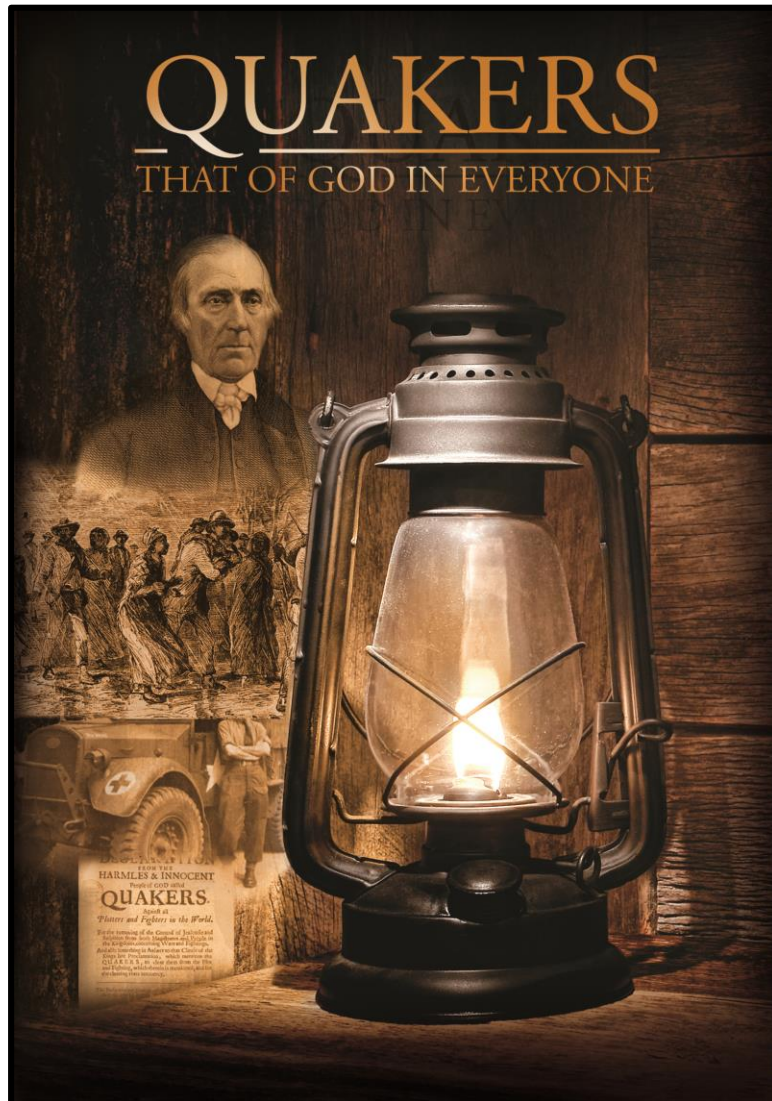




**Discernment and Transition  
upon the occasion  
of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of  
CINCINNATI FRIENDS MEETING**

## ***Introduction***



Cincinnati Friends Meeting is a semi-programmed pastoral meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, established in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1815. We are an open and affirming (seeing that of God in everyone) congregation, seeking God daily in accordance with the founding testimonies of Quakers: simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and truth.

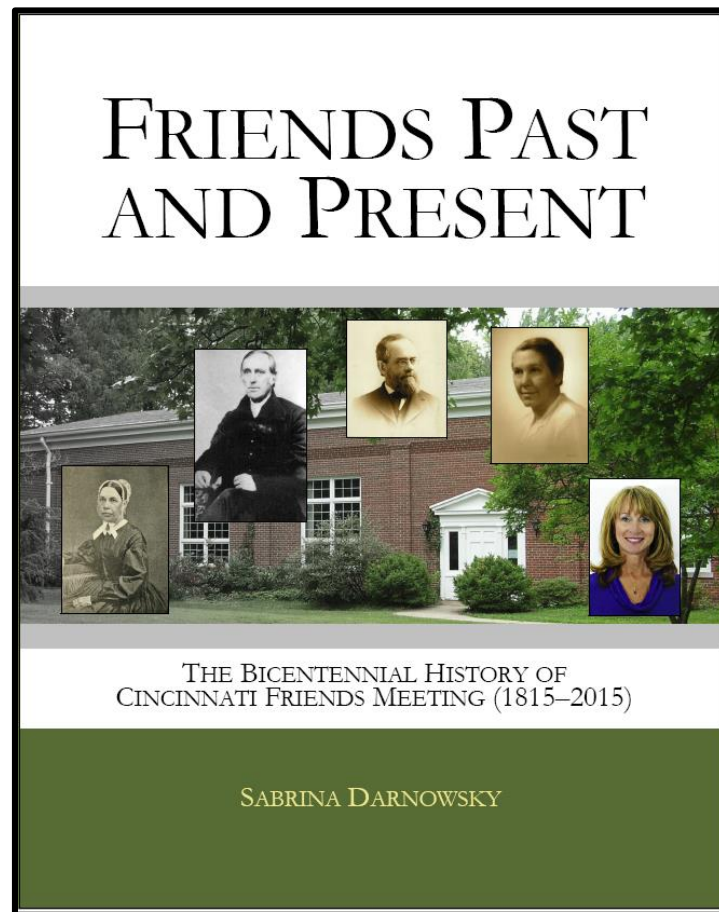
## ***Acknowledgment***

We have had an empowering and spiritual journey in our discernment related to our theology, the search for a pastoral guide/leader and in discerning our vision and mission as we move forward/transition as a meeting of diverse and caring Friends.

We have shared from the depths of our spirits and listened to leadings that have brought us to a deeper connection with each other, based on our shared commitment to each other as individuals and as members of a devoted faith community.

To those who participated in this lengthy process, please know that you have been responsive to a significant need within our Meeting. We have been and will continue to be strengthened in our community because of your faithfulness and service.

May that same sense of faithfulness and service continue to lead, guide and direct us as we move forward beyond our discernment queries and this transition period. May we be more fully engaged in a growing and embracing community with each other.



The occasion of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Cincinnati Friends Meeting prompted leadings that led to the publication of a book, written by Sabrina Darnowsky, to honor the rich legacy of CFM and those Quakers from throughout our region whose lives epitomize our Quaker testimonies.

Our anniversary inspired us to join with Rebel Pilgrim Productions for the the production of a film documentary, written by Donne Hayden, in distributed worldwide by Vision Video, sharing within a historical context the work and service of those who have left a lasting impact not only on our community at CFM but on the wider community and world.

We answered a leading within CFM to use the occasion of our 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary to not only celebrate the legacy of those who came before us but to pause to discern in worshipful deliberations who we are as a diverse community of seekers and how our gifts may be recognized and used in service within and without our community as we look beyond our 200<sup>th</sup> year.

## ***Process***

Under the direction of Ministry and Counsel, CFM undertook a lengthy (*5 months*) discernment process, under the leadership of Sabrina Darnowsky, Mary Ellen Krisher and Judy Leasure.

There were two primary focal points for the discernment process:

- 1) Using our 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary as the framework, discern in shared community an understanding of who we are as a faith community and ways we want to continue to grow together as that faith community;
- 2) With the retirement of our pastor, use what we learn within our discernment process to help us in the search for and selection of a new pastor and have our discernment summary available as an instrument to provide the new pastor a deeper understanding of who we are as a faith community.

A series of Queries were developed in three areas identified by Ministry and Counsel: theology, pastoral concerns, and visioning (a review of who we are today, thinking about who we may want to be in the future, using the basics of a SWOT review—strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.)

The Queries were presented by subject area during an hour- long worship sharing session held each Sunday at the Meeting House prior to the start of meeting for worship. A second worship-sharing session was made available following meeting for worship on selected Sundays for interested members/attenders who could not attend the morning session to assure as much access to the process as possible.

The sessions were led, based on the topic, by Mary Ellen, Sabrina and Judy, beginning June, 2015 and ending November, 2015.

Four queries were available for each session but due to the depth of the leadings in responding to them, the time allotted usually allowed for consideration of two queries at the most. Those not addressed in one session were carried over to the next session so that all of them would be available for responses. This resulted in a lengthy but relevant timeframe.

All members and attenders were invited to attend any or all of these worship-sharing sessions. They did not have to attend all of them. There were no “right” or “wrong” answers. There was no debate or ongoing discussion. Moderators carefully guided the sessions so that we could complete each session within the worship sharing format.

One moderator shared the queries and asked for leadings, while another moderator took detailed notes. In keeping within the worship-sharing framework, each comment was noted and kept for consideration for the final summary. No comment had more value over another.

The names of those in attendance were kept for each session but were not identified with any particular comment, only noted to identify the number of people attending sessions and to know who among the congregation responded so as to help Ministry and Counsel evaluate if our findings were those of the community at large or only a few members/attenders.

Notice of the worship-sharing sessions, along with the accompanying queries for each session, were printed in the bulletin every week so that everyone would have the opportunity to share. Written and e-mail responses were encouraged for those who could not attend the worship-sharing sessions.

Attendance at the worship-sharing sessions ranged from 4 to 18 people. A total of 32 individuals attended one or more of our worship-sharing sessions. As the weeks unfolded, the same people attended the worship-sharing sessions. We received e-mail and/or written responses from six members/attenders.

Those participating were an overall representation of the Meeting. The majority of participants were 50 years of age or older. They included individuals who have been involved short-term with the Meeting (1-3 years), as well as those who have been members/attenders for many years, including over 50 years with CFM. As with the Meeting overall, a high percentage (more than 90%) of the participants are seekers (convinced Quakers) who have come to the Meeting and to Quakerism from little to no faith or other Christian faith communities, bringing with them varied expectations and experiences. A small percentage are birthright Quakers.

With the completion of our process, we had accumulated in excess of 60 pages of typed notes from all of the sessions. Ministry and Counsel determined that the number of pages was too cumbersome and so many of the responses were similar. They requested that the moderators prepare a summary report to highlight the findings for each of the three focus areas. Ministry and Counsel will keep all of the Query responses as background. The summary report was shared with members of the Search Committee and Ministry and Counsel for input prior to hiring a new minister.

Ministry and Counsel carefully and prayerfully reviewed the initial summary report and recommended some changes. With those changes complete, Ministry and Counsel presented the summary report at Meeting with Attention to Business (November, 2015).

The complete summary report will be included on the Meeting's website. Printed copies will also be available at the Meeting House for members and attenders to read.

Discussion and discernment will continue related to what we learned during our thoughtful and spirit-led process.

A complete list of the Queries is included at the end of this summary report.

## **Summary Report**

Founded in 1815, Cincinnati Friends Meeting (CFM) is one of three Quaker meetings in Cincinnati, Ohio. A monthly meeting of Wilmington Yearly Meeting, it is the only pastoral, semi-programmed meeting in Cincinnati. As with the other two Meetings, we are small in membership (75) and attendance (*approximately 20-25 during meeting for worship.*) We are a “commuter” Meeting in the sense that members/attenders come from various communities throughout the region, including Butler and Clinton counties. We do not have a “neighborhood” presence in the community surrounding our Meeting House, with some of that related to the “commuter” aspect of our members/attenders.

### **Theology/Worship**

CFM is a Christ-centered\* (Spirit-led) meeting of seekers who are committed to fulfilling the Quaker testimonies at the foundation of our faith, as illustrated by our mission statement of being an open and affirming congregation, which asks of us to see that of God in everyone. One example is the “corporate/congregational” commitment to equality and justice in regards to issues related to sexual orientation.

We place a high value on diversity. There is openness within the Meeting to study and learn about other faith traditions and to welcome participation with those of other faith traditions both as part of the Meeting and in the wider community. The study of faith traditions have been and continue to be included within the Meeting as part of Spiritual Nurture Groups, Book Study groups and other activities, with a sense of curiosity, openness and a willingness to consider that we may not have the one answer to questions of faith and that there is more than one path to the Light.

Members/attenders approach to diversity is to celebrate it with integrity, caring and intentionality, while not attempting to be “all things to all people.” We consider our congregation to be a place of safety, a sanctuary, where each person is respected and supported in their continuing journey, accepting that there is room for disagreement and

\* *“When all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could I tell what to do, then, oh, then I heard a voice which said, “There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition.” – George Fox*



differing views, a place where all voices are welcome and listened to from a place of reverence and worship.

We believe we should live our testimonies and not be limited by creeds. We do not feel a need for the outward expressions of faith, as expressed through rituals such as communion and baptism. Without rituals there is more of an expectation that we may grow into that one on one relationship with God, The Light. To us, communion and baptism are internal rather than external. Perhaps we use rituals as a way to try and “control” God instead of waiting for a leading.

We are not Jesus-centric or Bible-centric. There is diversity in our thinking related to the role of both Jesus and the Bible within our worship and community. Some believe in the archaeological “truths” within the Bible. Some see it as a great work of literature. Others see it as a guidepost in helping us live out our commitment to our testimonies, while others more clearly relate to it as the divine word of God. Some see it as book of wisdom to guide us in living more faithful lives. Some do not believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible, while others take it more literally.

We view Jesus in much the same way, with some seeing him as the Son of God, others following him as the Great Teacher. Others see him as a great revolutionary reacting to injustice in his time. Others are still seeking answers to questions about the Bible and Jesus.

With diversity as a high value for the congregation overall, that diversity is both a strength and a weakness. A part of that strength can be illustrated in the people who do come to Meeting for Worship on a regular basis from long distances when there are numerous faith communities immediately around them. They are finding something at CFM spiritually that they have not found anywhere else for them to make that commitment.

Many members/attenders appreciate the energy and challenges that come with being part of a diverse congregation. There is no “rote” thinking or acting. There is the challenge to not become spiritually complacent and to be open to new possibilities, ideas and leadings, to accept that to live in the Quaker Way is difficult, hard work.

That diversity can be a weakness when there are disagreements that are more “people-related” than “spirit-related” and thus become more imbedded and difficult to address – personality conflicts. It can be a weakness in growing the Meeting as well. While we have those who that travel long distances just to be in worship, we also have people who come to us, curious as to who we are, sometimes with expectations that Quakers

will have all the answers and become disillusioned when we cannot meet those expectations. Some people want more music. Some want no music at all.

Some have been concerned that there are no boundaries, but many believe that CFM is guided by the most important boundaries, those set by our Quaker testimonies. Some have found or are finding it difficult to support the actions of CFM in such areas as equal rights related to sexual orientation (perhaps that is in the realm of politics and as such, not appropriate for us as a congregation).

Our diversity and manner of worship, our lack of rituals and our theology often attracts people initially, but it is those same things that have also resulted in some choosing to continue searching beyond our Meeting. People who like and want boundaries find it difficult to adjust to our manner of worship. Some have come to us wanting us to be more Jesus-centric or Bible-centric. Some have wanted us to have more activities for children and young people and elders.

As a Meeting, we also struggle with what it means to live and worship in the Quaker Way in today's fast-paced, loud and rewards-driven society. Our silent worship is different and difficult for many and there is no one telling us we are doing it right. We are responsible for our own spiritual journey, with support from the community, and that is perhaps more difficult today than it was for the early Quakers – we are pulled in so many ways! There are too few of us called upon to do what at times seems to be too much. There is concern that the “busy-ness” required to maintain the business of the Meeting takes away from our worship and can lead to burn-out. Sometimes people just want a place to worship. There is something in Quaker worship that cannot be found anywhere else.

As we reflected during our 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we have consensus on this: those of us led to be part of the CFM community care deeply about each other to the point of love for each other. We have difficult times and good times. We do not always agree, even in relation to our manner of worship. Some favor even more silence, while others welcome vocal ministry. Some are passionate about the value of music to building community through our worship, to the point of having a paid musician if we cannot assure musical ministry on a consistent basis; while others prefer no music.

Many are the times when we don't have answers, only questions. We love this community of Quakers and we believe our community and our world needs Quakers. We believe firmly and steadfastly in our testimonies and in living our faith daily. We are passionate about our faith, our Meeting and each other. We are relevant.

We want to be a “beloved community.”

*Conclusion: There is diversity in our leadings as to our overall theology and how we express that theology in our manner of worship, from those who prefer more (increased) inward worship and silence, including little to no music (we become more bonded to each other through silent meditation, prayer and reflection), to those who place high value on shared vocal ministry through messages and music within the context of how we may be led to that vocal and musical worship (we become more bonded to each other through shared stories/messages.)*

*Some would be more content with a manner of worship more akin to unprogrammed meetings. Some come specifically to CFM because we are semi-programmed, noting that there are other options for unprogrammed Quaker meetings within our community for those who prefer that style of worship.*

*Within our diversity, we are in overall agreement that the role of CFM is to continue our following of theology and Quaker worship within the framework of a semi-programmed Meeting, with the expressed mission of being an open and affirming congregation.*

### **Pastoral/Ministerial leading**

There is consensus that the congregation places high value on being a pastoral meeting with a paid minister. A paid minister affords us the ability to speak as “one voice” in the community, to be representative of us as a community, as well as serve as the voice for Quakers overall. The role of Public Friend for the minister is very important in helping us as a meeting and Quakers overall to remain relevant within the community, to have our testimonies and service shared with other faith communities and the public at large.

A paid minister is very important within a community as diverse as CFM. She/he can listen and minister to individual needs and concerns while ministering to the overall community and building consensus among varying leadings for the good of the meeting.

A paid minister also performs a very important administrative function. With CFM being more a commuter meeting than a neighborhood meeting, this is even more important. Planning, coordination, management and business functions work best with one central person knowledgeable about the internal and external functions of the meeting. Part of that administrative function includes maintaining office hours, counseling, visitation and supervision of staff.

We expect our paid minister to be a visionary, to move us beyond theory to practice, to foster the spiritual growth of individuals and the meeting overall. She/he should be a person of integrity and openness and have the ability to know when to lead and guide and when to foster working together.

A vocal message during worship each week helps with focusing and centering down. A paid minister can bring this to us, but we need not rely solely on a minister to share vocal ministry. There is value in hearing other voices. The minister should be open and supportive of having a vocal ministry in which members/attenders of the congregation participate. It is also important to have a minister to lead us in such areas as funerals, weddings and other occasions.

Our minister should have knowledge of Quaker history and be able to guide us along our path in understanding that history and how it relates to us today. She/he should have strong inter-personal skills, be spirit-led, be accessible, honest, flexible and caring, be open to diversity and be “in tune” with the Meeting’s overall leadings in regards to worship, community-building, and social issues, someone the Meeting can see and feel truly accepts and lives the instruction to see that of God in everyone. She/he must be a person who can work with inter-generational members/attenders.

We want a minister to not only provide leadership when necessary, but to be a consensus-builder as well, to help us to deeply and patiently listen to differing viewpoints, and be a part of building our “beloved community.”

*Conclusion: We have consensus that it is our desire to move forward as a pastoral Meeting, with a paid minister to serve the congregation not only as minister but as counselor when needed, as well as serving as Public Friend. We highly value the role of Public Friend in assuring that the voice and visibility of Quakers is actively present in the community in activities and issues that align with our testimonies, values and mission – that Quaker relevance in our community in many ways depends on the commitment and work of our paid pastor/minister. We are also in consensus that our paid pastor/minister must come from a Quaker background, knowledge-base, and represent in his/her life adherence to our Quaker testimonies – a person of integrity who believes in truth, justice, equality and building a community for all seekers.*

*We value as well the importance of the administrative role of a paid pastor/minister, especially with our current status as a small congregation that is having difficulty filling all positions within the Meeting and completing tasks, such as supervision of employees, scheduling, coordination, prepared messages, providing theological and Quaker-based support for committees, teaching Quaker 101 Class, etc.*

## **Transition (Visioning)**

Who are we now and who do we feel led to be? As CFM is moving beyond our 200<sup>th</sup> year, we find ourselves at a crossroads that speaks to the diversity within our Meeting in ways that are both contradictory and affirming. What some find as strengths, others see as weaknesses. What some see as threats, others find to be opportunities. This “state of contradiction” can be seen in the following:

For some there is great comfort in that we are a contemplative meeting with a strong desire for inward seeking and personal spiritual growth, that we are a place of such spiritual depth that it causes some to drive many miles to be a part of the community. This inward seeking within a contemplative setting can be seen in the number of classes and groups we have now and have had over the past few years, including the time we had a paid minister, who responded to the urging of the overall congregation for these kinds of groups and classes.

For others, while accepting the comfort and assurance that comes with being a contemplative meeting, the strong focus on the inward spiritual journey alone does not encourage and/or “energize” the Meeting into having a commitment to an outward expression of faith as well, i.e. active Quaker presence in the community; that the inward focus is one factor that leads to us being more apart from the external community than a part of it.

Our strengths and current status as a Meeting lend themselves intricately to our focus as a contemplative Meeting. Those involved in our classes and group, including in the planning, coordination and attendance, are primarily older (chronologically) members/attenders who are a more reflective stage of their lives, who are perhaps more open to inward seeking due to their range of life experiences. Some believe that this is more the Quaker Way, that we grow in our spirituality and community through this contemplative focus.

The contemplative focus does not require additional expenditures of resources, including money and time. Our groups/classes can be initiated by any interested member/attender who has others who shares the same interests. There is usually no cost or only minimal cost. There is no need to be concerned about the number of people who will be involved. If three people are interested in a class, there can be a class. We can coordinate our classes/groups without the leading/support of a paid minister.

Our physical location (our Meeting House and grounds) highly supports our contemplative focus. Serenity, sanctuary, safe haven – these words were used

frequently in responses related to our Meeting House. Set back on five secluded acres, the very views from the windows lend themselves to inward reflection.

When responding to how we might use the Meeting House in ways other than how we are using it now, responses from those who have a deep level of comfort with our current contemplative focus centered around reaching out beyond us to the community by making the Meeting House a retreat, a spiritual retreat, a spiritual nurture center in which those beyond our own Meeting would be most welcome to enjoy. There was a level of energy when speaking about extending our spiritual and nurturing environment with others, irrespective of a particular faith/denomination.

For others, while they find much value in the contemplative nature of our Meeting for themselves, they have much concern for the external leadings that have been so much of the fabric of living the Quaker testimonies in an outward and active manner, such as more concern for involvement in the life of the community. While we make annual allocations, either through our budget or in “targeted” efforts (serving dinner at Tender Mercies) and while we support such community efforts as the Free Store, Bethany House, Tender Mercies, the “real” involvement of individual members/attenders and the Meeting as a whole does not fully meet the perceptions of those who are led to believe that we are required by our testimonies to be more “active.” While we belong to MARCC and IJPC and have representation within these community organizations, the Meeting as a community does not participate actively in issues identified by these groups.

We support the ministries of Cathy Barney (Artsy Fartsy) and Luke and Angela Ebner (Eco-Garden) but few of us are actively involved except in providing some funding support and with prayers.

Some firmly believe that we should be a place where people can come and get away from responsibilities and commitments (as relates to activities/service) and that we should always make sure we are an open and welcoming place for those who don’t want to be asked to do something, to serve on some committee, or take some action, but who want to be with us for spiritual solace, guidance and support only.

Some asked “are we resting on our laurels and living off our endowment?”, referring to the rich history of those who have been members of our Meeting over 200 years and to the fact that if it were not for the efforts of others who came before us who left endowments, including funds for a hired minister, we would not be able to sustain ourselves financially.

“Faith without action is wimping out,” was one statement from those who first were drawn to Quakerism because of its known tradition and history of social activism. Overall, those with a passion and/or concern for social activism shared their concerns that throughout history Quakerism has been relevant because of its outward work in the world and if we do not participate actively in the community and world around us we risk becoming less relevant or no longer relevant at all. It is our willingness to be led to an active faith that sets us apart from some other denominations but that could also make us a valued ally in other denominations who share similar testimonies (Brethren, Mennonites, etc.)

When responding to queries related to uses for our Meeting House beyond what we are doing now, the responses were more “externally” based than those who have a deep level of commitment to our contemplative focus. Responses included building a pre-school or school; opening the Meeting House to concerts, recitals and other community events; inviting groups like AA to meet in our Meeting House; making our library a “state of the art” peace library where anyone concerned about peace and justice could come and use the library; marketing our Meeting House as an event center; doing more with our trail – put out signs along the trail with Quaker testimonies and quotes – advertise the trail, have walks or events – things that are “do-able” and that do not require a high level of resources, but that seem to require more resources than we have now.

This group was also more interested in communication and marketing, including paid advertising, more consistent efforts with social media, ongoing, consistent publicity. Unlike with the more contemplative suggestions, these suggestions would all require more commitment of resources, including people, money and time and so pose many more obstacles in addressing them.

We find contradictions when it comes to discerning issues related to the size of the meeting (number of members/attenders) and to “growing” the Meeting.

Some (generally those who are more contemplative focused) feel strongly that we are fine the way we are now, that the number of members/attenders allow us to worship together more deeply, more in the Quaker Way, to feel a sense of closeness and community with each other that having more numbers would lessen, that we have always been small in numbers and have continued to be an open and caring community of Quakers over generations. There is no reason to believe that that will not continue.

Some feel that we do need to have some growth in membership/attenders, but with no desire to become a “mega-church.” Such growth should be enough to allow us to

sustain ourselves, financially, for the “business” of the Meeting and the continuation of the Meeting as a voice for Quakerism and our testimonies.

Some face burn out, weariness, lack of energy, and little excitement when we have too few people asked to do too many things. We have had the same two to three Clerks of Meeting over and over again for many years. Some of this is due to the interest and love for the Meeting of those serving as Clerk, but also because there frequently is no one to step up and take on the responsibility. Our Nominating Committee has been unable to fill all of the Committee openings, including for Ministry and Counsel, where again we see the same members serving time after time.

We are an older/aging congregation as well and there is concern that if there is not some growth, especially with younger members/attenders and families, there may come a time when we are no longer able to maintain ourselves as a Meeting and may need to consider laying our Meeting down. This concern is not meant as a threat but as a deeply felt concern and fear.

Others expressed that we are not fully living our lives in the Quaker Way if we are not more “active”, both in our own spiritual development and journey and in our reaching out to share the good news about Quakers and Quaker testimonies. Are we content hiding our light under a barrel was one question asked. Are we willing to take action to let this little light of mine shine was another question.

Those with a more active/external focus welcome the thought of change and growth so that we can meet the needs of those who are older and ready for a more contemplative time in their spiritual journey while also providing opportunities for those interested in the social activist “arm” of Quakerism and the Meeting to realize their faith as those who are contemplative are realizing theirs.

The resources necessary for a more outward expression of who we are is always a consideration. We may wish to promote, publicize, market ourselves on a more consistent basis, such as opening up our classes and groups to others through invitation, but that requires people to do that and funds to support that, always difficult when we cannot get enough people to fill our committees. One person was so excited about the possibility that she shared she would welcome becoming our publicity coordinator.

One concern noted was the small number of Quakers not only within our Meeting, but in the world today, which puts additional stress on Meetings like ours to “stay the course”



and carry on with the traditions, history and legacy of Quakers, so that all shall know us by our work.

There was an expression that we should not seek change (which includes growth) but wait to be led and then following the leading(s). That is what Quakers should do, not precipitate change but allow room for change if we are led to it.

Some are weary while others feel that there is a spark that has not yet made itself fully known but is waiting to ignite.

We find ourselves again in contradiction when we talk about how weary we are, how some are bone-tired, physically burnt-out, spiritually drained to some measure. At the same time that we acknowledge our weariness, some of which comes from our own personal aging and some from being too involved for too long without a break, we also affirm that there is something happening within the Meeting, some yearning, some dream perhaps of things to come and that comes without regards to chronological age. We can be chronologically older but be spiritually filled with energy and excitement.

This process has verified to us the calling of Quakers to be spiritual and social activists, as were those who came before us. We are relevant to the world, to our community and to our congregation. What shape that relevancy takes as we move forward is now up to us to discern, and following discernment, to do.

*Conclusion: When in discernment regarding who we are and who we want to be as we move beyond our 200<sup>th</sup> year and as we prepare to welcome a new minister, our divergent leadings came to light in an atmosphere of caring and supportive worship sharing. It was a challenging and sometimes difficult process to remain in worship sharing due to the level of passion related to our discussion and to our Meeting.*

*We discerned that there are elements far beyond our ability to control that have direct impact on the relevance of Quakers in the world today and, ultimately, to whom we are as Cincinnati Friends Meeting. Elements such as the overall decrease, particularly in our country, of people attending a church or house of worship; the rise and popularity of meg-churches that offer so many activities; social media's impact on the ability and/or interest of people to worship in the way Quakers worship – all of these elements and more are now and will continue to be out of our control.*

*With that as background, our divergence in responses to such issues as growth of the Meeting give us pause for thought as we move forward. Our responses also illustrate some of the concerns that will be facing our new pastor/minister. He/she must be*

*prepared to join us at a time when there are members/attenders who want to remain as we are in such areas as our manner and form of worship and the size of our congregation.*

*Others do see the need for some growth in order to meet current needs and concerns in a way that does not lead to physical and spiritual burn-out and weariness that comes with a small congregation but are cautious about approaches to how that growth may be achieved. Others believe that we have an obligation to work to keep our Meeting relevant in the external world and within our own community and express that we should be more active not only in social concerns but in growing our Meeting, to share the good news about the Quaker way of life. There is concern with how long we can continue at our current level of members/attenders as it relates to physical and financial needs as well.*

*There have been some negative outcomes within the Meeting that can be related to the size of the Meeting and to leadership, such as personal conflicts, conflicts within various committees, which may be attributed to the underlying divergent views on what we are doing and what some feel we should be doing. With some of those concerns surfacing during our discernment process, they may likely lead to additional conflict. We need to ask ourselves what we will do to follow up from what we learned during our process. Did we ask questions just to see what we would answer, or did we ask questions to lead us into a call for action, with that action still to be discerned?*

*For a new pastor/minister and for visitors to our Meeting, we appear as a small, aging, deeply spiritual and welcoming congregation with a high degree of contentment with our contemplative form of worship and expression and the way we see who we are as Quakers in the world today. They may also find that there is an undercurrent of discontent related to what may seem like an overwhelming focus on the inward while there is a yearning and leading to actively engage, live and fulfill our Quaker testimonies through a commitment to outward expressions as well. How to balance these divergent passions and leadings will continue to provide us both challenges and opportunities.*

## *Appendix*

### **Discernment Transition Queries**

#### **Theology**

Before Cincinnati Friends decided to proceed with Quaker Quest, several people said that there was something good about our Meeting that should be shared with others who do not know about Quakers. From your experience, what is that good thing that needs to be shared?

What experiences have you had at Cincinnati Friends that have enriched you and nurtured your spiritual growth?

In your experience, what happens during meeting for worship?

What is your understanding of God?

What do you think we mean we ask that people be “held in the Light” at the end of worship?

Early Friends were called “Children of the Light.” Today we talk of “minding the Light” or “walking in the Light.” What does that mean to you?

How do you understand the idea of “God’s continuing revelation?” How does it fit with the authority of the scriptures or with the messages of paid ministers?

Friends do not have a creed that is repeated during worship. Does this mean that there are no boundaries on what we can believe and still call ourselves Friends? How are the Quaker testimonies to be understood?

Friends do not have rituals such as communion and baptism. Why do you think early friends decided not to have rituals? Do you feel as if you are missing something by not having rituals?

How would you describe the book called the Bible? Has the way you read the Bible changed over the years? If so, how? How important is it for you to read the Bible in your home and worship?

Friends in our Meeting don't talk much about salvation or being saved. We do not ask each other if we are saved, nor have altar calls to be saved. What would your answer be if you were asked if you were saved?

Do you think God favors Christians and Christianity?

Is Christianity more about believing or doing? What does the Quaker saying "Let your lives speak" mean to you?

We are asked to speak from our own experiences when we talk about our spiritual life. If our faith is made up of our individual experiences, how do we know they are Truth?

### **Pastoral leadership**

Do you value the services of a paid minister? What do you discern to be the role of a paid minister in our Meeting?

What qualities are important to you personally in a minister?

What qualities in a minister would you like to avoid?

How important is it to you that the minister has a Quaker background, knowledge of Quaker history, understanding of Quaker principles, and/or membership in the Religious Society of Friends?

What types of messages from the minister speak to your condition?

Are regular office hours for the minister important to you? How do you generally interact with the minister?

In what ways has a minister influenced your spiritual growth in the past? In what ways would you like to be challenged in the future?

## Visioning

People looking for a place where they can have power are often drawn to churches. Where is the power in a Quaker Meeting? Is there a place for power in our Meeting activities?

What do you discern to be the relevance of Quakers in the world today – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats?

What do you discern to be the relevance of Cincinnati Friends Meeting in relationship to other Quaker organizations, groups and service in the world?

What do you discern to be the relevance of Cincinnati Friends Meeting in relationship to our neighbors and communities?

What do you discern to be the relevance of Cincinnati Friends Meeting to individual members/attenders?

What do you discern to be the most important part of your relationship with Cincinnati Friends Meeting?

What do you struggle with as part of your relationship with Cincinnati Friends Meeting?

How does the location of the Meeting House define who we are and what we do as Cincinnati Friends Meeting and as Quakers in the wider community?

What are other possible uses for our Meeting House and grounds?

What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with the Meeting House in relation to furthering and fulfilling the short-term and long-term purpose, mission and vision of Cincinnati Friends Meeting?

How does the current focus of the Meeting relate to the overall role and function that may be necessary for Quakers in the world and community today?

How does the current focus of the Meeting allow, encourage, support and challenge members and attenders to seek to fulfill our Quaker testimonies?

Does the current focus of the Meeting inhibit or encourage growth, both spiritually and growth in the number of attenders/members?

For 2015 and beyond, what kind of Meeting do we want to be, in accordance with the leading of the Spirit?

Do we need to make a change in our approach (more active and focused marketing, for example) to encourage growth and ministry from within the Meeting?

What needs do you think are not being met that would encourage new members and attenders to join us while keeping current members/attenders active and involved? (These might include programs for children or seniors, service opportunities, advocacy at the local and national level for relevant issues, etc.)

Are we open to change, even radical change, as we may be led to it, or do we seek to maintain our current focus?