the Leadings of the Spirit in Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting

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Preface

Welcome to *Nurturing Faithfulness to Leadings of the Spirit in Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting*. The following pages document the emerging understanding in CPMM of how we support one another in dynamic faithfulness.

Nurturing Faithfulness is the successor to *Responding to Calls to Ministry in Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting* which was adopted in 1995. Those earlier guidelines have served the meeting well and have been useful to others in the Religious Society of Friends. However, as we have lived into them we have discovered new questions:

- How can the meeting support the growth of *all* members and attenders in faithfulness to the leadings of the Spirit, not just specific members at a time when they are called to a particular public ministry?
- How does each of us contribute to creating such a meeting?
- When is it rightly ordered for the meeting to give focused care when a member is called to a public ministry, and is that care for the ministry or the member who is undertaking the ministry?
- How do we foster gifts of centering and discernment so that service on clearness and spiritual accountability committees can be rich in the Spirit and faithful to its leadings?
- How do we develop a process that enriches the meeting community and does not exhaust it?

Nurturing Faithfulness is a next step in addressing these questions and continuing on the path of discovery. We invite you to live into these new guidelines and find what new possibilities they open and what new questions they raise.

What you will find in this document

Nurturing Faithfulness is divided into two parts. The first, “Nurturing Faithfulness to Leadings of the Spirit in CPMM” is a description of the ways we in CPMM attempt to support one another in faithfulness in every phase of the life of our community. It is accompanied by a “Handbook for Formal Care of Friends Called to Ministry or Witness” which describes the procedures of CPMM for providing formal care.

The contents of these documents are guidelines not rules. The procedures are stated as “generally” or “in most cases” because we understand that, in listening carefully for the guidance of the Spirit, our meeting may from time to time be led in surprising directions.

Some notes on language

(1) This document uses the terms God, Divine, Spirit, and Guide interchangeably—other Friends might use Truth, Light, Jesus, or Christ. (2) The meeting is in the process of considering the use of the term “oversight” which has distressing connotations for some Friends. When the meeting comes to unity on a term, that term can be inserted into this document. Meanwhile, we have experimented with the alternative term “Spiritual Accountability” which we hope Friends will recognize as having the same meaning of prayer, care, discernment, supervision, and corporate discipline. (3) Some of the terms and nomenclature may not be clear to all readers. Please consult the glossary which is in Appendix B.

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See also the companion document:

Handbook for Formal Care of Friends Called to Ministry or Witness

- I. Determining When to Submit One's Leading to the Discernment and Care of the Meeting
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Faithfulness in Community

At the core of Quakerism there is the belief that the Spirit may speak to and through any person. Our discipline as Friends is to listen for movements of the Spirit in our lives and to be faithful in following the Spirit's guidance as fully as we are able. Another assumption of early Friends, not so frequently acknowledged among contemporary Friends, is that the individual's listening and faithful action is carried out in the context of the support of the meeting community.

In Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting we have been growing in our understanding of what it is to be a meeting that supports one another in listening, discerning, and faithfully responding to the leadings of the Spirit. In our 1999 document on Being a Member of CPMM we affirm our covenant not only to attend to one's own relationship with God, but also to attend to ways in which we can uplift and encourage one another in the meeting community. As we nurture the faithfulness of each one, the meeting is strengthened. When the meeting as a whole is strengthened, it more fully calls out the faithfulness of each individual.

Supporting one another through various seasons

Each of us is called in a unique way to faithful living as we listen to God's guidance in the context of our gifts and our life circumstances. Faithfulness for some may be outward work in the world; for others it may be quietly holding the meeting community in prayer. It may be teaching or organizing, taking a public stand of conscience, witnessing through the arts. It may be calling forth the spiritual gifts of others, or carrying a deep and reconciling love to our daily lives in our families, our neighborhoods, or our workplaces. Faithfulness may be a life dedicated to prayer and the discovery of the wondrous works of the Spirit.

For most of us, faithful living moves through different seasons—shifting with changes in one's outward life and with one's growing understanding of the movements of the Spirit. There may be seasons of fresh openings when we feel called to actions which are new to us or are finding new ways of expression, seasons of traveling the familiar road, and seasons of seeking when one may not be sure of the path. Then, perhaps, the road becomes more familiar and less challenging or there comes a fallow time. As we move through these seasons both our need for support from our faith community and our ability to contribute to the community shifts and changes. As a meeting we seek to support one another in every season of our journeys.

- A. We support each other in faithfulness by gathering together in the meeting for worship and through our ordinary interactions in the life of the meeting. This starting point for support of faithfulness is available to all and is contributed to by all who are present.
- B. Some of us feel drawn into more intentional ways of seeking and providing support to one another such as spiritual friendships or study and sharing groups where in the company of others we grow in our relationship with God and, perhaps, begin to see the challenges of faithfulness in a new light. Members and attenders in these groups support, test, and encourage one another in various ways. For attenders, commitment to an ongoing small group is often a step toward membership in the meeting.
- C. Some of us, then, may find ourselves called to an outward ministry or witness which is spiritually demanding, and may ask the meeting for its formal guidance and support as we move forward in finding our way in responding to the calling. The meeting's response might include spiritual care and discernment as well as financial or other practical support. Generally those who are formally supported and held accountable by the meeting are Friends who have made a commitment to the meeting community through membership and active participation.

- D. There may be times when the meeting finds itself not only supporting a member's quest for faithfulness, but also feeling a unity between that person's ministry and the aspirations of the meeting. The meeting may then find itself under the weight of the ministry as an outgrowth of the life of the meeting and join in proclaiming the concern as not only the clear concern of the individual but one shared by CPMM as a body.
- E. Throughout all these ways in which we support one another's faithfulness, the meeting is challenged to deepen its capacity for centering, prayer, and discernment.

Each of these seasons of support is explained more fully in the sections that follow.

A. Mutual support that is inherent in the life of the meeting

1. *Meeting for worship.* Each person present contributes to the depth and quality of the worship as we open ourselves to the leading of the Spirit and seek ways to follow the guidance we receive.
2. *Meeting for business and committee service.* As the meeting undertakes its business we participate in the process of corporate discernment. We seek ways for the meeting to be faithful as a community and learn of the ways others in the meeting are recognizing and responding to opportunities for faithful service.
3. *Everyday conversation in the meeting.* It is common that we ask one another how we are doing and offer and receive words of encouragement and counsel. Each one of us can play a role by providing a listening ear for Friends whom we encounter at coffee hour or other times in the life of the meeting and giving them words of encouragement. When appropriate, we can remind one another of the ways in which the meeting community is available to support our discernment.
4. *The work of the meeting's committees:* Various meeting committees support us in faithfulness, e.g, the work of Membership Care Committee's "Friendly Care Person," Peace and Social Concerns Committee raising up opportunities for service, Adult Religious Education sessions and classes, Worship & Ministry, etc.
5. *Meeting events:* Through adult and children's religious education, Friendly 8s, meeting retreats and other events we have opportunities to deepen our spiritual understanding and deepen our connections in the community.

B. Opportunities to be more intentional about supporting one another in faithfulness

For many of us the basics listed above may be enough to keep us steady on the path of faithfulness much of the time. Others among us long for ways in which we might more intentionally embrace the question of how to better discern our gifts, follow our leadings, and grow more fully into faithfulness. We may be new to, and awkward with, conversation about our religious lives. Though there may be much in our hearts, the words do not come readily to our lips. While our goal may be to have a faith community where sharing about leadings and ministry is as natural as breathing, it can help to set up explicit opportunities in our community life to practice, as one way of moving toward that ease.

Below are some ways we can give attention to strengthening the meeting's support of discernment and faithfulness to the Spirit's guidance.

1. *Structured opportunities for sharing:* We might, for example, experiment with the question "How does Truth prosper with thee?" or "How are you finding the Spirit at work in your life?" as a greeting

at coffee hour or as an opening at committee meetings. We might have tables at coffee hour where it can be the designated topic of conversation. Questions about discerning and being faithful in following our leadings can be topics for Friendly 8's.

2. *Making our emerging leadings and discernment known to the meeting.* Friends are encouraged to share their sense of leading with the meeting and to invite others to hold them in the Light and ask them how they are doing. One setting in which to do this is the "news of ourselves" portion of meeting for business. Another is the meeting newsletter.
3. *Showing appreciation for one another's ministry:* There is much to be thankful for in the way the work of the Spirit is manifested in our community. There are many ways that we as a community might acknowledge the gifts in our midst and the fruits of the Spirit among us. When one member's contribution is being recognized in meeting for business, for example, it can be an occasion to say, "There are these and other things that we don't even know about... and we are grateful." There may be occasions when it is appropriate to have a period of worship sharing during which people can tell of their response to leadings that may never appear on the agenda of meeting for business, but enrich our community life through individual faithfulness. There is much we will never know, yet to the extent that we learn of each other's ministry, we are made richer by it, both individually and corporately.
4. *Spiritual friendships:* Some individuals join with one other person in a spiritual friendship, meeting at regular intervals to pray together and to reflect on their spiritual lives.
5. *Small groups for prayer or discussion:* From time to time in the life of the community small groups form to practice spiritual discipline, to learn, or to share support and fellowship. Discernment and support of faithfulness happens organically in many such small groups.
6. *Discernment groups:* There are times when it can be helpful to be in a group specifically focused on discernment and faithfulness. By joining a group for mutual support of faithfulness, we develop skills of supporting one another in discernment.
7. *Informal clearness committees:* There are times when a person is wrestling with a leading or a life decision and would welcome the support of others in discernment. He or she might gather together a few trusted friends to serve as an informal clearness committee as the next step in discernment. Or the need for clearness might be met by a small group in which the individual is participating. Such a clearness process may not be known at all to the wider meeting, but may help a person come to clarity about her/his next steps. (If a Friend is unsure whom to invite to serve on an informal clearness committee, she or he may ask the help of the Committee on Gifts and Leadings, clerk of the meeting, Worship and Ministry, or their Friendly Care Person in Membership Care to identify seasoned Friends to be part of a clearness committee.)
8. *Support Groups:* Sometimes a person undertaking an activity (either a ministry under the meeting's formal care or a new experimental project) will draw together some F/friends to join in the work in some way or provide practical support.

C. The Meeting's formal guidance and support of Friends called to outward ministry

As we seek to center our lives more and more fully in God, any of us may come into a season when God is calling her or him to an even deeper and more challenging faithfulness. The call may be to reorient one's life, to undertake a spiritually challenging ministry, or to more fully submit the work one is already doing to the guidance of the Spirit. One is challenged in these seasons to discern what is being asked, to find the courage not to lag behind the Guide and the wisdom not to run ahead. It is at these times that we most desire and need the more focused support of our spiritual community. The meeting's support is for the faithful following of the calling.

When the meeting has taken a Friend's faithfulness to a leading under its care, all members of the meeting are asked to hold the individual in prayer and to hold a tender interest in the work. In addition, a specific group will be appointed to act on behalf of the meeting in holding the Friend's faithfulness in prayer, offering care, asking hard questions, and holding the person accountable to the Spirit and responsible to the meeting. Most ongoing ministries will be held in Mutual Spiritual Accountability Groups with others in the care of the meeting. A Dedicated Spiritual Accountability Group for response to a specific leading may be formed when it is discerned that the work is newly beginning or in a period of transition which requires more focused care.

CPMM's evolving practice in providing this more focused care is described in the "Handbook for Formal Care of Friends Called to Ministry or Witness."

D. The meeting in unity with a ministry and under the weight of the concern

Supporting a Friend in response to a leading means that the meeting recognizes the Spirit at work in the minister and is prepared to provide spiritual and practical support as the minister grows in faithfulness. It does not necessarily imply that the meeting as a whole is under the weight of the concern.

Sometimes, however, there is a feeling of unity between that person's ministry and the aspirations of the meeting when the meeting finds itself under the weight of the concern. This is not something to be "requested and approved." Rather it is something to emerge and be recognized in its time. It will likely represent a period of growing together between the ministry of the individual and the life of the meeting. And it will likely require growth and change on the part of both the meeting and the minister. It will certainly require a commitment of both the meeting and the minister to work together over time to deepen our understanding of one another and of the concern. It will require patience and care on both sides. (*Handbook, page 15*)

E. Deepening our capacity for centering, prayer, and discernment

Supporting one another in faithfulness can be challenging for us as a meeting. It calls for openness, love, care, toughness, trustworthiness, sensitivity, and discernment. We seek to care for one another in ways that resonate with the Spirit, yet we know that our human limitations can cause us to be clumsy or inconsistent. We have discovered that the very act of nurturing faithfulness requires a deepened faithfulness.

In CPMM we are experimenting with having a Committee on Gifts and Leadings to assist the meeting as we grow in our capacity to support one another in faithfulness and ministry. This committee will provide opportunities for Friends to meet together to learn about and practice the art of discernment and care. The committee will be responsible for appointing and supporting clearness committees and spiritual accountability groups. And it will assist the meeting in refining the practices laid out in these guidelines.

Responsibilities of this committee include:

- Assisting members and attenders in finding sources of support in the meeting;
- Fostering the development of discernment groups, informal clearness committees, etc.
- Helping the meeting and its members to deepen our capacity to care for one another's discernment and faithfulness through discussions and workshops.

- Supporting the meeting's formal care of those with leadings to ministry or witness by: appointing members of clearness committees, forming Spiritual Accountability Groups, and offering consultation, assistance and support to the committees and to the persons under the care of the committees.
- Being alert to the potential of the meeting being in unity with or under the weight of a concern, and helping both the minister and others in the meeting to understand the implications of growing together in this way.
- Reporting recommendations on care of a member's ministry to the meeting for business.
- Reporting to the meeting as issues arise that require the meeting's attention.
- Being alert to ways for vital interaction between a ministry and the meeting.

This committee is expected to report annually to the meeting on its work and bring recommendations as needed for the updating of these guidelines as we live our way more fully into supporting one another in faithfulness. No later than after five years (2009), and sooner as necessary, the committee is asked to assist the meeting in reviewing these guidelines in the light of what the meeting is learning about nurturing faithfulness.

Appendix A: Historical Background

In many ways nurturing faithfulness reawakens among Friends the gifts and responsibilities of the “elders” of earlier times. The elder’s function was to nurture the spiritual life of the meeting by caring for the meeting for worship, encouraging those with gifts in vocal ministry, and tending to the spiritual needs of others in the meeting.

In the past fifteen years or so, in our meeting and around North America, there has been a growing interest in reclaiming the inward gifts of Quaker ministry and eldership. While this interest harkens back to the practice of earlier Friends, our 21st century experiments are different in significant ways.

The practice of recognizing ministers and elders was common among Friends for over 200 years (from the early 1700s to the early 1900s). Persons gifted in spoken ministry in worship were recognized as ministers. Persons seen as gifted in nurturing the growth of the Spirit in others were recognized as elders. Notice they were *recognized* not named or appointed, rather the meeting saw that the gift existed in the Friend and noted it. The ministers and elders met together regularly for mutual support in deepening the life of the Spirit and in caring for the spiritual well being of the meeting community. Generally, recognition as a minister or an elder was for a lifetime.

Recognized ministers who proposed to travel to other meetings were given a “minute of travel in the ministry” which testified that the minister was recognized in her or his own meeting and was traveling with the meeting’s approval and support. In most cases these minutes for travel were for a specific, time-limited travel to a certain place or set of places and were returned at the end of the travel and another minute was issued for subsequent travel.

The practices of recognizing ministers and elders and issuing minutes for travel were largely abandoned in most Hicksite yearly meetings in the early 20th century because these practices were seen as having grown formal and lifeless. Toward the end of the 20th century these practices began re-emerging as Friends hungered for a deeper spiritual nourishment. In recent years, increasing numbers of Friends around the country have been laying their leadings before their meetings and seeking support. As the meetings have grown in their capacity to provide support, they have rediscovered elders’ function of prayer, discernment, and drawing out gifts of ministry. Indeed, ministry and eldering have been found to go hand-in-hand.

A key difference between the emerging practice and that of earlier Friends is the question of who takes the initiative. According to both *Faith and Practice* of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and the practice of CPMM, the process of recognizing and supporting ministry begins when someone lays a leading before the meeting, rather than the meeting’s taking the initiative. Another difference is that the leadings that are coming forward are generally not for vocal ministry in worship but a variety of calls to public ministry of teaching and service to the wider Friends community and to the world.

Despite these differences, the emerging practice upholds the aspirations of earlier Friends: to draw out and nurture gifts that strengthen our meetings in faithfulness to the Divine.

APPENDIX B: Glossary of Terms

In *Nurturing Faithfulness to Leadings of the Spirit in Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting* and its accompanying *Handbook for Formal Care of Friends Called to Ministry or Witness* one will find an array of terms not in the common American vocabulary. Some are traditional terms used by Friends others are peculiar to this document where the writers found a need to name a process or function.

Calling—An inward sense of being asked by God to undertake a specific course of action. Often used interchangeably with “leading.”

Clearness—Confidence that an action is consistent with God’s leading.

Clearness committee—a small group of Friends drawn together to assist an individual in discerning whether a sense of call is true and consistent with God’s leading.

Committee on Gifts and Leadings—a structure within CPMM formed to assist the meeting in growing in capacity to support one another in faithfulness and ministry. (Discussed in *Nurturing Faithfulness*, page 6)

Companions, Companions for Travel in the Ministry—Practice of Friends that a person traveling in ministry or religious service be accompanied by another Friend who is sympathetic to the concern and able to give counsel and encouragement. (Discussed in *Handbook*, page 14.)

Concern—A situation or issue that takes hold of a person’s attention and may be the first step toward a leading to action.

Dedicated Spiritual Accountability Group—a Spiritual Accountability Group appointed to care for one person in her/his ministry. (See also, *Spiritual Accountability Group, Mutual Spiritual Accountability group*. Discussed in *Handbook* page 8.)

Discernment, spiritual discernment—the faculty to sense the movement of the Spirit or to distinguish the movement of the Spirit from other impulses.

Discernment groups—A term particular to *Nurturing Faithfulness in CPMM* which denotes a small group convened to support one another in discerning leadings of the Spirit. (Discussed in *Nurturing Faithfulness*, page 5)

Elder, eldership—Term used by earlier Friends, now reentering Quaker usage, to refer to Friends gifted in spiritual discernment and spiritual nurture.

Faithfulness—attentiveness to the guidance of the Spirit and earnest endeavor to submit to that guidance.

Gifts—The collection of abilities, skills, and talents that an individual may apply in response to a leading. (see also, *spiritual gifts*)

Leading—An inward sense of being asked by God to undertake a specific course of action. Often used interchangeably with “calling.”

Ministry—Sharing or acting upon one’s gifts in response to a leading. This term is used to apply to vocal messages in meeting for worship, to individual acts of faithfulness small and large. (See also *religious service*)

Mutual Spiritual Accountability Group—a Spiritual Accountability Group made up of two or three members whose ministries are under the care of the meeting and two or three other individuals who have gifts of discernment and care. (See also, *Spiritual Accountability Group, Dedicated Accountability Group*. Discussed in *Handbook* page 7.)

Public Friend—a Friend active in a public ministry.

Public ministry—ministry outside the home meeting or representing the Society of Friends in the wider world.

Released Friend—a term used by some meetings to denote a Friend who is freed by the meeting to pursue a ministry without the encumbrance of other responsibilities often including being freed from the need of earning a living for the duration of the ministry. This term is not used by CPMM in our recognition and support of ministers in their work.

Religious service—sometimes used synonymously with “ministry” or “public ministry.”

Spiritual Accountability Group—an experimental term in CPMM for what has been known among Friends as an *oversight committee*: a group of Friends appointed by the meeting to support a Friend in faithfulness and ministry through prayer, care, discernment, supervision, and corporate discipline. (See also, *dedicated accountability group*, *mutual accountability group*. Discussed in *Handbook*, page 6)

Spiritual friendship—Commitment by two individuals to join together to pray and reflect on their spiritual lives.

Spiritual gifts—Abilities, skills, and talents in spiritual matters such as gifts for vocal ministry, discernment, or prayer.

Stand of conscience—see *witness*.

Support groups—a group of Friends gathered together to assist an individual (or to assist one another) in carrying out a task.

Testing a leading—the prayerful search for whether a sense of leading is true and from God. See also *clearness committee*.

Under the weight of—Giving high priority to an issue arising from a deep of concern or sense of leading.

Unity—a sense of spiritual oneness or harmony. Used in Friends decision making to refer to coming to a sense of spiritual oneness with regard to a proposed course of action.

Witness—Manifesting Friends testimonies through a public stand on a political or social matter (e.g. war tax resistance, draft resistance, avoidance of investments in environmentally harmful industries), sometimes called *stand of conscience*.

Appendix C—Further Resources

The resources listed below are excerpted from a more extensive annotated listing on the Friends General Conference Website (<http://fgcquaker.org/traveling/bibliography.html>). Friends are also encouraged to consult *Faith and Practice* of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and other yearly meetings. Many of these resources are available in the PYM Library.

- Bownas, Samuel.** *A Description of the Qualifications Necessary to A Gospel Minister*, with an Introduction by William Taber. Philadelphia: Pendle Hill Publications and Tract Association of Friends, 1989 (from the 1767 edition). The classic "how to" manual for Friends who feel a gift of ministry emerging in them, and for their meeting community to learn how to understand, receive, and nurture the ministry. Available from Quakerbooks of FGC.
- Cronk, Sandra.** *Gospel Order: A Quaker Understanding of Faithful Church Community*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet #297. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1991. Describes the communal theory and practice of Quaker tradition. Challenges us to see our meetings more deeply. Available from Quakerbooks of FGC .
- Farnham, Suzanne, et.al.** *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1991. Thorough study of call, call to ministry, individual and corporate discernment, and support for the ministry of others, from a non-Quaker perspective. Includes notes and an annotated bibliography. Available from Quakerbooks of FGC.
- Glover, Sue.** *Go and the Lord go with thee!* Sessions Book Trust, 1997. A nice brief overview of the historic and current practice of travel among and by Friends. The text provides many practical suggestions as to how to nurture those they visit and themselves. Available from Quakerbooks of FGC.
- Grundy, Martha Paxson.** *Tall Poppies: Supporting Gifts of Ministry and Eldering in the Monthly Meeting*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet #347. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 2000. Specific suggestions to meetings for discernment and for supporting ministry and eldering. Available from Quakerbooks of FGC.
- Guenther, Margaret.** *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction*. Boston: Cowley Publications, 1992. Tries to "de-mystify" the art of spiritual direction by emphasizing ordinary, everyday experiences. Uses the images of hospitality, teaching, and midwifery to illustrate the role of spiritual director. Written for "amateurs." Available from Quakerbooks of FGC.
- Hoffman, Jan.** *Clearness Committees and their Use in Personal Discernment*. FGC, 1996. A very precise structure is presented for the formation and use of these committees. Particularly useful for those unfamiliar with such committees. Available from Quakerbooks of FGC.
- Loring, Patricia.** *Listening Spirituality. Vol. II: Corporate Spiritual Practice Among Friends*. Openings Press, 1999. Weaves historical Quaker material, modern experience, bibliographies, and issues Friends face today, with practical suggestions to illuminate and deepen our practice of living together in a faith community predicated on listening to God. Available from Quakerbooks of FGC.
- Loring, Patricia.** *Spiritual Discernment: The Context and Goal of Clearness Committees*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet #305. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1992. Explores testing leadings, both Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, *Nurturing Faithfulness*, April 2005

individually and corporately. Describes setting up and conducting clearness committees. Available from Quakerbooks of FGC.

O'Shea, Janey and Ben Pink Dandelion. *Making Quaker Disciples: the formation of a people of God.* London: Quaker Home Service, 1995. Emphasizes how Quakerism is a religion, involving discipline. Available from Quakerbooks of FGC.

Vogel-Borne, Jonathan. *“Traveling in the Ministry.”* Paper written for Friends Meeting at Cambridge, 1987. A short but very informative article which includes historical background for traveling in the ministry, a good discussion of recognizing a call, and a detailed description of the clearness process and traveling minutes. Available on FGC Website, (<http://fgcquaker.org/traveling/bibliography.html>)