

Introduction

The need for a book describing Intermountain Yearly Meeting rose out of the same impulse toward order as was recognized during the early years of the Religious Society of Friends. What early Friends called a “book of discipline”* evolved from minutes describing guidelines that Friends found enabled them to carry out actions consistent with their faith. It described the basic framework of monthly, quarterly (or regional), and yearly meetings set up by the founder, George Fox. Not long after its founding, the Society realized that, in order to assess the health and progress of Friends, certain information was needed. Focused questions, now called *queries*, were formulated to gather this information. In 1791, the first *advices* were adopted. Together, the advices and queries reminded Friends (and still do) of the basic faith and principles held to be essential to the life and witness of the Religious Society of Friends. This collection of materials, with periodic revisions, served both as records and guides, never as rules or creeds, and was open to change as times and society changed. A Quaker book of discipline, also called a *faith and practice*, sets forth our current understanding of how we are organized, what we believe, and how our lives bear witness to what we believe.

Intermountain Yearly Meeting began in the 1960s, as a fellowship of Friends. In 1974, it became a yearly meeting. Unlike other yearly meetings, ours did not evolve as an outgrowth of a pre-existing yearly meeting. Because it developed independently, it had no *Faith and Practice* to guide its constituent monthly meetings. Between 1976 and 1979, Friends created the *Guide to Clerks and Monthly Meetings*, which later became *The Guide for the Operations of Intermountain Yearly Meeting*. In 1993, Intermountain Yearly Meeting created a committee charged with developing a *Faith and Practice*. In 1998, we adopted the 2nd edition of North Pacific Meeting’s *Faith and Practice* (1993), pending development of our own.

This present version, in response to the changes that have occurred over time, attempts to describe Intermountain Yearly Meeting and the Society of Friends both as we were and as we are now. Advices and queries help us see if we are living our faith in Truth and ask us to be honest with ourselves. At the same time, our *Faith and Practice* reminds us of what joins us in the Spirit despite the great variety of ways Friends experience and express that Spirit moving in, through, and among us in the world. Such differences are valuable for the breadth and richness they bring to our Society.

A word about the words we use: early Friends used words that described their experience—*seed* and *light* come to mind. This allowed both an openness and a precision that could easily have been lost if they had prescribed or limited the words available to them. To strengthen the understanding of our own experience, we look to the experience and understanding of others. We listen as others describe their experiences in their words, and work to describe our own experiences as best we can using our own words. Language is precise when it opens doors and illuminates broad vistas. Please feel free to interpret the language of this work in ways that open up the world for you beyond the limits of your material senses.

This book explores the current practices and ways of living of Intermountain Yearly Meeting Friends. It reminds us of what Quakers believe and how they are to behave. It is not a book of prayer or liturgy. Our *Faith and Practice*

- reflects not our individuality but the spirit of our corporate body;
- shows us how to live and act as Friends in our meetings;
- guides and advises us as we seek our way through the confusions of our world;
- reminds us that we are Friends and that we continue to be led by the inward Spirit;
- directs our actions as Friends in our communities;
- shows our commonality despite the breadth and variety of our beliefs;
- helps each of us, new to or familiar with Friends, to learn more about who we are and how we do things;
- helps us maintain order in practicing our faith;
- reminds us of who we are and what it is that joins us in God’s spirit;
- declares that we care about who we are and what we believe and consider it worth sharing.

It has been a long journey!