

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

GETTING THE FAMILY TOGETHER AGAIN:  
RESTORING MIDDLELEVEL CONNECTIONS  
IN NORTHWEST YEARLY MEETING OF FRIENDS

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BY

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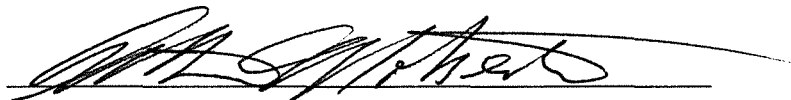
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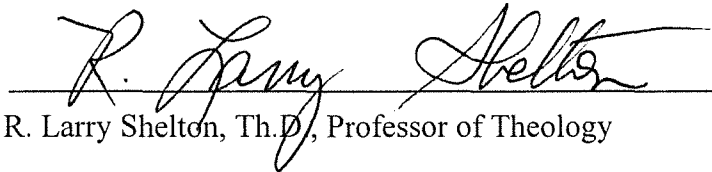
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We, the undersigned, certify that we have read this thesis and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation degree.



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## CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS . . . . .	v
ABSTRACT . . . . .	vii
Chapter	
1. WHEN FRIENDS LOSE TOUCH . . . . .	1
Vocabulary and Acronyms	
The Broader Cultural Context of Friends in the Northwest	
Overview	
Literature Review	
2. THE SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT FOR CHRISTIAN CONNECTION . . . . .	22
The Words and Images of the New Testament Church	
Scriptural Calls for Connection	
The Beginnings of Structure in the Church	
3. THE QUAKER BEGINNINGS: HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ROOTS . . . . .	50
Origins	
The True Church	
The Beginnings of Order and Polity Among Friends	
Conclusion	
4. 20 <sup>TH</sup> CENTURY POLITY ADJUSTMENTS IN NWYM . . . . .	77
Structural Changes Among Friends of NWYM	

The “Needs” That Precipitated These Changes	
The Theological and Polity Implications of These Changes	
Where Do We Go From Here?	
5. PRESBYTERIAN POLITY AND PRACTICE . . . . .	97
A Rationale for Examining Presbyterian Polity	
The Role of Presbytery as a Midlevel Structure	
A Preliminary Observation	
Current Issues in the Presbyterian Church	
Functions of Denominational Structure	
Conclusion	
6. PROPOSALS FOR RECONNECTING THE FAMILY . . . . .	117
Theoretical Guides	
Proposals for Rebuilding Connections in NWYM	
Conclusion	
Appendix . . . . .	146
SOURCES CITED . . . . .	151

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## ABSTRACT

Title: GETTING THE FAMILY TOGETHER AGAIN: RESTORING MIDDLELEVEL CONNECTIONS IN NORTHWEST YEARLY MEETING OF FRIENDS

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Historically Friends (Quakers) have had a polity that reflected the denomination's strong sense of community with a structure and traditions that enabled practical caring for one another and accountability to one another. This community extended beyond local congregations to include Friends in other places. In the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the American group of Quakers known as Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends made structural changes to their midlevel connections, the Quarterly Meeting, that were intended to help the church operate more efficiently. Unfortunately, a related and unintended consequence was to reduce communication and connection between and among their congregations. These changes, taking place concurrently with broader cultural trends in America of localism and devaluation of denominations, have resulted in a mindset among many evangelical Friends in the Pacific Northwest that can be described as *de facto* congregationalism. The problem for which this dissertation pursues some resolution is how to restore meaningful connection among the congregations of

Northwest Yearly Meeting in order to enable a healthy “extended family,” and faithfulness to a Friends understanding of the Church.

The narrative of Chapter 1 establishes the context of the problem both for Friends in Northwest Yearly Meeting and in the broader culture. The chapter also includes a section on vocabulary and acronyms peculiar to Friends in general and this specific group of Friends.

Chapter 2 explores New Testament images of the church and specifically the community and relational aspects of the church, showing that the isolated and individualistic Christianity of some 21<sup>st</sup> century North Americans is far removed from the New Testament view of the church.

Chapter 3 describes the beginnings of the Friends movement in 17<sup>th</sup> century England with special attention to the concept of the church that George Fox and other early Friends held, showing a pattern of accountability and caring across local group boundaries.

Chapter 4 documents the changes made in NWYM in recent decades that altered the structure and consequently the polity of this group of Friends. Chapter 5 explores Presbyterians in the U.S. as a kind of “control group” to compare polity and practice.

Chapter 6 offers specific proposals, both informal and formal, for restoring meaningful connection between the congregations of NWYM of Friends.



## Chapter 1

### WHEN FRIENDS LOSE TOUCH

Ronald's intercom buzzed and the secretary announced that Martha, his 10:00 appointment, was here. He felt a bit of foreboding as he went to open the office door for her. He knew Martha was in town primarily to visit family, but he also knew there was something troubling her about one of the churches in the area she represented on the Council of Elders. As General Superintendent Ronald had come to respect all of the volunteers from around the Yearly Meeting who served on the Council. He would not want to serve as Superintendent without their support, encouragement and counsel. But still, he did not need anymore problems to handle.

Martha was especially constructive, he thought hopefully. Her wisdom and insight had often been an important help to him and the Council as they worked through issues that needed resolution in local congregations. He wondered what problem Martha came to tell him about today, but he thought it likely had to do with the recent Response Team that the Elders had sent to the Woodview Friends Church in the area she represented.

The Response Teams were a new effort by the Council of Elders to send volunteers from other Friends Churches into local congregations that faced some sort of crisis to see if they could be of assistance. The teams included people with expertise in the areas of need in that local church. Perhaps the financial records needed audited, or conflict required mediation, or the congregation just could not seem to find clarity about

its particular mission. Martha likely wanted to talk about the team that had been sent to meet with local Elders who were convinced they needed to terminate their pastor, but they were about to do so in a most inappropriate way. Ronald's apprehension in talking about this troubled church was lessened by the fact that he knew Martha well enough to know that she would have specific suggestions and they would be constructive.

"Hello, Friend," he said warmly as he welcomed her to his office. Martha and her husband and he and his wife had sustained a life-long friendship. They all had gone to church camp together as kids, socialized while attending their denominational college, attended each other's weddings, and eventually sent their kids to those same camps they had attended as children and youth. For several years they had worked as leaders in Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends. With only slightly more than 50 congregations in the denomination, and most of those relatively small and spread over the states of Oregon, Washington and Idaho, it was common for leaders to know each other well, and even to know a lot about each other's congregations.

"It's great to see you! Tell me how the kids are...and Hal," Ronald said as they sat down at a small table. After a few minutes of sharing family news, Ronald directed the conversation to the issue at hand. "I know you didn't stop by just to catch me up-to-date on the family, Martha. What's going on?"

"I got a report from the Response Team that visited Woodview, and things are even worse than I feared. The Clerk of the team reported that when they sat down with the local Elders the tension was heavy and it soon became apparent that the Response Team was not welcome. One of the local Elders actually said to Tom, 'Who do you people think you are? What right do you have to interfere in the affairs of our

congregation?’ Tom said the resistance and resentment was pretty much typical from all of the local Elders. Even though they were in fact the ones who had requested the team’s visit, it was pretty clear they did so only because they wanted to be sure their views had been heard because they knew their pastor had already talked with the Council of Elders.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, Martha, but it’s not the first time I’ve heard of a reaction like that from local elders to a Team sent by the yearly meeting Council. In fact, I often get similar reactions to my own visits! Sometimes I consider myself fortunate if I’m ignored when I visit a congregation for Sunday worship – that’s better than being verbally attacked!”

“What’s wrong with us, Ron? Why would Christian people ignore anyone, let alone a Superintendent who is their chosen leader? I guess I understand the frustration and anger from local leaders when they’re facing some sort of crisis. Much of that is to be expected, I suppose. But it grieves me that we have such a poor relationship with so many churches...so poor that they don’t understand we only want to help, and even worse, they don’t see that it is both our right and our responsibility to intervene! But the good news at Woodview is that after several meetings, the issues between the elders and their pastor were resolved and just as important, the relationships between the elders and the Team members had moved in a much better direction. Tom said that when it came time for the Response Team to leave, the elders expressed great appreciation for the help and said things like, ‘I don’t know how we could have done this without you!’ So it ended in a positive way, but I’m sorry it started so badly and I think that other Response Teams are likely to have similar chilly welcomes from local congregations, because there

is something deeper here, Ron, than just the specific problems at Woodview. That's why I'm still concerned."

"Tell me what you mean, Martha." This was exactly why Ronald valued elders like Martha. He knew she was about to get at something that really mattered.

"The initial reaction of the elders at Woodview tells us how they think of themselves as a congregation. Perhaps there was some embarrassment at their situation becoming known among yearly meeting leaders and the visit by the Response Team. I'm sure that was part of it for some of those elders. But what their reception really tells us, Ron, is that the folks at Woodview Friends Church think of themselves as an independent congregation. Those elders were utterly sincere when they asked Tom and his team, 'What business do you have interfering in the affairs of our congregation?'"

"I think you're probably right, Martha. I know that when it comes time for churches to make a pastoral change, many of them don't call for my assistance. They just go out and look for a pastor on their own, and often without regard to the person's denominational background. If I try to insist that congregations look at Friends pastoral candidates, I'm often told, 'We want the best pastor we can get regardless of denominational background.'"

"I can believe it, Ron. That's just another symptom of the same thing I'm talking about. And still another symptom is the discussion at yearly meeting the last few years about changes to the wording in *Faith and Practice* about titles to property. You and I both know that legally the Yearly Meeting owns the properties of the various congregations of the denomination because we are a connectional church. But the discussion has made it clear that many of the representatives coming from local churches

have not clearly understood our connectional polity, and they are shocked to hear that if there was ever a dispute between their church and the yearly meeting that they could lose their buildings.”

“But Martha, I think the discussion has made it clear that this has always been the case and that it’s only minor word changes that are proposed in order to satisfy the denomination’s legal counsel. The fact that the Yearly Meeting owns the property is one of the main defenses we have against some pastor or strong-willed group of church leaders deciding to go off on their own and pull out of the denomination. You know that almost happened a few years ago at the Metro Church.”

“Yes, Ron, I know that’s true. But does it really have to get to that point before we can do something about it? That seems like using a ‘nuclear bomb’ when sitting down and talking much earlier in the process could avoid a fight in the first place and would be so much more redemptive.”

“But when it gets to that point, Martha, we have to use our leverage. We simply can’t let congregations walk away with assets that likely have been in part built up by the sacrificial giving of people all over the Yearly Meeting. It belongs to *all* of the church, not just that local congregation! Besides, it has to do with our understanding of the church as a whole; it’s really a theological issue as well as a very practical one.”

“I agree, Ron, when you speak of *all* the church. That’s part of my concern. We’ve lost our sense of the bigger ‘family’ of Friends...call it the ‘extended family.’ We now each focus so much on our own individual congregation that we have no interest in, no concern for, and no sense of connection to other congregations. It’s like we’ve divorced ourselves from the rest of the family.”

“Your family metaphor has lots of positive association with it, Martha, but there’s also a down side to it. One of the things that concerns me as Superintendent is that we haven’t grown as a Yearly Meeting. Though there have been ups and downs over the years, the number of congregations is about the same as it was three decades ago and so is Sunday morning worship attendance.<sup>1</sup> And financial support of the yearly meeting programs has been at a plateau for many years, which actually means a decline in real dollars. My own theory about the stagnancy of the yearly meeting is that we’re too insular. We’re too ingrown. We’re *too* family oriented, Martha!”

“I agree that we’re too insular, Ron, but I disagree with you about being ‘*too*’ family oriented. The issue is what *kind* of family we are. You know how some families stick to themselves and never let anybody else really get close, but other families just always seem to be growing with ‘adopted’ members? Those families have wide open arms that welcome everybody in as if there’s plenty of love to share, plenty of food for all, and plenty of concern to focus on others. That’s the kind of ‘family’ I want us to be! But as it is now we not only don’t have room to ‘adopt’ anybody, we don’t even care about our sisters and brothers down the road!”

“When you and I were young adults, Ron, there were structures in place, and more importantly an *attitude* that would have prevented a congregation from ever getting close to the possibility of thinking it could ‘pull out’ of the Yearly Meeting. Doctrinal concerns, church conflicts, or other serious matters were known much earlier than they are now. Things just rarely ever got as far as having to claim ownership of property!”

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<sup>1</sup> Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends Church, *Minutes* Held at Newberg, Oregon, August 13-19, 1973 (Newberg, OR: Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends Church, 1973), 101; Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends Church, *Minutes* Held at Newberg, Oregon, July 19-25, 2003 (Newberg, OR: Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends Church, 2003), 76.

“I guess there were more checks and balances back then, Martha. When congregations took answering the Queries seriously, and when they were clearly part of a Quarterly Meeting, there was just so much more awareness of what was going on among the churches, by *all* the churches in an area. That’s what we’ve lost, isn’t it? Is that what you’re getting at, Martha? But do you really want to restore Quarterly Meeting? To be honest, I don’t think that will ever happen! There were some good reasons to get rid of Quarterly Meeting and I just don’t think it’s possible to bring it back—or that we should.”

“I don’t think so either, Ron. I don’t want to go back to Quarterly Meetings. Yet some how we have to restore the sense of connection that we once had among the congregations. This is an age of ‘localism’ and there are unhealthy trends in our yearly meeting that make me think we are falling into some of the traps associated with that. What the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 12:2 about not being conformed to the world applies to the *church* also, not just individuals! It scares me to think of how we treat the church like just any other ‘voluntary association.’ We’re fast losing our sense of ‘extended family’ as a denomination – that sense of belonging to one another beyond local boundaries. Strong and healthy families don’t just ignore each other, Ron. There’s the problem: How to restore meaningful connection among the congregations of Northwest Yearly Meeting in order to be a healthy ‘extended family,’ and stay faithful to our understanding of the Church.”

Though Ron, Martha and the others of this story are fictitious characters, and though there are no actual Woodview and Metro Friends Churches, together these characters and congregations comprise a composite that does portray reality in the

Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends. This dissertation will show that the midlevel connections among Friends in the northwest are in a considerably weakened state. It is postulated here, and I will argue in Chapter 4, that this is a factor of cultural trends and the unfortunate parallel timing of well-intentioned structural changes by NWYM. The resulting circumstances have made more likely a way of thinking about the church that is unhealthy for Friends. It is time to give due consideration to the polity and theological implications of what has occurred in the last 35 years, and it is time to be intentional about rebuilding meaningful connections among Friends in Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends.

### Vocabulary and Acronyms

For readers not familiar with the special vocabulary of Friends, and even for Friends who are not part of the particular Yearly Meeting that is the focus of this work, it is helpful to review some of the specialized vocabulary and resulting acronyms that are part of the everyday speech of the “insiders” of this group, and most of which will appear one place or another in this dissertation.

To begin, the very terminology used by Friends to refer to their local congregations and denomination seems strange to those unfamiliar with it. Though anachronistic, this terminology has its roots in the functional structure of the early movement. Local congregations gathered monthly in a special meeting for worship and decision-making and so the practice grew of referring to local congregations by the phrase **Monthly Meeting**, typically modified by the geographical location. To use the fictitious name of the congregation mentioned in the narrative above, among early



Friends this group would have been known as “Woodview Monthly Meeting.” The several monthly meetings in a particular geographical area (in England typically a county) would send representatives to an area-wide meeting held every three months called a **Quarterly Meeting**. As Chapter 4 will make clear, Quarterly Meetings as a part of the structure of NWYM, were significantly altered in the late 1960’s and are now known as **Area Meetings**. Annually the various Quarterly Meetings met in a central location to conduct worship and business as a meeting of the whole, called **Yearly Meeting**. Chapter 3 describes in more detail the origin of this structure of meetings.

In the first years of the movement adherents used a variety of words and phrases to refer to their group. Often they spoke of the **Children of the Light** or of the **People of the Covenant**. The term **Quaker** was a nickname given them by their opponents and was intended as a term of derision, poking fun of their frequent sense of awe in the presence of God. Eventually, and despite the objection of some in the movement, that term was accepted and used by group members themselves. The term **Friends** was one often used by George Fox, credited with founding the movement, when he wrote epistles to various congregations. Fox used that term as a term of endearment more than as a name for the movement. The nomenclature used by some Friends and often found as the label used in dictionaries, almanacs, etc. is **The Religious Society of Friends**, but that phrase was not used until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, long after the founders of the movement were dead, and says more about 18<sup>th</sup> century vocabulary usages than it does either 17<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century ones.

Many Friends in America began to use “church” language in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. That is why “Woodview Monthly Meeting” is now more likely to be known as

“Woodview Friends Church.” It is common to find mixed terminology among Friends with some local groups still referring to themselves as a Monthly Meeting, and others referring to themselves as a Friends Church. **Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends Church** is a yearly meeting with congregations in the states of the Pacific Northwest of the United States. In an earlier period this same group of Friends was known as **Oregon Yearly Meeting of Friends (OYM)** because its headquarters was located in the state of Oregon. Many yearly meetings in America began to change their names about three decades ago to more accurately reflect the geographical territory in which they have churches, and also to be sensitive to the feelings of Friends who lived outside the boundaries of the headquarters state of that Yearly Meeting. The nomenclature “Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends” is a more accurate phrase for this yearly meeting because it includes those who live in Washington and Idaho. Most Friends commonly shorten the name of their Yearly Meeting, thus Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends Church is more commonly referred to as Northwest Yearly Meeting, and in writing with the acronym **NWYM**.

In the United States there are more than thirty Yearly Meetings. Yearly Meetings should not be confused with the term “conference” used in many Christian denominations. Each Yearly Meeting is legally independent of all the others. However, over the years, many Yearly Meetings have formed loose associations that allow them to share certain tasks, such as publications, service and missions. These groupings of Yearly Meetings have basic correspondence with theological leanings of the respective Yearly Meetings. **Friends General Conference (FGC)** is a grouping of Yearly Meetings commonly described as “liberal” theologically. Many Friends in this group

would consider themselves Christians and use Christian language; many other Friends in the group would specifically disavow Christian terminology and theology. Most of the congregations in FGC would be **nonpastoral** and **unprogrammed**. The terminology “nonpastoral” easily suggests the point of the phrase, that these congregations do not have pastors in the traditional Protestant mode. They may have committees designated to carry out “pastoral care” in the sense of visitation, etc. These Meetings are referred to as “unprogrammed” because there is typically no plan to the service other than to meet at an agreed upon time in an agreed upon place, and to worship out of silence and “as the spirit leads.”

At the other end of the spectrum from liberal Friends are the **Orthodox** Friends, so named during a separation that occurred in the United States in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Orthodox Friends considered themselves faithful to the original insights of early Friends which they saw as consistent with the core of traditional Christian teaching concerning the deity of Jesus Christ, the necessity of Christ’s cross for the atonement, etc. Their “opponents” in the separation were those liberal Friends who are now part of FGC.

From the basic group of orthodox Friends, there are three organizational clusters active in the United States today. The largest of these groupings is known as **Friends United Meeting (FUM)**. The Yearly Meetings that comprise this association are Christ-centered, but have some variation in the style of their worship. The majority of congregations in FUM have pastors and a worship style with many similarities common to Protestant worship in the Free Church tradition. Many other congregations in FUM are nonpastoral and unprogrammed.

**Conservative Friends** refers to a handful of small Yearly Meetings that are Christ-centered and very traditional in their practice of Friends worship, conduct of business, etc. These are Friends who would most fit the dictionary definition of a “sect.” They are careful to use traditional Friends vocabulary and procedures. They have maintained an understanding of acceptable spoken ministry in their meetings for worship that is highly stylized, using certain rhythms and patterns of speech that signal to the group that this “message” is inspired of the Lord.

**Evangelical Friends** constitute the third grouping among the Orthodox Friends in America today. The official name of their association in the United States is **Evangelical Friends International – North America Section (EFI)**. This nomenclature is intended to make clear that they are part of a larger grouping of evangelical Friends Yearly Meetings that is international. In fact, the Yearly Meetings in Asia, Africa, Europe, and Central and South America that are part of EFI are the products of missionary efforts of the core North American Yearly Meetings in the association. EFI is a successor association to what was for some years known as the **Evangelical Friends Alliance (EFA)** and that association in turn was a successor of a much looser affiliation known as the **Association of Evangelical Friends (AEF)**. The AEF allowed participation by individuals and by particular Monthly Meetings. The EFA and now EFI are primarily associations of Yearly Meetings without personal or congregational membership. Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends has roots among Orthodox Friends and is part of EFI-North America.

The common term for the presiding officer of a business meeting, or even a committee, is **Clerk**. Usually the distinction between the presiding officer and the

“secretary” is clarified with the modifying terms **Presiding Clerk** and **Recording Clerk**. Originally **Elders** were those of the local Meeting who were given the responsibility to supervise the conduct of worship. This was a different use of the term than some denominations, which refer to Elders as the governing board of the congregation. Among Friends congregations today the term “Elders” generally refers to a leadership group in the church that has broader responsibilities than merely supervising the worship of the group. And in some cases, the Elders are in fact a governing board of the congregation. Originally Friends had a separate group called **Overseers** who cared for membership matters and the fostering of appropriate lifestyles among the members. **Ministers** were those recognized by the Meeting as having a clear gift from the Lord for speaking in Meeting words of prophecy or exhortation or proclamation of truth. Since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century evangelical Friends have recognized some as **Pastors** and they fill roles very similar to most Protestant pastors. Among Friends all pastors are ministers, but not all ministers are pastors; the term minister has broader application.

The narrative that began this chapter contained reference to two groups that are relatively new in the structure of Northwest Yearly Meeting. The **Council of Elders (COE)** has been in existence for about 15 years and is a board of the Yearly Meeting, comprised of twelve members (some pastors, some not) representing the Area Meetings of NWYM, with a few members at-large. The COE last year recruited volunteers from around the Yearly Meeting to serve on **Response Teams** available to visit local churches and aid their local leaders in dealing with acute situations that threaten the health of the local congregation.

Though Friends insist they do not have a “creed,” they have in fact for many years published documents that state basic beliefs and prescribe the normal structural elements of the local, area, and Yearly Meeting entities. Over the period of Northwest Yearly Meeting’s history discussed in this dissertation, the name of this document has changed. At the point in which the Yearly Meeting began to make changes to its Quarterly Meeting structure the document was known as the *Constitution and Discipline*. The same document, as amended over the years, is now known as *Faith and Practice*. Both these titles are used in Chapter 4.

#### The Broader Cultural Context of Friends in the Northwest

Many of the congregations of NWYM show symptoms of localism, consumerism and individualism, just like the broader culture in the United States that some scholars have written about with warning and concern.<sup>2</sup> Though there are exceptions, one could say about the congregations of this denomination of Friends that despite her legal and historic connectional polity this is an association of independent churches, each seeing itself related to the “whole” in about the same way as any Baptist congregation sees itself related to its “Convention.” Indeed that is the way many Friends congregations attempt to function.

Two closely related trends among Christians in the broader culture are especially significant to this occurrence: The decline of “denominationalism,” and the rise of *de*

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Robert N. Bellah, *et al.*, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); David G. Myers, *The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty* (New Haven, CT: Yale Note Bene, 2000); Robert Wuthnow, *Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Reflections on the Challenges Ahead* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

*facto* congregationalism. The focus by American Christians on the local congregation with accompanying disinterest in the larger church and whatever denominational ties exist for their local congregation is a phenomenon that seems to be occurring in churches regardless of polity. Lyle Schaller, one of the premier church consultants of the last 40 years, observes this when noting the general trend across American society that churches with traditional denominational ties (particularly the “mainline” churches) have experienced decline while churches that have no denominational ties, or which specifically minimize the denominational ties they have, are growing.<sup>3</sup>

In describing the decreased role of denominations Schaller also points to the tasks that once were handled almost exclusively by denominations and that are now routinely carried out by parachurch and independent organizations. This includes publication of Christian education materials and training of workers, education of pastors, the sending of missionaries, evangelism programs, and much more.<sup>4</sup>

Robert Wuthnow, Director of the Center for the Study of American Religion at Princeton University, sees this as a factor of a larger cultural trend in America. Writing on the challenges churches face in increasing their influence in society he says:

One is overcoming the increasingly localistic orientation in the society at large. In religion, this orientation encourages people to be active in their congregations but disinterested in denominational activities at the national or international level. This religious-style localism is compounded by the public’s broader distrust of government.<sup>5</sup>

In earlier works Wuthnow also wrote of this disinterest among Christians in denominations. He cites studies showing that,

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<sup>3</sup> Lyle E. Schaller, *It’s a Different World: The Challenge for Today’s Pastor* (Nashville, TN: The Abingdon Press, 1987), 66.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Wuthnow, “The Moral Minority,” *The American Prospect*, II, 13 (22 May 2000), [journal online] (accessed January 2, 2004); available from: <http://www.prospect.org/print/V11/13/wuthnow-r.html>, 5.

Fewer people remain in the denominations in which they were raised, fewer people think their own denomination has a better grasp on the truth than other denominations, and fewer denominations themselves impose creedal tests that people must meet in order to become members or participate in church services. Growing numbers of churches might be characterized as open systems, attempting to embrace everyone, while imposing little on anyone.<sup>6</sup>

Though noting this decreased interest in denominations and their significance, Wuthnow specifically disavows the notion that denominations are now a thing of the past. He expects them to continue to have an important role in American Christianity. But, he writes, “denominationalism has declined in significance *relative* to other cultural divisions and modes of religious identification.”<sup>7</sup>

When writing of *de facto* congregationalism, I refer specifically to the state of many local churches in which the leaders and people, regardless of the official polity of that church, function as if they were independent congregations. The people of these churches think of themselves as having the appropriate rights to focus on their local concerns, make their own decisions, and not only see no need to communicate with “higher” authorities or “sister” congregations, but may also actually resist any such communication.

Examples can be cited from various Christian groups dealing with these cultural trends and beginning to reflect on how they impact their particular churches. John Redekop, a Mennonite from Canada took the occasion of the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to reflect on both the history of the Mennonite Brethren and their future. Among the half dozen key issues he sees as important for his denomination in the near future he includes these three:

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<sup>6</sup> Wuthnow, *21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 49.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., n. 9, 223.



Will we be able to accommodate the still-increasing emphasis on congregational autonomy, an emphasis which in several respects runs counter to our understanding of brotherhood?

As we become socially and economically integrated into Canadian and American society, will we be able to retain an understanding of what it means to be a people separated unto God? Will we function as such a people?

Having decided to dismantle our North American General MB Conference structures, will Canadian and American MBs find new ways to cooperate with one another and also with the 15 MB sister conferences around the world, or will we content ourselves with localism? Will the initial preoccupation with “the regions beyond” be replaced by a preoccupation with “Jerusalem”?<sup>8</sup>

It is remarkable to see how closely the issues this Mennonite group faces mirror the issues facing Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends.

The United Presbyterian Church also faces the issues of denominational significance and localism. Catherine Borchert and Peter Solyuk in an article reflecting on the social witness of that denomination wrote,

The church is in a process of decentralization in many aspects of its life. Localism describes our situation, as mission is right outside the congregation's front door. A lack of trust in – as well as a lack of familiarity with – the structures farthest from the local congregation is evident. The question is often raised as to whether an irrelevant denomination will simply fade away. Almost universal agreement centers on the national structure's need to understand itself as a service agency that, in a reconfigured form, only resources congregations, without an independent voice or an independent presence.<sup>9</sup>

If Mennonites and United Presbyterians are dealing with issues of localism, what about the Roman Catholic Church? If any church represents a strong denominational

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<sup>8</sup> John H. Redekop, “The Mennonite Brethren Church in Two Millenia,” *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 39, 1 (7 January 2000), [magazine online] (accessed January 2, 2004); available from: <<http://old.mbherald.com/39-01/opinion.html?view=p>>.

<sup>9</sup> Catherine Glennan Borchert and Peter A. Solyuk, “What Are We Waiting for? Social Policy Witness at the Millennium,” *Church & Society* November/December 1999, [magazine online] (accessed January 2, 2004); available from: <<http://horeb.pcusa.org/churchsociety/NovDec1999/default.htm>>.

identity and the likelihood of members feeling a part of something bigger than the local congregation, it certainly ought to be the Roman Catholics. Yet a survey conducted for Roman Catholic congregations in Pontiac, Michigan showed that of the Catholic media available to church members the one most frequently read was the local church bulletin.

Authors of the study concluded:

The importance of the bulletin ... highlights the phenomenon of localism in American religious history. This simply means that for most people who attend church, whatever denomination it might be, their preeminent experience and knowledge of their faith comes from their local parish. Denominational identity, in other words, has always been secondary to local parish or local congregational identity.<sup>10</sup>

### Overview

In one respect it is tempting to concede to the cultural trends and “let happen what happens” to the Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends. But it is the perspective of this dissertation that to do so would be to betray the biblical and historical roots of Friends, and likewise it would deprive the present culture of the witness Friends have to the call of God on us as a people. Chapter 2 probes the biblical roots of the church, and specifically the community and relational aspects of the church, showing that the isolated and individualistic Christianity of some 21<sup>st</sup> century North Americans is far removed from the New Testament view of the church. Special attention is given to the images of the church that are implicitly and explicitly communal, such as The Covenant People of God.

Chapter 3 describes the beginnings of the Friends movement in 17<sup>th</sup> century England with special attention to the concept of the church that George Fox and other early Friends held. Their understanding of the church as the people of God called into

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<sup>10</sup> “Catholic Media,” in Survey 2000, Vicariate of Pontiac, Michigan, [document online] (accessed January 2, 2004); available from: <<http://www.pontiacareavicariate.org/survey2000/surveyhome.htm>>.

relationship with him and each other was the basis for the polity they constructed for Friends. That polity involved clear connections between local groups of Friends with ever widening connections as geography warranted.

Chapter 4 moves to the modern history of the specific group of Friends known as Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends. The focus of this chapter is to describe the intentional dismantling of one part of the connectional structure of Friends. It will be seen that this dismantling was not intended to change the polity of the church, nor to weaken the connections among Friends. Unfortunately there were unintended consequences to this action and the midlevel connections of NWYM have in fact been weakened as evidenced by significant disregard for the requirement for Area meetings. That raises the question of whether Quarterly Meetings ought to be reinstituted, or if some other form of midlevel connections might be built.

Chapter 5 offers a look at the contemporary experience of the United Presbyterian Church, a denomination with common historic roots to those of Friends and similar polity. The purpose of this look at the Presbyterians is to explore what can be learned about the importance of structure to the actual experience of meaningful connection between and among congregations. This review of Presbyterian experience will demonstrate that structure itself does not insure the desired connections.

The concluding chapter offers specific proposals designed to address the need to restore meaningful connections among Friends congregations. These are offered within a theoretical framework suggested by key Friends theological principles and the work of contemporary social scientists who have studied what they call “social capital.” A review and evaluation of NWYM’s existing efforts at connection, as well as proposals for

changes and additions to these efforts are offered. The vocabulary of “family” and “extended family” is suggested as the most appropriate way to discuss these points of connection among Friends of Northwest Yearly Meeting.

### Literature Review

There are some significant works available on the origins of Quaker polity, including an abundance of the writings of George Fox. His journal and his epistles and doctrinal pamphlets often address issues of what he calls “Gospel order.” The early Friends apologist Robert Barclay wrote a specific work on church government that has been published under the title, *The Anarchy of the Ranters*, but also simply as *A Treatise on Church Government*, the edition used as a source in this dissertation. Margaret Fell Fox, wife of George Fox, also wrote about issues of church order, especially as it pertained to the Ranters, and this work is included in T. H. S. Wallace’s compilation of her writings under the title, *A Sincere and Constant Love*.

The modern period has produced a few works that look back on early Friends with commentary on issues related to this dissertation. Lewis Benson wrote significantly in the third quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on the writings of Fox, including pieces on Fox’s view of the church, for the general Friends reading public. Arthur Roberts wrote a Ph.D. dissertation presented at Boston University in 1954 on the ecclesiology of George Fox. Charles F. Thomas edited a booklet published for the Faith and Life movement among Friends in 1979 which included the perspectives of various Friends on Quaker ecclesiology. Dean Freiday, who has studied and written on various topics for Friends,

and who is responsible for publishing Robert Barclay's *Apology* in modern English, in 1984 wrote the book, *Nothing Without Christ*, which includes a chapter on "Order."

Very few materials are available on the specific topic of this dissertation, the adjustments made in 1967-1971 to polity structures in NWYM by changing the nomenclature, schedule and responsibilities of Quarterly Meetings. There are official minutes of the Yearly Meeting for that period, which contain very brief references to action taken, with minimal commentary on rationale. The George Fox University Archives contain the minutes of boards and committees from the period and there are a few helpful pieces there that reveal some of the rationale for the actions NWYM took. There is a published article in the *Northwest Friend* magazine from the period that offers the views of Earl Barker, clerk of the committee studying the changes, about those changes. To this writer's knowledge, there are no writings from the recent past that look back upon and reflect upon the significance of the changes in terms of the implications for polity in the Friends Church.

## Chapter 2

### THE SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT FOR CHRISTIAN CONNECTION

The problem-solving challenge of this dissertation is to discover appropriate actions to re-establish meaningful connections between and among Friends congregations. Before exploring potential solutions to that problem, it is appropriate to ask and answer the question, “Why does it matter?” or similarly, “What difference does it make?” The purpose of this chapter is to establish that Scripture answers these questions with great clarity when studied for what it says about the nature of the church. In short, it matters.

Not all Christians approach Scripture in the same way. Some contemporary Christians might not be heavily swayed in their view of how the church ought to function by what is found in the New Testament. Such persons would likely see the cultural gaps between first-century Christians of the Mediterranean world and 21<sup>st</sup>-century Christians of North America so great as to render biblical polity models mostly irrelevant. For these Christians, the task of forming the church today is either one to be directed by the Spirit in ways that are appropriate for this time, or for others the task is for Christian believers to use their best reasoning skills to devise an appropriate purpose and order for the church.

Evangelical Friends, however, are among those Christians who see Scripture as having authority for the present, and the New Testament documents in particular as

having appropriate guidance for contemporary Christians to understand the purpose and nature of the church.<sup>1</sup> Given the authoritative place of Scripture for evangelical Friends, the task of this chapter becomes to demonstrate what Scripture says about the church in regard to its corporate nature and the call for Christians to care for and be accountable to one another as individuals and as congregations. Specifically this chapter will demonstrate (1) that the very language used in the New Testament for the church pictures connection among Christians; (2) that the New Testament documents, both implicitly and explicitly, call for connection, support and accountability among individual Christians and among congregations; and (3) that the “hints” of polity forms that Christians have found in the New Testament carry assumptions in each case about the need for congregations to be connected to other congregations.

### The Words and Images of the New Testament Church

The words and the metaphors used by the authors of the various books of the New Testament to refer to the church consistently point to her corporate nature, as the following examples make clear:

*Ekklēsia*. This Greek word, typically translated “church,” is sometimes translated as “assembly” or “gathered assembly.” The word was used among the Greeks to refer to a group of citizens “gathered” to discuss the affairs of state, for example. In the Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible this word is used to designate the “gathering”

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<sup>1</sup> *Faith and Practice: a Book of Christian Discipline Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends Church*, § “What Friends Believe,” 5 (2001). Though affirming that Scripture is “the divinely authorized record of the doctrines that we as Christians are bound to accept...,” it is important to state that theologically Friends place the authority of the Holy Spirit as integral to that of Scripture. I.e., Scripture has authority because of the Spirit who inspired its human authors, and when the Spirit leads in applying those words to the immediate context.

of Israel, summoned for some specific purpose, such as that recorded in Deuteronomy 31:30 where Moses recited the words of a song that recounts the history of the people.<sup>2</sup>

The word *ekklēsia* is the word used in Matthew's Gospel (Mt. 16:18) to convey Jesus' declaration to Peter about his intent to "build my church." But it is Paul who is the primary user of this word, where, according to Richard Longenecker, it occurs in his letters more than anywhere else in the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> Paul uses the word to refer to specific local congregations, as well as to refer to a group of congregations in a particular region, and still further to refer to the church universal.<sup>4</sup> *Ekklēsia* is not the only word this apostle used to refer to the church. As will be demonstrated shortly, he also used a variety of images and metaphors to picture the church. Even more common in Paul's usage is the phrase "in Christ."

*In Christ.* Paul uses this phrase or variations of it some 165 times in his letters.<sup>5</sup> Ernest Best, in his study of this phrase in Paul's letters, says that because the apostle uses this phrase so often, "it raises directly all the major questions connected with the relationship of the Church to Christ."<sup>6</sup> While cataloging nine distinct ways in which Paul uses "in Christ" or its variations, Best explores the question of whether, when referring to believers, the phrase is singular or plural. He notes that many of the references are in the

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<sup>2</sup> Verlin O. Hinshaw, "The Church in the New Testament," in *The Church in Quaker Thought and Practice*, ed. Charles F. Thomas (Philadelphia: Faith and Life Movement, 1979), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, "Paul's Vision of the Church and Community Formation in His Major Missionary Letters," in *Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002), 74.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ernest Best, *One Body Christ: A Study in the Relationship of the Church to Christ in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul* (London: S.P.C.K., 1955; reprint, Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1980), note 2, 19. Best is British and in all references cited, British spellings and punctuation have been maintained.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 1.



plural, but more importantly they are in what Best calls the “social” plural as opposed to the “additive” plural. He explains his meaning this way:

In the ‘additive’ what is said in the plural might as easily be said a number of times in the singular; the sentence, ‘you are men’, can be replaced by the similar sentence, ‘you are a man’, repeated in turn to each of the men, and the meaning will be the same. That is not true of the sentence, ‘you are brothers’; ‘you are a brother’ leaves unanswered the question, ‘brother of whom?’, the answer to which was implicitly contained in the original plural sentence; this is then a ‘social’ plural.<sup>7</sup>

This point is extremely significant in understanding Paul’s view of the church.

After studying these many texts Best asserts,

a Christian is not “in Christ” as an isolated believer. The Christian finds himself with others in Christ. The attitude which he adopts to those others who are in Christ will differ from his attitude towards those who are not in Christ; there will be certain duties which he owes to those in Christ which he does not owe to others .... He will also stand in a certain relationship towards others who are in Christ which will differ from the relationship he has with those who are not in Christ...; they are brethren, and together they form a unit, a whole.<sup>8</sup>

Best is careful to clarify that in making the point quoted above he is not meaning to suggest some kind of mystical absorption into an ill-defined whole. He asserts that individual believers maintain their own personality and identity. He says, “They rejoice, stand fast, and labour in Christ but it is still ‘they’ who rejoice, stand fast and labour.”<sup>9</sup>

Earnest Best’s summary of the meanings carried with this phrase “in Christ” is significant in supporting this chapter’s thesis that the church is corporate and communal:

To conclude: the formula ‘in Christ’ contains two fundamental ideas: believers are in Christ; salvation is in Christ. In both the *εν* is taken at its full value. Sometimes one idea predominates and sometimes the other; they are held together by the conception of Christ as a corporate personality, who in his own person gained the salvation of believers, and of whose personality they are members. We thus have a community in

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 23.

which the Christian lives and acts, and in which he receives his salvation; there is no suggestion that a man can be a believer and not be a member of this community.<sup>10</sup>

It might be observed that while what has been presented so far in this chapter clearly addresses the corporate nature of the church, it has not yet established that this “corporateness” needs to extend beyond local congregations. Yet there is more to see in the New Testament about the church, and the case does build. Evidence mounts as we review some of the major images of the church found in the New Testament. Richard Longenecker suggests that out of the many metaphors used by the Apostle Paul in his letters to refer to the church there are six groupings that are of special significance. He names them as follows, in some cases using his own language as a kind of summary for multiple images: *The People of God*, *The Body of Christ*, *The Household of Faith/God*, *The Temple of God*, *The Community of the Spirit*, and *God’s Eschatological Community*. While a few of these six image clusters deserve detailed attention, I will touch on all of them to some extent.

The People of God. This phrase is not limited to the writings of Paul but is also found elsewhere in the New Testament. It appears in Luke’s Gospel in the words of the angel that appeared to Zechariah with words about John (“the Baptist”), the son who was to be born to Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. Speaking of the work of preparation that John would perform, the angel said, “And he will go on before the Lord...to make ready *a people prepared for the Lord*” (Luke 1:17). Luke uses a similar phrase in Acts when he records the discussion of the so-called “Jerusalem Council,” which labored over specific issues of how to incorporate Gentiles into the church. After much discussion, James addressed the assembly and said, “Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described to us how

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 29.

God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles *a people for himself*” (Acts 15:13b-14).

The author of the letter to the Hebrews also uses the phrase. In the context of ongoing comparisons between what “was” and what now is available through Christ, the author writes in Hebrews 4:9, “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for *the people of God*; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.”

Peter uses this phrase, normally associated with the Hebrews of the First Testament, to refer to the church. He writes:

But you are *a chosen people*, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, *a people belonging to God*, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are *the people of God*; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Peter 2:9-10).

The phrase is found also in Revelation. John, recording what he heard and saw in “the new Jerusalem,” wrote, “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be *his people*, and God himself will be with them and be their God.’”

Richard Longenecker, in analyzing the use of this phrase by Paul in his letters notes its special significance in Romans 9:25 where the apostle quotes the prophet Hosea and applies those words to the Gentile believers: “I will call them ‘*my people*’ who are not my people....” Longenecker associates several other Pauline phrases under this same category: “*God’s elect*” (Romans 8:33; Ephesians 1:4; Colossians 3:12); “*Abraham’s descendants*” (Romans 4:16; Galatians 3:29); “*the true circumcision*” (Philippians 3:3; Colossians 2:11); and “*the Israel of God*” (Galatians 6:16).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Longenecker, “Paul’s Vision,” 75.

Though Longenecker does not explore it, there is a strong correlation between the phrase “the people of God” and the language of covenant. The Hebrews became the people of God through covenants initiated by Yahweh. In his classic work Gerhard von Rad summarized the history of the covenants in creating a people of God this way:

God created the world and man. After the destruction of the corrupt human race by the Flood, God gave to a new human race laws for its self-preservation, and, in the covenant with Noah, guaranteed to it the outward continuance of the world and its orders. He then called Abraham, and in a covenant which he made with him, promised him a great posterity, a special relationship to God, and the land of Canaan. The first promise was fulfilled in Egypt, when the patriarchs grew into a people; the second was fulfilled at Sinai, when with a fresh covenant (JE) Israel received the regulations for her community life and her intercourse with God; and the third was fulfilled when under Joshua Israel took possession of the land of Canaan. Thus, by means of the covenant theology, the entire mass of the Hexateuchal traditions was set beneath a threefold arch of prophecy and fulfillment. Initially, there were only the patriarchs: they are not yet a people, they have not entered into the promised special relationship with God, nor do they possess a land. Then, from the patriarchs a people comes into being; but it is without the special relationship and the land. And finally, in what is perhaps really the most exciting period, Israel, which is entirely ordered in one direction only, that is towards Jahweh, moves in stately procession through the wilderness towards the last promise, the land of Canaan.<sup>12</sup>

Christians become the people of God through a new covenant initiated by God in Christ. Craig Evans makes the connection, writing:

Jesus’ ministry was inaugurated and defined by the proclamation of the good news of the kingship of God. ... The good news entailed the restoration and redemption of Israel, the renewal of the covenant, and the reclamation of the lost. The essence of this message concerning the kinship of God guided all other aspects of Jesus’ ministry.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker, The Old Testament Library, ed. James L. Mays, Carol A. Newsom and David I. Petersen, vol. I *The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 135.

<sup>13</sup> Craig A. Evans, “The Ministry of Jesus in the Gospels,” in *Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002), 71.

John Walton makes the point even more strongly about Jesus and his connection to the covenant. He does acknowledge that the only specific reference Jesus is recorded as making about the covenant is at the “Last Supper” when he took a cup and referred to it as “the new covenant of my blood” (cf. Mt. 26:28; Mk. 14:24; Lk. 22:20). But Walton adds, “Nonetheless, the covenant is central to his teaching. Jesus preached the kingdom of God throughout his ministry, and the kingdom cannot be understood apart from the covenant.”<sup>14</sup>

G. E. Mendenhall notes the way Paul in Ephesians 2:11ff. addresses Gentile Christians as those who were once “foreigners to the covenants of the promise,” but who are “brought near through the blood of Christ.” He goes on to observe how the author of the letter to the Hebrews is even more focused on covenant issues than is Paul.

The Letter to the Hebrews utilizes much more frequently the covenant tradition, but in almost exactly the same way as Paul. Every possible argument is drawn on to show that the new covenant both fulfils and abrogates the old. In 7:1-22 the passage of Ps. 110:4 is applied to Jesus, with the conclusion that Jesus is the “surety” (or “mediator”) of a better covenant. Ch. 8 strongly argues that the old covenant is obsolete, drawing on Jer. 31:31-34; and in the subsequent chapter (9), the concern for Levitical purity is contrasted with the purifying of the conscience by the blood of Christ . . . .

This great emphasis on covenant in the Letter to the Hebrews, which argues for the substitution of the new covenant for the old, is itself a strong indication that the early church did take the covenant seriously.

And yet the Sinai covenant of the OT and the NT covenant in Christ’s blood are one: each created a people of God out of those who were no people, demanded the complete self-surrender to God as a joyful response to the love of God which preceded. The simple stipulations of the Decalogue were summed up in the yet simpler obligation of love at Jesus’ command—but this is no command; it is rather the very nature of the relationship between God and the community.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> John H. Walton, *Covenant: God’s Purpose, God’s Plan* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 151.

<sup>15</sup> G. E. Mendenhall, “Covenant,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, *et al.*, vol. I (New York: Abigdon Press, 1962), 723.

To this writer, the significance of the “people of God” and “covenant” language carried over from the Hebrews of Israel to the church of the New Testament is that it carries with it such a strong sense of corporate identity. To be sure, Christians join “the people of God” individually and despite any racial, socio-economic or gender classification, and they do so by faith in Jesus Christ. But having so “joined,” they are part of a community in the sense that the Hebrews of the First Testament were. There were twelve tribes of Hebrews, and there were multiple families and clans, but all “the people of God’s choosing.” In a similar way, there are multiple congregations and denominational groupings of Christians, but they are all part of the larger grouping called, “*the people of God.*”

In Hebrews 12:1 the writer refers to “a great cloud of witnesses,” heroes of the faith from times past, looking on the present church. Those currently running the “race,” to use the metaphor of this letter, are part of a “race” that has gone on through the centuries and continues. Previous “runners” are somehow still participants. In this sense, language of “the people of God” points toward the church universal and “invisible” in that it is beyond boundaries of time and space. But the same language can and does refer to specific people in a particular time and place, the church “visible.”

The Body of Christ. According to Richard Longenecker, this particular metaphor is, “the most distinctive image of the church in the Pauline letters...”<sup>16</sup> It is certainly one of the most familiar images of the church to average North American Christians. “Body” language is commonly used by Christians to refer to either their local church or the church-at-large. While Paul uses this phrase in a variety of ways, probably the best

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<sup>16</sup> Longenecker, “Paul’s Vision,” 80.

known is the way he uses it in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 to describe the function of the church, and in Ephesians (1:22-23) and Colossians (1:18; 2:19) where he uses the metaphor in a more focused theological way in exalting Christ as the “Head” of the body.

Of most significance for the purpose of this chapter is Paul’s use of this metaphor in Romans and 1 Corinthians to describe the way the church functions. In both cases, using the familiar language of “one body, many parts,” Paul describes the church as a group in which diverse people with diverse “gifts” from the Spirit function in unity. In these passages he strongly emphasizes the interdependence of Christians, their need of each other, and even the way they “belong” to each other. Exegetes and theologians may debate whether or not this interdependence extends beyond the local congregation, but it is difficult to read these passages and picture the solitary believer without connection or relationship to others as any sort of functioning Christian. From Paul’s perspective, this person would be withholding gifts from the Body and likewise missing what the Spirit had to offer through others.

It is interesting to speculate on the venue Paul had in mind for the exercise of gifts and the mutuality of the members of the body of Christ. Was it only in the context of worship, when all were gathered in one place? Perhaps because Paul’s 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1 Corinthians seems so focused on the public gathering, many contemporary Christians think of the “spiritual gifts” as working only in the gathered assembly. But when Paul names examples of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 (apostles...prophets...teachers...workers of miracles...healing...those able to help others...administration...tongues...) the range seems to encompass activities that would extend beyond the gathered meeting to the events of every day life. Those who are “members” of the

“body” are such wherever they are. This analysis is confirmed by New Testament scholar James D. G. Dunn who in his commentary on the book of Romans reflects on the meaning of Paul’s use of the body metaphor:

From the fact that Paul made so much of the image of the church in Corinth as the body of Christ (in Corinth) in his first letter to Corinth (1 Cor 12; also Eph 4), we can deduce that Paul saw it as one of the best means of encouraging the right sort of community spirit in the diaspora congregations. Although the metaphor is not developed here, the emphases it brings to the fore are clear enough: a Christian believing, which could be no private matter or solitary piety, but which involved as of its essence a belonging to a larger body, an indispensable corporeality; an active membership—each having its different function as part of the body; a practice of mutual support in both giving and receiving without overdependence on any one member or function.... The fact that the imagery was well known to describe the body politic probably implied also that for Paul the Christian congregation’s functioning as a body could itself serve as a model for the functioning of the wider (secular) society.<sup>17</sup>

The Household of Faith/God. This phrase, and related “family” phrases used in Paul’s letters would have carried significant messages that modern readers might miss. Scott Bartchy helps the modern reader understand the way first century residents of Paul’s world would have “heard” this household language. He notes that in the first century Mediterranean world the closest family ties were sibling ties. This is in contrast to the way they related to people outside the family.

Within all social classes, traditional male socialization produced human beings trained to pursue a never-ending quest for greater honor and influence in a culture where both honor and influence were in limited supply. Among strangers and those from other families, honor could be acquired only at the expense of someone else’s honor. Thus retaliation was the only honorable response to a challenge to one’s honor in any encounter beyond the family.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, vol. 38B, *Word Biblical Commentary*, (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988), 733.

<sup>18</sup> S. Scott Bartchy, “Divine Power, Community Formation, and Leadership in the Acts of the Apostles,” in *Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002), 93.



Honor was the pivotal value of the culture, similar to wealth in our own culture. But within the family,

these values were inverted. Brothers were raised to give honor freely to all their siblings—thereby practicing what anthropologists today would call “general reciprocity”—and to refrain from responding in kind to any honor challenge from a member of one’s own family. The tightest unity of loyalty and affection in the ancient Mediterranean world was experienced in the sibling group of brothers and sisters.<sup>19</sup>

In this context of thinking about the church as “household,” it is interesting to remember that Jesus once looked around a gathering of his disciples and said of them, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:35). Likewise, it is interesting to notice the language of Luke in the Book of Acts when he describes Pentecost. Scott Bartchy observes that when Peter stood up on Pentecost in the gathering of 120 disciples (Acts 1:15), Luke refers to him standing in the midst of the “brothers and sisters” (Bartchy notes that the Greek *adelphoi* is literally “brothers,” but notes that the context is brothers and sisters).<sup>20</sup>

One scholar insists that the “household” model of the church fails to carry Paul’s otherwise egalitarian emphases in the New Testament. Robert Atkins specifically notes that the “household” of the era had a definite hierarchy to it, and he sees that absent in the churches started by Paul. He says, “The existence of the itinerant apostle, fellow workers, and charismatic leadership in the church based on ‘spiritual gifts’ runs counter to the hierarchical patterns of the Roman household....”<sup>21</sup> Atkins goes on to argue persuasively that the Pauline churches were remarkably egalitarian in their structure and function. But that does not invalidate the important relational bonds that are

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Robert A. Atkins, Jr., *Egalitarian Community: Ethnography and Exegesis* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1991), 10.

communicated in the “household” metaphor. If anything, Atkins’ thesis about egalitarianism reigning in the Pauline churches adds even more strength to the image of the church as a “people” in community, not just a network of leaders.

The Temple of God. On the surface the use of a building metaphor may cause some to think of the church as a literal building, the way many people use the word “church” in common speech. But Paul is clear in using the metaphor to refer to people. For example in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, in the context of his discussion of division within the church at Corinth, Paul writes: “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple.” Other Pauline passages in which the metaphor is used include 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1 and Ephesians 2:20-22. Peter uses a similar metaphor in 1 Peter 2:5 where he refers to believers as “living stones” in a “spiritual house” that God is building.

Longenecker summarizes Paul’s use of the metaphor as being to name:

(1) the place in the New Covenant where God dwells; (2) the place where God’s Spirit is now active; and (3) the holiness and purity that must necessarily characterize God’s people, both individually and corporately. For both believers and the church, whether local or universal, have become habitations of God’s Spirit.<sup>22</sup>

Even though there is one reference (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20) where Paul uses this metaphor to apply to individuals with a call for sexual purity, the overwhelming use of the temple metaphor in the New Testament is applied to the church as a group. Fundamentally, it is “together” that Christians are the Temple of God.

The Community of the Spirit. This is a phrase Richard Longenecker has created to try to capture the meaning of a group of images and phrases that Paul uses for the

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<sup>22</sup> Longenecker, “Paul’s Vision,” 78, 9.

church. He says the idea captured in this category title underlies much of what Paul writes in his letters, but it is usually assumed.<sup>23</sup> What Paul wrote to the Galatians serves as an example of what Longenecker is describing. Paul asked the believers in that church:

Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? (Galatians 3:2b-5)

Similarly, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

Longenecker summarizes Paul’s teachings related to the concept of “the community of the Spirit”:

Being “the community of the Spirit” means many things for believers in Christ—both doctrinally and ethically, and both individually and corporately. It does not, however, mean that one must affirm only the spiritual and renounce everything natural; or that one be guided only by the Spirit and oppose everything traditional or ecclesiastical; or, as in our discussion here, that one should honor a ministry of the Spirit that exists without structures, forms, or order. Rather, the church as the community of the Spirit, whose activity necessarily finds expression in local congregations and particular situations, is urged to “keep in step with the Spirit” in whatever circumstances it finds itself, as Paul exhorted his converts at Galatia to do (Gal 5:25). And that holds true, it seems, not only in matters of faith and doctrine, but also with respect to ecclesiastical structures, forms, and order.<sup>24</sup>

God’s Eschatological Community. Longenecker notes the eschatological connection of the phrase “people of God” for the Jews, and he sees the same connection

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

for Paul and the early Christians. That particular phrase, combined with others, “identify the church as a society centered in heaven and striving toward eschatological fulfillment.”<sup>25</sup> Three texts from Paul’s letters are of special interest in this regard:

Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother (Galatians 4:25-26).

I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him (2 Corinthians 11:2).

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:20).

Longenecker observes:

In none of these three verses does the word “church” (*ekklēsia*) appear. Yet all of them speak of corporate existence in the New Covenant, and all of them use Old Testament and early Jewish imagery that suggests eschatological fulfillment. So all three of them, particularly in concert with the expressions “people of God” and “community of the Spirit,” may be seen as alluding to the church as God’s eschatological community. All of this imagery suggests that the real nature of the church—though presently, and of necessity, embodied in various shapes and forms—cannot be truly grasped simply by a study of any of the church’s earthly shapes or historical forms, whether ancient or modern.<sup>26</sup>

He notes that early Christians viewed themselves as “living in ‘the last days’ of redemptive history and attempted to give free reign to the Spirit,” but they nevertheless had some structure and order to their organization. “As the new ‘people of God’ and the new ‘temple of God,’ the earliest believers in Jesus were not neophytes in religion but drew on the long tradition of worship, discipline, and organization they had known in their Jewish synagogues and in the Jerusalem temple.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 79, 80.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 81.

The connection between the church of “now” and the church as it “will one day be” is described by Miraslov Volf:

The future of the church in God’s new creation is the mutual, personal indwelling of the triune God and his glorified people, as becomes clear from the description of the new Jerusalem in the Apocalypse of John (cf. Rev 21:1-22:5). Participation in the communion of the triune God, however, is not only an object of hope for the church; it is also its present experience.<sup>28</sup>

The first section of this chapter has cited numerous words, phrases and images of the church in the New Testament. Ernest Best provides an appropriate summary for the point of these citations that describe the church:

This community has a ‘shape’. The ‘shape’ is normally described in personal terms as ‘a body’, ‘a man’, ‘a bride’, but sometimes in non-personal terms as ‘a building’. We have seen reason to believe that behind all these descriptions and behind the descriptions of the Church as ‘in Christ’ and ‘with Christ’ there is a conception of Christ as a corporate or inclusive personality, and of believers as solid with him.<sup>29</sup>

### Scriptural Calls for Connection

Because Friends of Northwest Yearly Meeting claim to be people who recognize the authority of Scripture, it is important to demonstrate that the case for connection is not dependent solely on images of the church in the New Testament. Further warrant for connection is found the numerous Scriptural calls, both implicit and explicit, for support and accountability among individual Christians and among congregations. These citations demonstrate that the normal functioning pattern of the early church was meant to be relationally and community based, not the individualistic and “private” pattern of much of 21<sup>st</sup>-Century American Christianity, including many Friends.

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<sup>28</sup> Miroslav Volf, “Community Formation as an Image of the Triune God: A Congregational Model of Church Order and Life,” in *Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002), 214.

<sup>29</sup> Best, *One Body*, 184.

The kind of community into which the church called her members was in some ways a new thing in the Mediterranean world, outside the Jewish experience. Scott Bartchy notes that in the culture of the Greco-Roman world, though religion had a great deal to do with everyday life, nevertheless, “the concept of ‘god’ (Greek, *theos*; Latin, *deus*) did not bring to Gentile minds the practice of “fellowship,” “community,” or “close personal relationship.”<sup>30</sup>

He quotes Wayne Meeks who wrote:

Being or becoming religious in the Greco-Roman world did not entail either moral transformation or sectarian resocialization. . . .

In striking contrast, Judeans had in common the tradition that their god, as the creator of the world and the principal actor in history, had long sought to create a community characterized by interpersonal righteousness and social justice.<sup>31</sup>

Bartchy concludes the contrast noting how the Jewish/Christian understanding of God was as “a community-forming and community-sustaining power.”<sup>32</sup> Citations from the words of Jesus and of the apostles will serve to show the implicit and explicit calls of Scripture for connection among Christians.

The Prayer of Jesus. John’s gospel records a prayer of Jesus prayed near the end of Jesus’ earthly life. In the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter we read of Jesus praying first for himself, and then for his immediate disciples, and then for all who are to come:

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me (John 17: 20-23a).

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<sup>30</sup> Bartchy, *Divine Power*, 90.

<sup>31</sup> Wayne Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 28, as quoted in Bartchy, *Divine Power*, 90.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

There is a kind of reciprocal indwelling spoken of in these verses that when combined with other passages in John's Gospel, such as the vine and branches metaphor of chapter 15, points strongly to the communal nature of the church. There are theological implications of this passage that will be addressed in the following chapter, but here it is important to emphasize the relational connection of Jesus to his disciples.

It is interesting to see how this passage becomes central to discussions in ecumenical circles when Christian leaders seek to agree on what it means for the Church of Jesus Christ to be "one" in unity. Paul Anderson, a Quaker Johannine scholar, has been asked to write a response to Pope John Paul II's Encyclical Letter, "Petrine Ministry; A Working Paper." In a draft version of Anderson's response, after noting the implications of this prayer of Jesus in John 17, Anderson summarizes with these words:

Jesus prays for the unity of his church, both visibly and invisibly, and all Christian leaders are called to join him in that prayer – as well as being open to being used by God in its actualization. Jesus' prayer for oneness among his followers transcends the bounds of time and space. It challenges the boundaries we place on faith and practice, even for good reasons, and it raises up the center of discipleship, which is ever a spiritual and relational reality. The question for the day is whether today's believers can find ways to follow a common Lord together in ways that incarnate the love of God at the heart of Christian mission. Rather than focusing on the means of getting there, or whether we have arrived, a common commitment to the venture – living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, in faith and faithfully – may be the way forward.<sup>33</sup>

This is a strong endorsement of the relational nature of the church with a common commitment to following the Lordship of Christ, in ways that are visible but not limited by institutions.

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<sup>33</sup> Paul N. Anderson, "Petrine Ministry and Christocracy-A Response to Pope John Paul II's Encyclical Letter," Draft, Newberg, OR, 2003.

The “One Another” Passages. Many observers of the New Testament have noted the pattern of “one another” passages that appear both in the words of Jesus recorded in the gospels, but also in the epistles. A brief and partial summary demonstrates this. Jesus made it a command: “love one another” (John 13:34). The Apostle Paul frequently used “one another” language in the imperative in his letters: “be devoted to one another” (Romans 12:10), “accept one another” (Romans 15:7), “serve one another” (Galatians 5:13), “submit to one another” (Ephesians 5:21), “teach and admonish one another” (Colossians 3:16). The writer of the letter to the Hebrews calls Christians to “encourage one another” (Hebrews 3:13), and to “spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24). Peter calls Christians to “offer hospitality to one another without grumbling” (1 Peter 4:9).

Even the brief citations from these texts in the preceding paragraph make clear that the “one another” responsibilities Christians have cover a full spectrum of living. Further exploration of the context of each of these citations would demonstrate even more clearly that what is in view is a *life*, not merely some brief portion of a believer’s activity on some particular day of the week.

Beyond these references, one could point again to Paul’s use of the body metaphor for the church and his strong words about how the individual parts, or members, of the body need one another, must honor one another, cannot simply “opt out,” and dare not dismiss one another as unimportant. For example, Paul writes, “...if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason cease to be a part of the body” (1 Corinthians 12:16). Or, “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’” (1 Corinthians 12:21). “On the contrary,” writes



Paul, “those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.....” (1 Corinthians 12:22).

Paul’s Example. The very existence of the letters of Paul to the churches and to individuals is significant evidence of his understanding of the church as community-based. If Christians individually and as congregations need not be accountable to one another, Paul’s letters have no warrant. That these letters exist is evidence of the church’s recognition that it was appropriate for Paul to address these believers and to “teach” and “admonish” and “correct” them in their conduct of the Christian life in general, including the function of the church where they were. That these letters are included in the canon of Scripture is evidence that the church-at-large recognized their relevance not only to the particular community to which they were addressed, but to the whole church.

In some well-known cases Paul had to make his claims to counsel Christians explicit. In the second Corinthian letter, the first several chapters include arguments in which he defends his right to counsel them and visit them. In the first chapter of that letter he informs them of his hardships, of the intervention of God who “delivered us from such a deadly peril,” and likewise of the significant potential of their prayers to help him (vv. 8-11). In the second chapter he distinguishes himself from those religious itinerants who “peddle the word of God for profit,” and asserts that on the contrary he speaks “like men sent from God” (v. 17). In the third chapter he observes that he does not need “letters of recommendation” because the Corinthians themselves are in effect living letters of endorsement of his ministry, “known and read by everybody” (vv. 1-2). In the same chapter he insists that his confidence is God-given (v. 5). Still in the third

chapter he comments on the glory of the new covenant and claims the great hope arising from that covenant as the basis for his boldness with them (vv. 7-12). The apostle's arguments continue, but these citations are sufficient to establish Paul's own perception of a legitimate claim to address this church.

Addressing the church in Galatia, Paul establishes his right to do so by reporting his call from God that came to him on the famous road to Damascus. In the second chapter of that letter Paul reports on his later visit to the leaders of the church in Jerusalem, and their endorsement of his ministry. He says, "James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles..." (Galatians 2:9). This is an especially interesting citation because it shows not only a basis for Paul's right to speak to the Gentiles, but at the same time it implicitly shows the rights of the church at Jerusalem to bless and endorse his ministry.

Paul's letter to the Romans provides a still more significant example in support of this chapter's thesis that Scripture calls for Christians to care for and be accountable to one another as individuals and congregations. The church in Rome is one that Paul did not start and at the time he addressed the Romans he still had not visited their city and church. The significance of this is that this was not "his" church in the sense that some others were. Though some in the church at Rome knew him, he did not address them as their "founder." This strengthens the conviction that in the early church there was an understanding of the right of the churches to be addressed from one outside the local fellowship.

Still from the example of the writings of Paul, but with a different focus, it is interesting to observe the pattern of the churches Paul visited soliciting from them gifts for the church in Jerusalem. This is an acknowledgement of responsibility to, as well as concern for, “brothers and sisters” in the new faith. In other words, this is an example of the kind of responsibility Christians felt for one another in Jerusalem itself, as recorded in Acts 4:32ff. But in this case, the responsibility and care extended across local church boundaries and even national and racial boundaries. With regard to the collection, Richard Longenecker sees this as major evidence of Paul’s commitment to the unity of the church. He writes, “For though he differed in some respects from believers at Jerusalem, the unity of the church—even amidst its diversity and despite real dangers—was of great importance to him.”<sup>34</sup> Paul’s concern for unity points to another example from Scripture of the kind of connection among and between congregations that we see in the New Testament.

The Jerusalem Council. This famous gathering described in Acts 15 was called to settle difficult issues of how to incorporate Gentile Christians into the church. The issues included major theological questions, but also cultural and ethnic considerations that had enormous power to divide the church. It is interesting to see the “connections” evident in some of the incidents leading up to the Jerusalem Council. In earlier chapters of Acts we read about “the apostles and the brothers” “throughout Judea” being aware of Peter’s interaction with the Gentile Cornelius and his household (Acts 11:1). Later in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts we read about leaders traveling from Jerusalem to Antioch to investigate what was happening there. In the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts we read about the church at Antioch commissioning Barnabas and Saul for further missionary trips among the

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<sup>34</sup> Longenecker, “Paul’s Vision,” 83.

Gentiles. Christians in various locations were aware of what was happening in other places, and they cared about it, for more reasons than one.

Aside from the specific issues of the council, the overwhelming significance of the incident for this chapter is what it shows about how Christians in the early church felt responsibility to and accountability for one another, and moreover, responsibility to affirm truth together. There was no sense of “you go your way and we’ll go our way and no harm done.” Rather there was concern to agree among themselves about what was most important and about how they would function in their interactions with one another.

The paragraphs of this section have made clear through the words of Jesus and the apostles that connection among Christians is normal and expected. Both implicitly and explicitly the call for connection is made over and over. If NWYM Friends wish to be faithful to the Scripture they acknowledge as authoritative, they must examine whether they are demonstrating caring, accountability and connection with one another. As we shall see in the third section of this chapter, whatever biblical roots there are for church polity also point toward connection.

### The Beginnings of Structure in the Church

It is commonly agreed among Bible scholars that there is no definitive scriptural support for a single style of church structure or governance. Rather, there are hints of each of three major polity forms used by various Christians groups in the modern church: Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Congregational. Richard Longenecker in introducing the collection *Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today* summarizes the history of polity studies over many years and quotes B. H. Streeter’s

1929 book, *The Primitive Church, Studied with Special Reference to the Origins of the*

*Christian Ministry* as a representative study of Protestant scholarship on the subject:

The most natural interpretation of the other evidence is that, at the end of the first century A.D., there existed, in different provinces of the Roman Empire, different systems of Church government. Among these, the Episcopalian, the Presbyterian, and the Independent [i.e., Congregational] can each discover the prototype of the system to which he himself adheres.<sup>35</sup>

Longenecker also quotes F.J.A. Hort (in *The Christian Ecclesia*), whom Longenecker describes as “Anglo-Catholic in many of his commitments,” in this warning at the end of lectures given on the subject at Cambridge in 1889:

In this as in so many other things is seen the futility of endeavouring to make the Apostolic history into a set of authoritative precedents, to be rigorously copied without regard to time and place, thus turning the Gospel into a second Levitical Code. The Apostolic age is full of embodiments of purposes and principles of the most instructive kind: but the responsibility of choosing the means was left for ever to the Ecclesia itself, and to each Ecclesia, guided by ancient precedent on the one hand and adaptation to present and future needs on the other. The lesson-book of the Ecclesia, and of every Ecclesia, is not a law but a history.<sup>36</sup>

Longenecker himself sees the references to order in the Pauline letters as reflecting “contextualizations appropriate for a particular time, culture, and circumstance, which should be appreciated on their own merits—but should also guide us as we contextualize the Christian gospel for our own particular time, culture, and circumstances.”<sup>37</sup>

James D. G. Dunn, a scholar of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, looked at this issue more specifically in terms of ministerial “offices.” He says there are two possible “readings” of Acts when it comes to finding precedents for particular forms of governance.<sup>38</sup> One

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<sup>35</sup> Longenecker, *Community Formation*, xiv.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii, iv.

<sup>37</sup> Longenecker, “Paul’s Vision,” 87.

<sup>38</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament; an Inquiry Into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, 2d ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1990), 106.

view holds that “the classic three-fold order of ministry” was established early: bishop (successor to the apostles), priest (elder), and deacon (the seven). This view typically holds that this pattern was followed around the empire where churches were founded.<sup>39</sup>

But Dunn cites the multiple problems with this thesis:<sup>40</sup> First, according to 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 it is not appropriate to equate the “twelve” with the “apostles,” for in that text Paul refers to Jesus’ appearing to the twelve and then later “to all the apostles.” Further there are others, not of the twelve, who are named as apostles: Paul (1 Corinthians 9:1), James (Galatians 1:19), Barnabas (Galatians 2:9), Andronicus and Junia(s) (Romans 16:7). He also notes the significance of the word “apostle” and its association with “mission” and the contrasting example of the twelve who stayed in Jerusalem.

Second, Dunn notes about the selection of the seven deacons, that one of the things stated clearly about them in Acts 6:3, 5, 8, and 10 is that they were already known for the fullness of the Spirit in their lives before they were chosen by the twelve, so there was nothing “bestowed” on them in that sense when they were selected. And third, though the Jerusalem church clearly had elders, there is no evidence in Paul’s writings that any of the churches he founded had elders until the pastoral letters, and those are at least very late in Paul’s ministry, if not actually post-Pauline. In addition, even Luke’s own account refers to the leaders at the church of Antioch as “prophets and teachers” (Acts 13:1-3) rather than as elders.

The other major “reading” of Acts is expressed by Dunn this way: “ministry and authority within the earliest Jerusalem community were much more spontaneous and

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 107, 8.

charismatic in nature, and leadership took several diverse forms before a form of administration following the pattern of Jewish synagogue government became established.”<sup>41</sup> It is clear that from Dunn’s perspective this second reading of Acts is the more accurate.

In acknowledging that the pastoral epistles do seem to convey an image of the church that is more structured than what is seen in Acts or the earlier epistles of Paul, Dunn remarks that he believes “...*the Pastorals represent the fruit of a growing rapprochement between the more formal structures which Jewish Christianity took over from the synagogue and the more dynamic charismatic structure of the Pauline churches after Paul’s death.*”<sup>42</sup>

Raymond Brown, one of the most outstanding of Roman Catholic scholars of our time, has written *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* in which he seeks to answer the question, “What were Christians in the Sub-Apostolic Period (the last one-third of the first century) being told that would enable their respective churches to survive the passing of the authoritative apostolic generation?”<sup>43</sup> In this work he examines more than one Pauline heritage, more than one Petrine heritage, and more than one of John, the beloved disciple, as well as what he describes as the Jewish/Gentile Christianity in Matthew’s Gospel. After explaining what he has found in the study of these authors (diversity), he concludes:

There was no evidence in these works that a consistent or uniform ecclesiology had emerged. Rather, writings addressed to different NT communities had quite diverse emphases. Even though each emphasis could be effective in the particular circumstances of the writing, each had glaring shortcomings that would constitute a danger were that emphasis

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>43</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1984), 146.

isolated and deemed to be sufficient for all times. Taken collectively, however, these emphases constitute a remarkable lesson about early idealism in regard to Christian community life.<sup>44</sup>

Brown notes how some contemporary church theologians and other leaders argue for one or more of these perspectives to the exclusion of the others. But he believes that the evidence contradicts those who argue for lack of diversity in the New Testament documents.<sup>45</sup>

What is of most significance for the thesis of this chapter is that Brown strongly emphasizes that he found unity in the New Testament, despite the diversity of governance patterns. He says that

some Christian scholars harden the detectable diversity of the NT into dialectic struggles and contradictory stances. No one can show that any of the churches I have studied had broken *koinōnia* or communion with another. Nor is it likely that the NT churches of this Sub-Apostolic Period had no sense of *koinōnia* among Christians and were self-contained conventicles going their own way. Paul is eloquent on the importance of *koinōnia* and in the Pauline heritage concern for Christian unity is visible in Luke/Acts and in Ephesians. Peter is a bridge figure in the NT, and the concept of the people of God in I Peter requires a collective understanding of Christianity. For all its individualism, the Fourth Gospel knows of other sheep not of that fold and of Jesus' wish that they be one. Matthew has a concept of *the* church and expands the horizons of Christianity to all nations.<sup>46</sup>

This is a ringing endorsement of the contention of this chapter that despite whatever roots one finds in Scripture for the differences in church polity that exist in the modern church, the churches of the New Testament considered themselves responsible to and concerned for each other as congregations, not just individuals.

Perhaps the fact that Raymond Brown is Roman Catholic causes some to suspect that he has a motive in such a strong statement about connection among churches, namely

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 146, 7.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.



to endorse the “one church” position of his church. But interestingly, from the other end of the ecclesiological spectrum, Miraslav Volf has written about the connection he sees between and among churches within a “free church” and “independent congregational” polity. He writes:

the same presence of Christ through the Spirit that makes each local church “independent” of other churches simultaneously connects them with one another. . . . Professing faith in the one Jesus Christ implies a unity with and openness to all other churches. What remains disputed, of course, is how this unity should be manifested concretely and how the various means of expressing it are related to the constitutive presence of Christ in a church.<sup>47</sup>

This chapter set out to demonstrate (1) that the very language used in the New Testament for the church pictures connection among Christians; (2) that the New Testament documents, both implicitly and explicitly, call for connection, support and accountability among individual Christians and among congregations; and (3) that the “hints” of polity forms that various Christians have found in the New Testament carry assumptions in each case about the need for congregations to be connected to other congregations. Evidence has been presented to support each of these three contentions. Since Friends seek to let Scripture be authoritative for the ways in which they actually structure their lives together, they must face into any discrepancies between the functioning patterns of the church in the New Testament and the part of the church over which they hold stewardship, and they must seek to reform any practices that contradict Scripture. We turn now to the beginnings of Quakerism to explore whether there was correspondence between the biblical patterns of the church described in this chapter and how early Friends understood the church and organized their lives as the church.

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<sup>47</sup> Volf, “Community Formation,” 218.

### Chapter 3

#### THE QUAKER BEGINNINGS: HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ROOTS

The task of this chapter is to show that the kind of biblical concern for connection and accountability among Christians and congregations that was demonstrated in the last chapter was nourishment for the historical roots of the movement known as Quakers or Friends. The chapter will show that the language and images of the Scripture discussed in the previous chapter were the very language and images used by early Friends as they wrote about their understanding of the church. As I review the historical context from which Friends began to gather, and their reflection on the meaning of their gatherings, and the way they actually built their organizational structure and functioned as a community it will become clear how important “connection” was to Friends.

#### Origins

The origins of the Quaker movement are in 17<sup>th</sup> century England. George Fox, often considered the “founder” of the movement, was in fact one of several strong men and women who “found” each other in the midst of the great social, political and religious turmoil of that period of English history. Fox was born in the year 1624, in Drayton-in-the-Clay, Leicestershire into a family of Puritans. His father Christopher was a weaver, a devout man whose neighbors called him “Righteous Christer.”<sup>1</sup> His mother,

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<sup>1</sup> This and other biographical information from George Fox, 1624-1691, *Journal of George Fox*, Vol. I, Eighth (and bi-centenary) edition (London: Edward Hicks, 1891), chap. 1, passim.

Mary Lago, also a devout Christian, was according to George, “of the stock of the martyrs.”

Fox testified to being serious and devout even as a child and on through his adolescent years. He described in his journal a spiritual and physical journey that began in his teen years and continued into his early twenties. He recorded conversations with various persons in many places, including priests and other religious leaders, none of which was spiritually satisfying to him. In 1647 Fox had an “opening” that has become perhaps the best known part of his testimony. He wrote in his journal:

When all my hopes in them [priests and pastors] and all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could I tell what to do; then, O! then I heard a voice which said, “There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition;” and when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy. Then the Lord let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give him all the glory....<sup>1</sup>

Arthur Roberts in a dissertation written on George Fox’s view of the church summarized how Fox represented the spiritual turmoil of his time and place:

The England of George Fox witnessed the struggle for authority and for unity. The papacy was out of the race; and in the Commonwealth period both monarchy and prelacy were downed. The new assertion of individualism likewise feared Presbyterianism as a new form of the same oppression. Puritanism sought to find outward verities in the revelations of God through Scripture and inward certainty through personal experience of the saving work of God. Within the context of the Bible, radical Puritanism sought the authority of the Holy Spirit, the “Inner Word.”

George Fox’s spiritual travail mirrors the unrest of the times. Men sought a new inward unity, a concept of the Church that would unite more truly than could outward conformity enforced by the state. Related to Fox’s own experiences and teachings are the views of other groups contemporaneous with him. The ideas of voluntary membership, perfectionism, mysticism, the invisible Church, of a coming New Age, - these ideas were cast in various forms. The seventeenth century was the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 11.

second, and spiritual, wave of the English Reformation. New unity was sought within a Christian framework. The Seekers waited for the Church, the Ranters despaired of it, the Fifth Monarchy looked for it in the imminent return of Christ, the mystics spiritualized it passively, the Levellers spiritualized it actively, while the Baptists and Independents separated its congregations from the world.

George Fox shared much in common with the radical movements of his time; but efforts to align him neatly with Baptists, Seekers, mystics, Ranters, Fifth-Monarchy, Levellers, and Finders result in only partial and inadequate appraisals.<sup>2</sup>

Soon Fox and others who gathered with him began to speak of themselves as “children of the Light” or “children of the covenant.” As noted in Chapter 1, the term “Quakers” was one of derision used by their opponents about them, mocking their sense of awe in the presence of God. It is a term that “stuck” and now for most people has lost its original negative connotations. The use of the word “Friends” for this group of believers came along later, and the more formal terminology of “Religious Society of Friends” did not come into use until the 18th century, and “Friends Church” language came into use in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Though Fox and those who gathered with him and preached alongside him considered themselves to be representatives of the restored True Church, and though they preached against the State Church and most other dissenters, they are in fact viewed by church historians as part of the Radical wing of the Protestant Reformation. James Wm. McClendon, Jr., a philosopher and theologian with Baptist roots, identifies what he calls the “persistent marks of the heirs of the Radicals” as follows:

1. Biblicism, understood not as one or another theory of inspiration, but as a humble acceptance of the authority of Scripture for both faith and practice.

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<sup>2</sup> Arthur O. Roberts, “George Fox’s Concept of the Church” (Ph. D. diss., Boston University, 1954), 46.

2. Mission (or evangelism), understood not as an attempt to control history for the ends we believe to be good, but as the responsibility to witness to Christ—and accept the suffering that witness entails.
3. Liberty, or soul competency, understood not as the overthrow of all oppressive authority, but as the God-given freedom to respond to God without the intervention of the state or other powers.
4. Discipleship, understood neither as a vocation for the few nor an esoteric discipline for adepts, but as life transformed into service by the lordship of Jesus Christ.
5. Community, understood not as privileged access to God or to sacred status, but as sharing together in a storied life of obedient service to and with Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Clearly these descriptors fit most Quakers in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, though just as clearly Fox and others might have quibbled about how to express each of these five points.

Once Fox had made his clear discovery of direct communion and communication with Christ, he began to attract others who shared his vital religious experience. In 1652 he looked out from Pendle Hill in the north of England and had a vision of a “great people to be gathered.”<sup>4</sup> In the following weeks many people were persuaded to join the new movement and this is considered to be the beginning of the group that comprises the spiritual ancestors of Friends, including Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends.

The early years were characterized by intense evangelism. For example, in 1654 Fox organized sixty persons into pairs to travel throughout central and southern England sharing the gospel. Two men went together, or two women, typically an older person with a younger.<sup>5</sup> They represented a cross-section of English society. As groups of believers were gathered from place to place, they were kept in communication by “traveling ministers,” who visited regularly and kept in touch with each other through an

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<sup>3</sup> James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology. Vol. I, Ethics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986), 28.

<sup>4</sup> Margery Post Abbott, *et al.*, *Historical Dictionary of the Friends (Quakers)*, Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements, ed. Jon Woronoff, vol. 44 (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2003), xxiii.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

administrative and communication center maintained by Margaret Fell in her home, Swarthmoor Hall. This ministry of hospitality and support inspired some Friends to call Margaret Fell the “nursing mother” of the Quaker movement.<sup>6</sup> The evangelistic impulse was not limited to England. Quaker ministers spread out through Europe, and eventually even to such remote places as Turkey, Russia, and the American colonies. As one would expect, the movement needed some sort of structure and organization if it was going to survive. But before describing the structure that developed, it is important to understand what Fox and other early Quakers considered the true church to be.

### The True Church

George Fox was adamant that the true church had nothing to do with any building anywhere. Though untrained in biblical studies, he had an excellent grasp of Scripture from his reading and study and knew that the church had to do with people not “steeple houses,” as he derisively called church buildings. Further, he reflected the spirit of other English dissenters in that he rejected the State Church and all that was associated with it: forced allegiance to doctrines he considered false, forced “tithes,” clergy who held lucrative positions because of political or social ties, rituals that resulted in no noticeable difference in anybody’s life, and more.

In fact, the early Quakers considered the church of the New Testament apostles to have been the last true church and that ever since there had been increasing apostasy with only minor corrections through the Reformation. William Penn in his preface to George Fox’s journal summarized church history this way:

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<sup>6</sup> T.H.S. Wallace, *A Sincere and Constant Love: An Introduction to the Work of Margaret Fell*, ed. T.H.S. Wallace (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1992), iii.

Christians degenerated apace into outsides, as days, and meats, and divers other ceremonies. And which was worse, they fell into strife and contention about them, separating one from another, then envying, and as they had power, persecuting one another to the shame and scandal of their common Christianity, and grievous stumbling and offence to the heathen, among whom the Lord had so long and so marvelously preserved them. And having got at last the worldly power in their hands, by kings and emperors embracing the Christian profession, they changed what they could, the kingdom of Christ, which is not of this world, into a worldly kingdom; or at least styled the worldly kingdom that was in their hands the kingdom of Christ, and so they became worldly, and not true Christians. Then human inventions and novelties, both in doctrine and worship, crowded fast into the church; a door being opened thereunto by the grossness and carnality that appeared then among the generality of Christians; who had long since left the guidance of God's meek and heavenly Spirit, and given themselves up to superstition....<sup>7</sup>

Penn acknowledged that there was a remnant of the true church hiding in the "wilderness" at one place and time or another. Likewise, he acknowledged that the Reformation had moved in the direction of truth. "But," he wrote, "practice quickly failed, for wickedness flowed in a little time, as well among the professors of the Reformation, as those they reformed from; so that by the fruits of conversation they were not to be distinguished."<sup>8</sup> In subsequent pages Penn described group after group and their failure to restore the church. In his view, Friends were witness to the restoration of the true church. He titled a pamphlet he wrote in 1696, "Primitive Christianity Revived."<sup>9</sup>

George Fox used a variety of phrases and metaphors to refer to the true church, including "the fellowship of the mystery,"<sup>10</sup> "a people to the Lord,"<sup>11</sup> "the congregations

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<sup>7</sup> Fox, *Journal*, Vol. I, xxii.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., xxiii. The term "professors" as used by early Quakers referred not to teachers but to those who "professed" Christian faith.

<sup>9</sup> *Early Quaker Writings, 1650-1700*, ed. Hugh Barbour and Arthur O. Roberts (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), 14.

<sup>10</sup> Roberts, "Concept of the Church," 108.

<sup>11</sup> George Fox, 1624-1691, *Journal of George Fox*, Vol. II, Eighth (and bi-centenary) edition (London: Edward Hicks, 1891), 251.

of the righteous,”<sup>12</sup> “the house of Christ,”<sup>13</sup> and more. Arthur Roberts says that when Fox was referring to the church in a metaphysical sense he was apt to use the phrase “the pillar and ground of truth,” and that when he was referring to the church in a sociological sense he used terms like “fellowship,” “Gospel fellowship,” and “church fellowship.”<sup>14</sup> Charles Thomas, a Friends pastor and teacher of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, wrote that the Quaker use of language about being the people of God, “is not a claim to exclusiveness but the owning of a very precious relationship in which God calls and those who hear respond. It reflects the Biblical vision of a ‘covenant people....’ The term is a vision of the true church, reaching across denominational and sectarian lines.”<sup>15</sup>

Covenant language has been used by many, including Fox, to characterize how Quakers have thought of themselves as a people, especially in the sense of continuing the special relationship of a people to God through the centuries of history.<sup>16</sup> Douglas Gwyn offers a succinct definition of a covenant: “faithful, promise-keeping relationship.”<sup>17</sup> He notes that “the entire biblical epic is a covenantal drama. It is played out in the successes and failures of Israel and the Church, as they try to live the covenant, to enact the sign of God’s loving call to the earth’s peoples.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> George Fox, 1624-1691, *The Works of George Fox*, vol. VII, *The Epistles Volume I* (State College, PA: New Foundation Publication, 1990), 256.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Roberts, “Concept of the Church,” 125.

<sup>15</sup> Charles F. Thomas, ed. *The Church in Quaker Thought and Practice: A Study in Ecclesiology*. (Philadelphia, PA: Faith and Life Movement and Friends World Committee, Section of the Americas, 1979), 27.

<sup>16</sup> See Ibid., pp. 178, 9; Lewis Benson, “The Early Quaker Vision of the Church,” *Quaker Religious Thought* II, 1 (Spring 1960): 5; Mary Moehlman, “Children of the Covenant, Children of the Light,” *Quaker Religious Thought* 24, 2 (Winter 1989-90): 8.

<sup>17</sup> Douglas Gwyn, *The Covenant Crucified: Quakers and the Rise of Capitalism* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1995), 1.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 8.



Gwyn also notes the importance of the idea of Covenant at the point in church history when Quakers came on the scene. “The Reformation was the first major flowering of covenantal thought in the Church since New Testament times. Protestants, particularly in Switzerland, the Rhineland, and Britain, reconceived history, the Church, society, and politics in terms of God’s covenantal purposes.”<sup>19</sup>

There are some important ways in which Fox and other Quakers affirmed their involvement in the Covenant, specifically the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. Aspects of the Quaker understanding of Covenant that deserve special discussion are: the inwardness of the New Covenant, the universality of this covenant, the call to holiness in this covenant, and the priority of this covenant.

The Inwardness of the Covenant. George Fox, in a pamphlet he wrote entitled “The Second Covenant,” recounted Israel’s failure in the first covenant and then cited the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and then asserts the fulfillment of the second covenant:

and now this spirit is witnessed, which the Lord hath put within his people, and hath given them a new heart, and this is the one heart, the new heart which the people of God come to be joined together withal to God, and this brings them to know the Lord to be their God, and themselves to be his people according to his promise, they shall be unto me a people, and I will be unto them a God, but as for those that walk after the heart of their own detestable things, and their own abominations, I will recompense their way upon their own heads, saith the Lord.<sup>20</sup>

Fox emphasized the inwardness and reality of experience in the new covenant. As Arthur Roberts put it, Fox was not content with “a closed experience known only by letter and by form. He would have the Church to be emancipated from the unnecessary shadows of

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>20</sup> George Fox, 1624-1691, *The Works of George Fox*, vol. 4, *Doctrinal Books I* (State College, PA: New Foundation Publication, 1990), 150.

the Old Covenant. God speaks now in the tabernacle of the soul, in a ‘new and living way.’”<sup>21</sup>

It was important to Quakers to emphasize that though the New Covenant was made possible in and by Christ, it was more than just “bookkeeping” in Heaven. It was relational. It was not just that sins were forgiven because Jesus shed his blood, but that the possibility of real dialogue and communion with God and the ability to hear and obey were now possible. Lewis Benson, paraphrasing Fox, emphasized the renewal of relationship the New Covenant made possible: “The risen Christ is the prophet who now teaches God’s people *himself*. In him the conversational relationship between God and his people, which was imperfect in the old covenant, is now made perfect.”<sup>22</sup>

The Quaker interpretation of the significance of the New Covenant is consistent with non-Quaker interpreters of the Bible. Fox example, the late F. F. Bruce in his commentary on *Hebrews* noted the threefold results of the New Covenant as portrayed by the writer of that New Testament letter in 8: 8-12: “(a) the implanting of God’s law in their hearts; (b) the knowledge of God as a matter of personal experience; (c) the blotting out of their sins.”<sup>23</sup> In an interesting footnote, Bruce comments on the significance of the word “law” in Jeremiah’s prophecy:

The original wording of Jer. 31:33 is: “I will put my *tōrāh* within them.” Heb. *Tōrāh* means more than statutory law; it embraces the ideas of guidance, direction and instruction. The New Testament fulfillment of this promise is nowhere better expressed than in Paul’s words in Rom. 8:1ff. of the work of the indwelling Spirit of God in the believer.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Roberts, “Concept of the Church,” 97.

<sup>22</sup> Benson, “The Quaker Vision,” 6.

<sup>23</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964), 172.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, n.54.

“Guidance, direction and instruction” were definitely part of what Quakers experienced in their conversational relationship with the risen Christ, and part of how they understood the New Covenant.

Neil R. Lightfoot, also not a Quaker, comments on the same portion of the book of *Hebrews* with even more significance, noting how the New Covenant was to be both individual and universal:

In the new covenant all were to be “taught by the Lord” (Isa. 54:13; Jn. 6:44-45). As God would write His laws on men’s hearts, so God Himself would be the teacher of His people. Under the old covenant all people did not know God’s law. No one but the trained expert, the scribe or the priest, could know the endless minutiae of regulations concerning offerings and sacrifices. . . . No longer would there be distinction between layman and priest. The knowledge of God would be accessible to all alike—to the poor as well as to the rich, to both the unlearned and the learned, to the least and to the greatest.<sup>25</sup>

The universality of the New Covenant mentioned by Lightfoot points to a second key Quaker understanding about the covenant.

The Universality of the Covenant. John Punshon, writing about the Quakers’ understanding of the idea of covenant, noted that they were strongly shaped by the Puritan context in which they arose. But they consciously rejected certain elements of Puritan thought about the covenant, including the notion of predestination by which only some were elected to salvation, and others were therefore elected to damnation.<sup>26</sup> The Quakers had great confidence in what the gospel writer John called “The true light that gives light to every[one]” (John 1:9). But as Arthur Roberts points out, the universalism

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<sup>25</sup> Neil R. Lightfoot, *Jesus Christ Today: A Commentary on the Book of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976), 159, 60.

<sup>26</sup> John Punshon, *Reasons for Hope: The Faith and Future of the Friends Church* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 2001), 161.

of the early Friends related “only to the witness of God ... and not necessarily to the reception of that witness.”<sup>27</sup>

The Call to Holiness. Yet another way in which the Quakers departed from the broader Puritan understanding of the Covenant was that they wanted no part of “imputed righteousness,” that is, a reckoning of moral innocence regardless of the facts in a person’s life. John Punshon writes that Friends, “preached ... a victory over sin, not an accommodation with it.”<sup>28</sup> In fact, says Punshon, one reason Quakers tended to talk about the Covenant as a Covenant of Light was to emphasize their different understanding. He quotes James Nayler, an early Quaker preacher:

That faith we own and witness is that which stands in Jesus Christ, the everlasting covenant of light, who is the light of the world, and this light we believe and follow; and by this we are led out of all the ways, works and worships of this dark world, and the effects of this light we witness by faith...What covenant have you who deny the light of Christ to guide you? Was he not given for an everlasting covenant to both Jew and Gentile?<sup>29</sup>

In two brief sentences that provide a summary of George Fox’s view on the matter, Arthur Roberts wrote, “A Fall which is significant morally can be answered only by a Restoration which is significant morally. Only by this can one understand a real Atonement.”<sup>30</sup>

The Priority of Covenant Community. Without relationship there is no covenant. Lewis Benson, one of the foremost interpreters of George Fox saw this matter of relationship with God and with others as the primary vision of the Quaker founder:

Fox’s vision of the church is based on his view of the relationship between man and God. His Christian anthropology is expressed in terms of the story of Adam and Eve and this revolves around the concept of the *image*

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<sup>27</sup> Roberts, “Concept of the Church,” 109.

<sup>28</sup> Punshon, *Reasons*, 168.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Roberts, “Concept of the Church,” 116.

*of God.* The *image of God* is not to be understood as something that man possesses as part of the humanity with which he is endowed at creation but it expresses, rather, a state of relationship between God and man.<sup>31</sup>

Interestingly, this understanding of the “image of God” expressed by the 17<sup>th</sup> century Quaker is a current topic of theological discussion. Colin Gunton, a British scholar writing in 1993, and with no known connection to Friends, shares Fox’s understanding of what it means to be made in the image of God, though he takes it in a direction Fox did not. Gunton argues that the Christian idea of the Trinity, and specifically the Greek word *perichoresis* offers a new way of thinking about what it means to be human. He explains what *perichoresis* meant to early church thinkers:

In its origins, the concept was a way of showing the ontological interdependence and reciprocity of the three persons of the Trinity: how they were only what they were by virtue of their interrelation and interanimation, so that for God to be did not involve an absolute simplicity but a unity deriving from a dynamic plurality of persons....

According to the teaching of perichoresis, the three divine persons are all bound up with each other, so that one is not one without the other two.<sup>32</sup>

Gunton goes on to argue that being made “in the image of God” may very well involve this same kind of *perichoresis*, that is to say that such a concept allows us to retain our particularity as persons while at the same time portraying a much more significant understanding of relationships than popularly understood. He specifically contrasts it with understandings of relationship that are based only on what individuals find fulfilling or personally pleasing.<sup>33</sup> And he specifically relates this concept to the Christian understanding of the Covenant. He writes, “*Covenant* expresses above all the calling of

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<sup>31</sup> Benson, “The Quaker Vision,” 4.

<sup>32</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 152, 3.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 168, 9.

the human race into free and joyful partnership with God, and so with each other.”<sup>34</sup> This theological language seems a legitimate way to think about what Jesus meant when he prayed, “Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21b).

Gunton is not alone among contemporary scholars who see the implications of the Trinity for the way we think about relating to God and to one another. Miroslav Volf has written:

The future of the church in God’s new creation is the mutual, personal indwelling of the triune God and his glorified people, as becomes clear from the description of the new Jerusalem in the Apocalypse of John (cf. Rev 21:1-22:5). Participation in the communion of the triune God, however, is not only an object of hope for the church; it is also its present experience.<sup>35</sup>

It should be noted that George Fox would likely have argued with both Gunton and Volf about their use of Trinitarian language, because he objected to the use of a word which is not found in Scripture. Dean Freiday, a contemporary Friend who is perhaps best known for his “modern English” version of Robert Barclay’s *Apology*, has written that George Fox advised early Friends to discuss doctrinal questions by using only the language of Scripture and avoiding “notions,” i.e., terms of theologians and other scholars.<sup>36</sup>

On the subject of the Trinity – or Triunity – of God, Freiday notes that early Friends, especially William Penn, had insights about the nature of God that anticipated a more modern understanding of this doctrine. Noting the tendencies toward neo-

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>35</sup> Miroslav Volf, “Community Formation as an Image of the Triune God: A Congregational Model of Church Order and Life,” in *Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002), 214.

<sup>36</sup> Dean Freiday, *Nothing Without Christ* (Newberg, OR: The Barclay Press, 1984), 88.

Platonism of 17<sup>th</sup> century thought and the modern discomfort with that, Freiday sees in the early Quaker language of “light” as especially helpful. He quotes Penn as identifying the “Light” that shines in the soul of a person with Christ “who was full of Grace and Truth....” For Friends this was a way of affirming both the immanence of God and the transcendence of God as well as the historical reality of the present Christ.<sup>37</sup>

So though the language of Gunton and Volf might not be acceptable to early Friends, the concept they articulate fits very well with Fox’s strong affirmation of the relational nature of being “made in the image of God.” And likewise Fox shared the view of these and many other contemporary scholars that the church is communal in nature. As Arthur Roberts put it:

George Fox had confidence that it was the purpose of God not only to restore to individuals the lost image of God but also to restore the unity of persons through “the true church faith.” Unity with God, with the Scriptures, and with one another is the cry of this reformer, who lived in one of the most disunited periods of modern history.<sup>38</sup>

In a later section of this chapter, quotations from the writings of Fox will show his practical application of this understanding of the church in the way he implemented the polity of the Friends movement and the way he fostered connection among the members.

The covenant community is one that deserves priority in our attention, because the church is not just “an interest group,” or, in the language of sociologists “a voluntary association.” It is a people *called* together by Christ who asks for their attention and their obedience. It is a holy community which, according to Hugh Barbour and Arthur

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>38</sup> Roberts, “Concept of the Church,” 124.

Roberts, “constitutes the primary loyalty-group, transcending the nation or state as the embodiment of God’s kingdom.”<sup>39</sup> Lewis Benson puts it this way:

A primary community is one that has the first claim on our loyalty and is the social force that has the greatest influence on our lives. It is our basic social orientation and the group which, more than any other, we feel to be the place where we belong. It is the social commitment that determines all other social commitments. It is a fact that for many people today church membership does not mean membership in a primary community.<sup>40</sup>

The early Quakers understanding of the church and their practice was consistent with this “primary community” concept. Though Fox would have vehemently resisted the label “sect,” sociologists and historians might very well consider the early Friends a sect because of the way in which they functioned as a primary community for their adherents.

For George Fox this community looked both backward and forward. The church was tied to history but also embraced an eschatological expectation. Benson says for early Quakers,

Hearing and obeying the voice of God leads men into a holy community and it leads to a prophetic understanding of the meaning of history. The word that is heard today is related to all that God has said and done before. It is only as we become obedient participants in holy history that we come to understand the meaning of salvation.<sup>41</sup>

Roberts adds about Fox in particular, “His concept of the Church in contemporary history and in the future is that it is a tension of a realized and expected eschatology.”<sup>42</sup>

We have seen in this section that for early Friends the church as they had known it and experienced it in their past was apostate, whether Roman Catholic, Church of England, or various Protestant reformations. They saw themselves as part of the True

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<sup>39</sup> *Early Quaker Writings*, 468.

<sup>40</sup> Lewis Benson, *Catholic Quakerism: A Vision for All Men* (Philadelphia, PA: Book & Publications Committee Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, 1968), 97.

<sup>41</sup> Benson, “The Quaker Vision,” 7.

<sup>42</sup> Roberts, “Concept of the Church,” 199.



Church restored, part of the Covenant of Light, a community able to recognize and follow the voice of the Living Christ in holy obedience, a community that shaped the whole of their lives. But how did this church function in practice? How was it organized? What patterns of leadership and accountability can be traced? The section below describes a structure and polity that functioned with little change well into the twentieth century.

### The Beginnings of Order and Polity Among Friends

The role of persecution. All students of Quaker history agree that persecution had a major role in bringing about the earliest organization of the Friends movement, though there is not complete agreement about whether Fox and the other early leaders planned for the structure that was eventually put in place or whether that structure was what contemporary North Americans would characterize as “Plan B.” There had been persecution of the Quakers almost from the start. There was an “established” church to which all citizens owed tithes. But when dissenters, including Quakers, refused to pay the tithe, they were subject to penalties, including imprisonment. Other Quaker beliefs and practices also brought them into conflict with the surrounding society and the legal structure of the church and state. Their situation was not quite as serious during the Commonwealth period of Oliver Cromwell, though even then persecution occurred. But with the restoration of the Monarchy in 1660 when Charles II took the throne of England, persecution increased dramatically. Within the first two years of his reign many of the early and strong Quaker leaders either died or were imprisoned, including a significant number of the early evangelists and traveling ministers. Richard Vann in his study of records of the period reports:

By the spring of 1663 Thomas Aldam, John Audland, Edward Burrough, John Camm, Richard Hubberthorne, and James Nayler were dead, to be followed soon after by William Caton and Richard Farnworth. Francis Howgill, William Dewsbury, George Fox, and hundreds of other Friends were in prison. The network of traveling Friends was disrupted almost beyond repair, and the survival of the movement required some sort of organization to sustain suffering Friends, secure what legal relief was available, and provide for local leadership.<sup>43</sup>

The earliest form of the Quaker business meeting, The Meeting for Sufferings, came into existence to care for the very matters that Vann names. But even as early as the 1650's there were informal arrangements to care for the needs of suffering Friends, record marriages and births, etc.<sup>44</sup>

The significance of the Ranter movement. A separate issue from that of persecution, though very much related, was the confusion in the minds of many English citizens of the Quakers with other dissenting groups, specifically the Ranters. Arthur Roberts says that if Quakers represented “a turn in the direction of corporate unity,” the Ranters represented “an entrance into the intoxicating enclosure of individualism.”<sup>45</sup> Perhaps the simplest way to categorize them is to say they were antinomian. They argued that since the Law of the Old Covenant no longer applied Christians were “free” to do as they pleased. And because Quakers also argued that the Law of the Old Covenant had passed away, there was some confusion in the popular mind between the two groups. But the Quakers in leaving behind the Old Covenant were at the same time embracing a New Covenant that called them into righteous and holy living. They were scandalized by the immorality of the Ranters and wanted no misunderstanding of how they differed from them. Not only did Fox himself criticize the Ranters in letters and doctrinal publications,

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<sup>43</sup> Richard T. Vann, *The Social Development of English Quakerism 1655-1755* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 91.

<sup>44</sup> *Early Quaker Writings*, 513.

<sup>45</sup> Roberts, “Concept of the Church,” 34.

but he was joined by other significant leaders. Margaret Fell wrote a pamphlet entitled “Some Ranters’ Principles Answered” as a response to a specific document, and Robert Barclay the well-known theologian of the early movement wrote a book which he titled *The Anarchy of the Ranters*.<sup>46</sup>

Why such attention to the Ranters? T. H. S. Wallace in his introduction to a reprint of Margaret Fell’s pamphlet wrote, “The Quaker need to confront Ranterism was concrete and imperative.”<sup>47</sup> For one thing, the open style of Friends worship made it possible for Ranters to take advantage of the setting and to disrupt meetings for worship. But more importantly, the public’s confusion of the Ranters and Quakers made for a significant public image problem. Quakers who were already undergoing persecution and likely to experience more did not need the added burden of being confused with people whose behavior was openly immoral and often illegal. And so here was another circumstance that spurred development of order and structure among Friends so as to gain some control over who was “in” and who was “out” of the movement.

A visible church needs structure. Because these circumstances are so much a part of the spur to develop an organization for Friends, it does raise the question of how much the organization was merely a reaction or how much it was in the minds of Fox and others at the very beginning of the movement. Lewis Benson insists that the structure which came to be called “Gospel order” among Friends was part of the original vision.<sup>48</sup>

He says George Fox

believed that there is an order that belongs to God’s people in the new covenant. He calls this the Gospel order and he understands this new

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<sup>46</sup> Used as a resource for this paper in a reprinted format as Robert Barclay, *A Treatise on Church Government* (Philadelphia, PA: Friends’ Book-Store, n.d.).

<sup>47</sup> Wallace, *Sincere and Constant*, 81.

<sup>48</sup> Benson, “The Quaker Vision,” 9.

covenant community to have form, structure, order, and government without being a religious institution. It is an outwardly visible community with historical existence but not necessarily continuous historical existence.<sup>49</sup>

It is clear that Fox believed all along in a visible expression of the church as well as an invisible one. Roberts explains that Fox believed that Christians knew each other “through the mystery of the new birth and in the leadership of the One Christ,” not by buildings or church names, etc.<sup>50</sup> But Fox did believe there was an “*outward recognition* of the Church which has been gathered in the name and power of Jesus. Fox does not limit himself to an invisible Church. Entrance into the holiness of the Church may be mysterious but participation must be obvious.”<sup>51</sup> Lewis Benson observes about Fox’s teaching that he believed that preaching the gospel produced a community.<sup>52</sup>

Dean Freiday suggests that because for Fox the Church was “a people of God,” that opened the way for it to be “ordered and reordered in an almost infinite variety of ways.”<sup>53</sup> Freiday, who has spent a great deal of time and energy in ecumenical discussions as an observer in the World Council of Churches, has an interesting observation about how Friends see order issues compared to how other Christians see these same issues in our own time. He writes, “In spite of all the significance others attach to Order, Friends seem to be alone in stressing that it is *the quality of the proceedings and the relationships* – not the nature or the authoritativeness of the structure – that should be paramount in all considerations of Order.”<sup>54</sup> Consequently it is not a

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<sup>49</sup> Benson, *Catholic Quakerism*, 44.

<sup>50</sup> Roberts, “Concept of the Church,” 126.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>52</sup> Benson, *Catholic Quakerism*, 49.

<sup>53</sup> Freiday, *Nothing But Christ*, 47.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

question of what structure is “holy,” but whether the people working whatever structure are “holy.”

The structure implemented. What did the “Gospel order” look like for early Friends? How did it function? Fox and others conceived of a connectional system of meetings, which actually took several years to organize. Local groups of Friends would gather monthly in a special meeting for worship and business (usually on a week-day) and deal with matters of concern to that local group. Representatives from each of these local “Monthly Meetings” in a given geographical region (typically a county) would gather every three months to consider matters of importance to all the Meetings in the area and thus constituted a “Quarterly Meeting.” And ultimately, representatives from the various Quarterly Meetings would gather annually for “Yearly Meeting.” Arthur Roberts adds further information:

Between 1667 and 1680 the grouping of particular meetings into “monthly meetings” and of representative “quarterly” and “yearly” meetings took place. The ministers had a general meeting in connection with the yearly meeting at London; and in addition, ministers in and around London met each Sunday morning before dispersing for services and also on Monday, forming what was called the “Second Day’s Morning Meeting,” which had oversight over the spoken and written ministry of Friends. The “Meeting for Sufferings” grew beyond the care, legal and physical, of those oppressed by the law. This weekly representative gathering became an executive body.

Thus arose an efficient organization patterned, according to Fox’s views, at least, after the authority given to the apostolic Church, and providing a framework for the exercise of the powers of the Church.

The gospel order not only provided historical vindication for authority but it also served as a check to individualism.<sup>55</sup>

Controversy over structure. Fox and other core leaders of the movement worked hard over a few years to establish this structure. Richard Vann calls it “an impressive

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<sup>55</sup> Roberts, “Concept of the Church,” 134.

accomplishment.”<sup>56</sup> But he also notes that the process of establishing this order in the movement “cost Quakerism its only really sizable schism [in England].”<sup>57</sup> Vann is referring to what is often called the “Wilkinson-Story Separation.” John Wilkinson and John Story were prominent early leaders in the Friends movement. They objected to the systematizing of church government. And some of their adherents even resisted meeting in agreed upon times and places. There were significant theological and ecclesiological issues involved in this debate, but there were also very practical matters. The “Separatists” (the Wilkinson-Story party) objected to what they considered the authoritarianism of Fox and other leaders. And the “Orthodox” (Fox and others) accused the Separatists of wanting to avoid particular meeting times and places because they did not have the commitment to face persecution from government authorities which was facilitated by predictable meetings.<sup>58</sup> Arthur Roberts, makes an important point about the consequences of this controversy for Friends, writing, “But for all its bitter personal attacks it served to test out and examine principles of centralized church polity whereby Quakerism was saved from a purely congregational form of government.”<sup>59</sup>

Robert Barclay’s book on church government was both a response to the Ranters, but at the same time a response to those among Friends who argued that there should be no church structure. In this work he offered three assertions:

First, That Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, did appoint and ordain, that there should be order and government in it.

Secondly, That the apostles and primitive Christians, when they were filled with the Holy Ghost, and immediately led by the Spirit of God, did practise and commend it.

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<sup>56</sup> Vann, *Social Structure*, 101.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Roberts, “Concept of the Church,” 139.

Thirdly, That the same occasion and necessity now occurring, which gave them opportunity to exercise that authority, the Church of Christ hath the same power now as ever, and is led by the same Spirit into the same practices.<sup>60</sup>

Barclay takes each of these assertions and argues them thoroughly with scriptural and historical citations. A recurring theme in his arguments is that even though Friends acknowledge the abuses of church order and government and that the fears of such by some Quakers and others is justified, that does not negate the value of appropriate use of structure and governance. Some examples of specific issues are helpful to catch the spirit of his book and to understand the kinds of practical questions Friends faced in their function as a church.

The submission to the counsel of leaders is one such example. Because Friends argued so strongly against a distinction between “clergy” and “laity” and for a full implementation of the “priesthood of all believers,” there was resistance by some to any kind of recognized leadership. Barclay quoted texts from Hebrews and Jude to counter this resistance, and in the case of the text from Jude he is clearly thinking of the Ranters:

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith (Hebrews 13:7).

Obeys your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be no advantage to you (Hebrews 13:17).

In the very same way, these dreamers pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings (Jude 8).

Commenting on these texts, Barclay writes:

For there can be nothing more plain from these testimonies, than that the ancient apostles and primitive Christians practised order and government

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<sup>60</sup> Barclay, *Church Government*, 21. Barclay’s British spelling is maintained in citations.

in the Church; that some did appoint and ordain certain things; condemn and approve certain practices, as well as doctrines, by the Spirit of God: that there lay an obligation in point of duty upon others to obey and submit: that this was no encroachment nor imposition upon their Christian liberty; nor anyways contradictory to their being inwardly and immediately led by the Spirit of God in their hearts; and lastly, That such as are in the true feeling and sense, will find it their places to obey, and be one with the Church of Christ in such like cases; and that it is such as have lost their sense and feeling of the life of the body, that dissent, and are disobedient, under the false pretence of liberty.<sup>61</sup>

Later, referring to the “modern church” (his own time) he observes that some of the same kinds of circumstances and problems exist as did in the biblical period and call for similar organization and authority:

We find, to our great grief, that some walk disorderly; and some are puffed up, and strive to sow division, labouring to stumble the weak, and to cause offences in the Church of Christ. What then is more suitable, and more Christian, than to follow the footsteps of the flock, and to labour and travel for the good of the Church, and for the removing all that is hurtful; even as the holy apostles, who walked with Jesus, did before us? . . . Must it be heresy, or oppression, to watch over one another, in love? To take care for the poor? To see that there be no corrupt, no defiled members of the body, and carefully and christianly (sic) deal with them, for restoring them, if possible; and for withdrawing from them, if incurable?<sup>62</sup>

George Fox’s views on the subject of church authority and the right and need of leaders to exercise it were expressed from time to time in his epistles and in pamphlets as well. One such pamphlet was titled, “The Authority of the Church of Christ.” In it he quotes the apostle Paul from 2 Corinthians 13:2 (“I already gave you a warning when I was with you....”) and then writes, “Here the apostle used his authority in the power and spirit of Christ, who would not spare sin and sinners.”<sup>63</sup> In the same document he also quotes from 3 John 9, 10 on the judgment pronounced against Diotrephes and says, “As many as receive Christ, to them he gives the power to become the sons of God...these

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 34, 5.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 35, 6.

<sup>63</sup> Fox, *Works*, VI, *The Doctrinals III*, 178.



had power from Christ to admonish, reprove, and rebuke such as went out from the will of God, into sin and evil.”<sup>64</sup>

Though Fox often emphasized that this church authority was to be used for “edification” and not for “destruction,” he was clear that the church community and its leaders must act at times to bring individuals “to that which did at first convince them, and to condemn their contrary actions.”<sup>65</sup> The following brief paragraphs from his Journal illustrate the strength with which he addressed such issues:

They that judge in God’s divine matters, must live in his divine Spirit, power, and light now, as they did then; which spiritual and divine judgment Christ has given to his church, the living stones, and living members, that make up his spiritual household; to try Jews, apostles, and prophets; to try faiths and religions, trees and fruits, shepherds and teachers; and to try spirits. So the living members have a living, divine judgment in the church of Christ, which he is the Head of, the Judge of all.

Nay, the church has a power given them, which is farther than a judgment: for what they “bind on earth, is bound in heaven by the power of God: and what they loose on earth is loosed in heaven by the power of God.” This power has Christ given to his living members, the church.<sup>66</sup>

Fox’s model of connection and caring. The strong defenses of church authority quoted above should not outweigh the many other kinds of expressions George Fox made concerning the appropriateness and need of Friends to stay connected to one another. He wrote a large number of “Epistles” to Friends in England, but also to other places as Friends spread around the world. These appeals were often made with clear expressions of love, such as “So with my love to all.”<sup>67</sup> Barbour and Roberts note that Fox’s epistles

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> George Fox, 1624-1691, *The Works of George Fox*, vol. VII, *The Epistles Volume I* (State College, PA: New Foundation Publication, 1990), Epistle 258, p. 310.

<sup>66</sup> Fox, *Journal*, II, 431.

<sup>67</sup> *Early Quaker Writings*, 496.

were and are among the most beloved of his writings.<sup>68</sup> An example full of both practical as well as loving concern is Epistle 340 sent to Friends colonizing West Jersey in 1676:

And keep up your meetings for worship, and your Men and Women's Meetings for the affairs of Truth, both Monthly and Quarterly. . . . And do not strive about outward things; but dwell in the love of God, for that will unite you together, and make you kind and gentle one towards another; and to seek one another's good and welfare, and to be helpful one to another; and see that nothing be lacking among you, then all will be well. And let temperance and patience and kindness and brotherly love be exercised among you, so that you may abound in virtue, and the true humility; living in peace, showing forth the nature of Christianity, that you may all live as a family and the Church of God, holding Christ your heavenly head, and he exercising his offices among you and in you. . . .

And write over yearly, from your Meetings, how you are settled, and how your affairs go in the Truth, and how your men and women's meetings are settled.

And my desires are that we may hear that you are a good savour to God, in those countries: So that the Lord may crown all your actions with his glory.<sup>69</sup>

Epistle 252 was sent "To Friends in the ministry, scattered abroad in Virginia, Maryland, New England, Barbadoes (sic), and other plantations beyond the sea."<sup>70</sup> It contained this common expression of what Fox thought ought to motivate Friends in their manner of living: "So be faithful, that you may be one another's crown, and rejoicing in the Lord, going together in the love and fear of the Lord."

To be clear in demonstrating that Fox's concerns for caring and accountability among Friends was intended not just for those within a particular meeting, but across the movement and across whatever national boundaries, Epistle 253 sent to Friends in Holland, is a good example:

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 486.

<sup>69</sup> *Early Quaker Writings*, 496.

<sup>70</sup> Fox, *Works*, VII, 305.

Dear friends, -In the ever lasting power of the Lord God I salute all the faithful and upright, among whom the Lord hath joy and delight; in which everlasting power of God have you your unity, fellowship, and dominion. And so friends, all sufferings of Friends, of what sort soever, for conscience sake to Christ, in Holland, in Germany, in Zealand, in Gilderland, in the Palatinate, in Freezland, Sweedland, Switzerland, and Hamburg, send an account for what they have suffered, and by whom; together with the examples that are fallen upon the persecutors; with their mittimusses [warrants for imprisonment] and examinations, send all these to London, to Friends there; that if any ambassadors or agents, out of any of those places, come to London, Friends may make application to them; for there are some Friends, who are ordered for the same purpose, to take knowledge of such things.<sup>71</sup>

Supports to the structure. It should be clear from the above that in addition to the actual connectional structure of Monthly, Quarterly and Yearly Meetings, this structure was supported by regular correspondence. Fox called his letters “Epistles.” That practice continues to this day among Friends with Yearly Meetings issuing annual letters of greeting and report which are sent to other Yearly Meetings around the world. These modern epistles do not usually hold the “weight” nor attention that correspondence from George Fox would have held for early Quakers, but even in their current format they serve to connect Friends across Yearly Meeting lines.

Another support to the structure of Friends is the practice of distributing “Queries.” These are questions that are asked and answered by individuals, and also by Monthly and Quarterly Meetings. They serve as a kind of accountability tool. The earliest form of these queries was sent to Monthly Meetings in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and asked questions such as, “How does Truth prosper among you?”<sup>72</sup> In past centuries, the task of reading and formally responding to the Queries might take considerable time and attention in Meetings for Business and Worship and would have been answered in

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>72</sup> Abbot, *Dictionary*, 235.

writing and forwarded to the Quarterly Meeting, or in the case of Quarters, to the Yearly Meeting. At present the practice of Friends is widely varied among local, regional and yearly meeting groups, in some cases still taken very seriously and in others as a perfunctory chore.

### Conclusion

The examination of the origins of Friends and their polity demonstrates clearly that they sought to commit themselves to a covenant community that took priority over all other communities. They saw this as obedience to the Living Christ. Within this community, across geographical boundaries, they were accountable to one another, cared for one another, and called one another to live as fitting disciples of Jesus Christ. With this chapter, in addition to the previous chapter's biblical foundation, we now have a historical and theological basis with which to compare contemporary Friends practice.

What have modern Friends, specifically those in the Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends, done with this structure? How have they adapted it for the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries? Are they being true to their biblical and historical roots? These questions point to the task of the following chapter.

## Chapter 4

### 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY POLITY ADJUSTMENTS IN NWYM

The last chapter described the theological and practical considerations that led early Friends to adopt a pattern of organization that fits the connectional model of church polity. That chapter also demonstrated how Friends saw their faith and practice corresponding to what they saw modeled in the church of the New Testament, based on the kinds of images and practices described in chapter 2 of this dissertation. The current chapter sharpens the focus on the contemporary group of Friends known as Northwest Yearly Meeting and demonstrates how they made changes to their structure that had consequences, some of them unintended, to the polity of their church. The chapter will 1) document the structural changes made in the late 1960s, 2) examine the problems and needs the denomination was trying to resolve by these changes, and 3) clarify the results of these changes with their theological and polity implications for Friends of NWYM.

#### Structural Changes Among Friends of NWYM

American Friends polity followed the traditional connectional pattern of monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Since the late 1960's several yearly meetings, though not all of them, have made significant changes to the way quarterly meetings function. Some of these changes relate to little more than nomenclature, but some of the changes have fundamentally altered the polity of the

denomination in ways that leaders likely did not anticipate. Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends is among those yearly meetings that have made these changes.

The official records of the Yearly Meeting begin to show evidence of a call for change in the midlevel connections called Quarterly Meetings in the year 1966. In that year the Portland Quarterly Meeting sent the following recommendation to the sessions of the yearly meeting: “That a committee at the Yearly Meeting level evaluate the effectiveness of the present program of Quarterly Meetings in their relationship to Oregon Yearly Meeting and explore possible ways of improving this effectiveness in terms of today’s needs.”<sup>1</sup> The matter was referred to the representatives and later that week they reported to the floor of the meeting their recommendation to have the Yearly Meeting Board of Evangelism study the proposal.<sup>2</sup> The meeting concurred with the recommendation.

The following year the Board of Evangelism reported having spent many hours in consideration of how quarterly meetings might be reorganized and presented the highlights of a proposed plan for such reorganization:

Instead of four quarterly sessions per year there would be three sessions, with the dates of all set up in each of three two-month periods on a no-conflict basis by the Board of Evangelism.

Since the term “quarterly” would no longer be appropriate, the groups of monthly meetings would be called “areas” instead...and the sessions would be called “area conferences.”

Yearly Meeting funds would be sent by the monthly meetings direct to the Yearly Meeting treasurer; the monthly meetings would appoint their own representatives to Yearly Meeting. Instead of having quarterly meeting committees, each area would appoint a member to each Yearly Meeting board. These would be called secretaries (secretary of evangelism,

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<sup>1</sup> Oregon Yearly Meeting of Friends Church, *Minutes Oregon Yearly Meeting of Friends Church 1966* Seventy-fourth session held at Greenleaf, ID, August 16-21, 1966 (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 1966), 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

secretary of Christian education, etc.), with each one especially responsible for promoting the program of his board in the monthly meetings....

There would be but one business meeting per year, in connection with the conference preceding Yearly Meeting. It would serve for the appointment of the secretaries as members of the several boards and a recording secretary, the hearing of a financial report and adoption of the annual budget. Secretaries would be nominated by a committee of which one member would be appointed by each monthly meeting.... It would still be in order for the monthly meetings to present matters of concern to be forwarded to the Yearly Meeting for consideration.<sup>3</sup>

The Minutes show there was considerable discussion of the plan, in more than one business session. One can imagine that in addition to the formal discussions there were many informal conversations throughout the day. The yearly meeting agreed to ask the Discipline Revision Committee to take the Board of Evangelism's proposal and prepare language to describe the actual working plan with details spelled out, and to distribute the proposed changes to monthly meetings for study during the year so that changes to the Discipline could receive a "first reading" in the yearly meeting sessions of the following year.<sup>4</sup>

As requested, a sub-committee of the Discipline Revision Committee, comprised of Earl Barker, Oscar Brown and Ellwood Mylander,<sup>5</sup> worked out the actual wording for the Discipline to accommodate the proposed changes, and in addition they prepared a chart which drew attention to the specific changes from existing practice to what was proposed. Every change was shown with clear distinction between current practice and proposed practice. This chart and accompanying correspondence was sent to every local congregation of Northwest Yearly Meeting during the fall of 1967. Figure 1 is an

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<sup>3</sup> Oregon Yearly Meeting of Friends Church, *1967 Minutes Oregon Yearly Meeting of Friends Church* Seventy-fifth session held at Newberg, Oregon August 15-20, 1967 (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 1967), 26.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>5</sup> Earl Barker, "Quarterly Meeting Structure Studied," *The Northwest Friend* (Newberg, OR), June 1967, 6.

adaptation of this document which was studied by Monthly Meetings during the church year 1967-1968.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 1. Changes to the Quarterly Meeting structure. Adapted from a mimeographed document distributed to the churches of NWYM by the Discipline Revision Committee, November, 1967.

<u>FEATURE</u>	<u>EXISTING QUARTERLY MEETING PATTERN</u>	<u>PROPOSED CHANGES</u>
Geographic grouping	Self-determined groups of monthly meetings, called "quarterly meetings."	Groups of monthly meetings established by the Yearly Meeting on the basis of convenience of travel and communication, called "areas."
Frequency of meeting	Sessions every calendar quarter, with times determined by each of the quarterly meetings.	Sessions, to be called "area conferences," three times per year (fall, winter, spring) on a no-conflict schedule coordinated by the Yearly Meeting.
Church promotion	Presentations in quarterly sessions by chairmen of the quarterly meeting committees.	Local and Yearly Meeting interests promoted in coordinated area conferences of the "rally" type; for example, a "Missionary Rally."
Fellowship	Spiritual sharing. Social visiting. Eating together.	These are all excellent; no change recommended here.
Inspiration	Gospel ministry. Congregational worship. Witness and praise.	No change except to avoid tedious preliminaries and go about it in a "King's Business-like" way.
Organization	Members appointed as clerks and as committee chairmen (superintendents); also as treasure, financial secretary, statistician.	Individuals appointed as members of the respective Yearly Meeting boards, to be called "secretaries," (as secretary of missions); one as recording secretary.
Business sessions	Held four times a year, as a regular feature of the quarterly meeting.	To be held once a year, in connection with the spring area conference.

<sup>6</sup>Oregon Yearly Meeting of Friends Church Committee on Discipline Revision, mimeographed document, "Quarterly Meeting Reorganization," November 15, 1967, George Fox University Archives: Committee on Reorganization.



	Presided over by clerks	Presided over by the "area superintendent." Recording secretary to take minutes.
	Various matters discussed and acted upon; officers and representatives elected in summer business session. Joint projects of the monthly meetings, and concerns in regard to church matters, considered and acted upon.	Election of officers (secretaries); annual financial report; adoption of annual budget.  These features should not be discontinued.
	Called and adjourned business meetings are provided for.	Similar provision would be made.
Operational procedures	Yearly Meeting funds sent to quarterly meeting treasurers and relayed by them to the Yearly Meeting treasurer.	Yearly Meeting funds to be sent by the monthly meeting treasurers direct to the Yearly Meeting treasurer.
	Fixed Expense quotas levied on quarterly meetings on basis of membership, and by them on monthly meetings.	Fixed Expense quotas to be levied directly on monthly meetings; treasurers notified by Yearly Meeting financial secretary.
	Quarterly meeting has its own annual expense budget, proposed by the finance committee.	Area likewise would adopt an annual budget, proposed by the secretary of finance (who is also treasurer) and the area superintendent.
	Annual reports of monthly meeting committees sent to the chairmen of quarterly meeting committees, summarized by them and read in the summer business session. Copies sent also to Yearly meeting boards.	Annual reports to be sent only to Yearly Meeting boards, not to be read in business sessions.
	Committee chairmen are members of Yearly Meeting boards, with main function to present their departments of work in the quarterly sessions.	There would be no quarterly meeting committees. Secretaries appointed as members of Yearly Meeting boards, with chief function to promote the program of their board in the monthly meetings.
	Quarterly meeting officers nominated by committee appointed in spring session; elected in summer session.	Area secretaries nominated by committee consisting of one appointed by each monthly meeting; elected in spring session.

	Committee convened and instructed by area superintendent.
Statistical reports sent by monthly meeting statisticians to quarterly meeting statisticians; summarized by them.	Statistical reports to be sent direct to Yearly Meeting statistician.
Quarterly meeting on ministry and oversight held in conjunction with each quarterly session.	Area meeting on ministry and oversight to be held three times a year in conjunction with area conferences.
Certain matters of church discipline related to the ministry delegated to the "quarterly meeting at large."	These matters to be cared for by the area meeting on ministry and oversight.
Monthly meeting reports on the "State of the Church" read in the summer business session; summarized and sent to the Yearly Meeting.	These reports to be sent to the area meeting on ministry and oversight; summarized and sent on to the Yearly Meeting.
Quarterly meeting may take initiative to establish outposts or new churches.	No change recommended here; monthly meetings encouraged to engage in joint projects of this type.
Quarterly meetings appoint representatives to Yearly Meeting on the basis of their resident active membership. Approximately 50 appointed each year.	Each monthly meeting would appoint one for each fifty resident active members or major fraction thereof, with each meeting to have at least one. Approximately 63 would be appointed. Every meeting would be represented if care were taken to appoint persons intending to go; no alternates would be needed.

In 1968 when Friends of Oregon Yearly Meeting convened for their seventy-sixth annual session, Earl Barker, chairman of the Discipline Revision Committee presented the proposed changes to the Discipline regarding the quarterly meeting structure. This served as a required "first reading" in the process of amending the Discipline. The minutes indicate there was lengthy discussion, carried over from the morning to the afternoon business session, but the changes were approved. Further, each quarterly

meeting was “encouraged to adopt the new approach as much as possible to meet the needs in its area.”<sup>7</sup> The next year, after a “second reading,” the changes to the *Constitution and Discipline* necessitated by the changes to the quarterly meeting structure were formally approved by the yearly meeting.<sup>8</sup>

### The “Needs” That Precipitated These Changes

The reader may have observed in the minutes cited above that the original request to study the quarterly meeting structure, and the reports of that study by the Board of Evangelism and the Committee on Discipline Revision, referred to “today’s needs.” That kind of language suggests that before the structure of quarterly meetings changed there were other things that had changed, making the existing structure feel like a poor fit. Something about the structure and circumstances in the churches led some people to conclude there was a mismatch. What were the “needs” which brought about these changes to Oregon Yearly Meeting’s structure?

Overwhelming evidence suggests that the changes made to the quarterly meeting structure were prompted primarily by pragmatic concerns: declining attendance at the quarterly sessions, changing communication patterns within the general culture and within the church, redundancy in the processing of church business, and growing competition with other priorities for both local meetings and the yearly meeting. The only concern that moved much beyond mere pragmatic issues was the view of some that

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<sup>7</sup> Oregon Yearly Meeting of Friends Church, *1968 Minutes Oregon Yearly Meeting of Friends Church* Seventy-sixth session held at Newberg, Oregon August 13-18, 1968 (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 1968), 31.

<sup>8</sup> Oregon Yearly Meeting of Friends Church, *1969 Minutes Oregon Yearly Meeting of Friends Church* Seventy-seventh session held at Newberg, Oregon August 12-17, 1969 (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 1969), 27, 36.

this particular structure now hindered the church's primary purpose: evangelism. The evidence to support the assertion that pragmatics pushed this change is found in the recollections of persons involved in the changes, in the official minutes that initiated and reported the changes, and in archived correspondence from the period.

When Friends who lived through the period of change described in this chapter are asked today what they remember about the reasons for those changes, their focus is universally on the pragmatic issues. I posed questions about what current pastors remember about these changes by sending a request to a NWYM pastors' email network. Though not many responded, those who did were consistent in their recollections. Ron Woodward commented:

#1 - It was hard to get people to come; not many folks showed up; hence, it was discouraging for those who did.

#2 - A bigger reason, however, was that Quarterly Meeting no longer conducted real business. I would gather that in our previous history, monthly meetings would forward concerns/issues to the quarterly meeting for discussion. Then, in some instances, those matters would be forwarded on to the yearly meeting. However, in all my lifetime-experience with quarterly meetings in CYM [California Yearly Meeting] and NWYM, I can never remember business issues being sent to the qm from the mm – to say nothing of being sent on to the ym. So, it became somewhat of a joke that the only business that the qm had to conduct was to perpetuate the organization by nominating/approving new officers for the next year.<sup>9</sup>

Mark Kelly, another pastor who commented in the email forum, was a relatively young man at the time of these changes. He expressed his view that the quarterly meetings ended up competing with monthly meetings for the time and energy of key leaders. As he put it, quarterly meetings “took a lot more out [of] local churches/members than they returned. Rather than the Quarterly Meetings inspiring &

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<sup>9</sup> Ron Woodward, <[woodwa@teleport.com](mailto:woodwa@teleport.com)>, RE: Were You There When They Killed Quarterly Meeting? [Email to NWYM Pastors List-serve <[nwym-pastors@strategicnetwork.org](mailto:nwym-pastors@strategicnetwork.org)>], 10 September 2003.

energizing church members, it seemed like local churches were expected to help out the QMs, which drained the energy of members.”<sup>10</sup>

Elenita Bales and her husband, George, were pastors in southwest Washington when the changes were made to quarterly meetings. She was also the Area Superintendent after the structural and nomenclature changes. She did not favor some of the changes that occurred, and feared for the impact on relationships among the congregations because of those changes. She reports that “Quarterly Meeting Business Meetings became more and more redundant (it seemed), as communication with the local church committees was coming from the Yearly Meeting Boards.”<sup>11</sup>

In a personal interview, Arthur O. Roberts, a professor of philosophy and religion at George Fox College during the period of these changes and a key leader in OYM, confirmed that the recollections reported in the emails quoted above fit with his own sense of what was occurring at the time. He reports that the kind of language heard in discussions were phrases like: “it is not working well,” “we can streamline the procedures,” “we can do a better job of redeeming the time than spinning wheels in quarterly meeting.” He does not recall any thought given to the theological issues and polity issues that might be implicit in the changes made.<sup>12</sup>

Printed minutes of the period and other records also show pragmatic concerns about structural issues. In the report of General Superintendent Dean Gregory at the

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<sup>10</sup> Mark Kelly, <pastormark@vffc.org>, RE: Were You There When They Killed Quarterly Meeting? [Email to NWYM Pastors List-serve <nwym-pastors@strategicnetwork.org>], 10 September 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Elenita Bales, <elenitabales1013@hotmail.com>, RE: Were You There When They Killed Quarterly Meeting? [Email to NWYM Pastors List-serve <nwym-pastors@strategicnetwork.org>], 21 September 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Arthur O. Roberts, interview by author, Newberg, OR, October 28, 2003.

1966 yearly meeting sessions, in the context of calling the church to a greater focus on evangelism and outreach, he said:

The work and ministry of the church is often misinterpreted as being the organizational structure and preaching ministry of the church. While these are vital and important, it is easy for us to get off-center so that most of our energies may be used up in simply being run ragged with committee work and the general operation of the establishment.

The real work of the church is not usually done at committee meetings, as essential as they are at times, but in the day by day witnessing of Christian people as they are “sown out” into their various communities and particular associations. A few folk can run an organization, but it takes every member to carry on the real heart-center of the work of the church....

This coming year has been designated the year of Advance 1966-67 in our Yearly Meeting. This is not a new program, but rather a fresh effort to lay aside the “busy work” of the church in order to permit all the members to concentrate on the “essential work” of the church, which is prayer, Bible study, worship, visitation, witnessing and attending to the affairs of the Great Commission of our Lord.... Friends, it is time for us to lay aside the weights and cut loose from the non-essentials in church operation and give ourselves fully to the central task and purpose of the church.<sup>13</sup>

It is likely more than coincidence that this concern over “busy work” appeared in the report of the Superintendent the same year in which Portland Quarterly Meeting asked the yearly meeting to consider how quarterly meetings might be revised.

In the ensuing year, Earl Barker, part of the committee that was charged with studying the proposed changes in quarterly meeting structure wrote an article on behalf of the committee in the yearly meeting’s monthly magazine, *The Northwest Friend*. Reporting the kinds of concerns the committee had heard and studied, he wrote of “the tedium of the business meetings, especially those in which the annual reports are read,”

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<sup>13</sup> OYM, *Minutes* 1966, 5, 6.

and of the sacrifice of “giving up precious Saturdays,” and also of the ineffectiveness of many committees.<sup>14</sup>

Later that year the new General Superintendent, Jack Willcuts, had correspondence with some who were troubled by the proposed changes to the quarterly meeting structure. In response to a letter from one pastor who had taken some offense at the reference in the Barker article about ineffective committees, Willcuts wrote about his own observations in various quarterly meetings. Though noting that there were many qualified people available to and from the quarterly meetings he wrote of “instances which I have personally observed where people are named on the floor of the quarterly meeting on a last minute basis merely upon determining who can be at yearly meeting....”<sup>15</sup>

The next year Superintendent Willcuts echoed in his own report to the yearly meeting the sentiment of his predecessor. Citing an editorial in *Moody Monthly* magazine Willcuts expressed concern that many local churches did not seem to know their intended mission. He added, “Churches are virtually paralyzed by a crippling ‘organizational sclerosis’ and introversion.”<sup>16</sup> Willcuts brought the same concern the following year. Noting some “unrest” in the church which was related to a desire for “renewal and relevance” in the church he suggested that one objective of the church

must be to seek continuous renewal through a fluidity of internal structure. We are in danger of becoming prisoners of our own procedures. There is a saying, “The rule book grows fatter as the ideas grow fewer.” It is in our nature, it seems, to develop an affection for customary ways of doing things. In certain situations this is proper. But a church that is capable of continuous renewal finds a means of combating the vested interests that

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<sup>14</sup> Barker, *Northwest Friend*, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Jack L. Willcuts, Chronological File July-Sept. 1967, Papers of Jack L. Willcuts, Shelf W30, July 14, 1967, Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. Morrill, Nampa, Idaho, George Fox University Archives.

<sup>16</sup> OYM, *1968 Minutes*, 8.

grow up in every human institution. Every change threatens someone's privileges, someone's authority, someone's status. If we are wise, we will see that, in the long run, our overriding interest is in the continuing validity and building of the church, winning others to Christ, and glorifying God.<sup>17</sup>

It is interesting to observe in these remarks not only another reference to frustration with certain structures, but a clear indication that some of those staffing the structures might have had “vested interests” and might have seen the changes taking place as a threat to their “privileges... authority...status.”

Though leaders have been quoted in this chapter thus far, it should be observed that “the people” were ahead of the leaders in coming to conclusions about the need for change at the quarterly meeting level. The attendance declines already referred to make it clear that people had been “voting” on the value of quarterly meeting with their lack of attendance. Lack of attendance could be interpreted more than one way. It might be a “verdict” on the content of meetings during that period, but it might also have been a more general repudiation of the need for quarterly meetings at all.

Also, in a separate venture, but with some significance to the topic of this chapter, Oregon Yearly Meeting of Friends released a study on church growth in the year 1969. Written by Superintendent Jack Willcuts and Myron Goldsmith, a professor at George Fox College, the study presented the results of a survey of the churches of the yearly meeting but also relevant data and theories from the “church growth movement” that purported to give guidance to churches that wanted to grow. Among the various statistics gathered in research from the survey, one noted the conclusion of the responding churches about the status of quarterly meetings. The authors report, “23 urged the

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<sup>17</sup> OYM, *1969 Minutes*, 8.



continued reorganization of quarterly meeting with genuine rallies, lively and inspirational – but admitting that these may not influence church growth. Seven urged elimination of quarterly meeting. Three urged the past plan of quarterly meeting.”<sup>18</sup> Less than 10% of the churches responding favored “what had been” with quarterly meetings.<sup>19</sup>

### The Theological and Polity Implications of These Changes

It is clear that the changes to the quarterly meeting structure as approved in the late 1960s did maintain a technical connection at the middle level. Constituents of local congregations were still expected and encouraged to meet together on a regular basis, albeit now with more of a “rally” emphasis than a business emphasis and on three occasions during the year rather than four. And the new structure did call for an annual “Area” business meeting in which Area representatives to Yearly Meeting boards would be named. The change, as proposed, still allowed for local meetings in a particular area to work together to bring matters and concerns before the Yearly Meeting.

There was some discussion within the study committee that acknowledged what was good about the structure and what needed to be maintained. For example, in the same magazine article referenced in the previous section which explained the proposed changes, Earl Barker did enumerate some important concerns that reflect theological and polity issues. He wrote:

The committee approached its task with the realization that certain features are needed to make our church life wholesome and satisfying. Friends need a Christian fellowship wider than that of the local congregation, to foster a sense of unity and group loyalty. Another major need is that of sharing in the promotion of the various interests of the

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<sup>18</sup> Jack L. Willcuts and Myron D. Goldsmith, *Friends in the Soaring '70s: A Church Growth Era* (Newberg, OR: Oregon Yearly Meeting of Friends Church, 1969), 19.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

Yearly Meeting, interests that challenge the entire membership to contribute many thousands of dollars every year. All of us profit immeasurably when we can get out of our “rut,” and see new faces, hear new voices, and engage in new activities. The group gathering offers the ideal way to meet these needs, to receive blessing and inspiration and to find renewal of courage and initiative.

It was felt that the quarterly meeting has the potential for providing these desirable features, and that those who do attend profit greatly.... Members who attend testify to renewed vigor, to the enjoyment and inspiration of social and spiritual fellowship, to the blessing of the ministry of Yearly Meeting personnel, and to the relationship to the Yearly Meeting which these associations emphasize. It was felt also that the quarterly meeting helps to preserve unity of doctrine, lessening the tendency of any to be led astray.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps similar concerns were expressed by other persons in the various venues in which the proposed changes were discussed, but the Yearly Meeting Minutes do not record such discussion. It is clear from Earl Barker’s article that the study committee thought their recommendations *were* taking into account the important connectional issues he refers to.

In a separate matter, but involving significant reflection on issues of ecclesiology, a different committee was at work over the same period of time charged with the responsibility to explore how OYM might become related to other Friends yearly meetings. The group functioned for nearly two decades after it was first organized in 1961 as the “Friends Unity Committee.”<sup>21</sup> By 1964 it had been renamed the “Committee on Friends Ecumenical Relations.”<sup>22</sup> Over the first years of the committee their work focused on various alternatives for Friends of OYM to be related to Friends in other yearly meetings, including some sort of merger with all yearly meetings that would support a Christ-centered mission, or with only the four existing independent evangelical

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<sup>20</sup> Barker, *Northwest Friend*, 6, 7.

<sup>21</sup> Oregon Yearly Meeting of Friends Church, *1961 Minutes Oregon Yearly Meeting of Friends Church* Seventieth session held at Greenleaf, ID, August 16-20, 1961 (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 1961), 53.

<sup>22</sup> Minutes of the Committee on Ecumenical Relations, 1961-1965 Oregon Yearly Meeting of Friends, George Fox University Archives, cover page note.

yearly meetings, or some relationship with either of these groups that was more limited in cooperation, stopping short of actual merger.

When it eventually became clear that OYM was likely to cooperate with the four existing independent evangelical yearly meetings in what was to be a loose confederation called the “Evangelical Friends Alliance” (now known as Evangelical Friends International-North American Section), the committee held extensive discussion on the proposed constitution of such an organization. The minutes of February 15, 1965 carry the record of their discussion on the nature of the church. These paragraphs are especially relevant:

[Gerald] Dillon is concerned about the image or concept of the Church. The Church is a reality when a group of believers, in meeting, sense the presence of the Living Christ. Thus the local congregation is in essence the Church, though not the whole Church – just as one person is in essence a part of the human race, not the whole race....

“Apostolate” refers to those having vital spiritual leadership. Though the word “Bishop” is not acceptable in usage among Friends in its common connotation, yet the true and original meaning of the office is needed. We face the danger of mediocrity because of individualism – unrelated to the whole – and also the tendency to relegate offices to mere ‘executive secretaries’ and functionary positions.<sup>23</sup>

That kind of explicitly theological discussion shows that there was concern among leaders of OYM over the nature of the church and about staying connected to other Friends. It is ironic that while on the one hand Friends of OYM were consciously seeking to build connections to Friends in other yearly meetings, they were at the same time unintentionally lessening connections between congregations of their own yearly meeting.

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<sup>23</sup> Minutes of the Committee on Friends Ecumenical Relations, papers of Arthur O. Roberts, 3.64, George Fox University Archives, February 15, 1965.

There were fundamental shifts in how local congregations related to each other in a given Area, and to the Yearly Meeting. One change that may have seemed insignificant at the time and one more of nomenclature than substance was that representatives to the annual Yearly Meeting sessions would now be named by each of the local Meetings instead of by the Quarterly Meeting. Previously, it was a gathering of representatives from Quarterly Meetings that met for Yearly Meeting. Now it would be a gathering of representatives from all the local congregations. It would have been roughly the same number of people, and very likely many of the same people, but now “John Doe” would be a representative of “Smith Corners Friends Church” instead of “Goshen Quarterly Meeting.” Though this may seem to be a somewhat incidental change, it was in fact a sacrificing of the ongoing opportunity to remind people that they were part of a Quarterly Meeting, something larger than their own local congregation. Perhaps previously it seemed a mere formality to have representatives from local Meetings approved at Quarterly Meeting, and not much more than a “silly rubber stamping” of local action. But in that process they were in fact representatives of a whole area, not just their “own” Meeting.

Now it soon became possible to ignore congregations beyond one’s own. Regardless of what the *Constitution and Discipline* said, now *de facto* it was possible for each local congregation to relate to the Yearly Meeting in much the same way that any church of congregational polity might relate to the “convention” or other national gathering of those local churches. Unfortunately this possibility occurred in concurrence with cultural trends in the United States in which most denominations, regardless of polity, struggled with “localism,” or the persistent tendency of all congregations to

become so focused on themselves and their own mission that they had little awareness of or regard for other churches, including congregations of their own denomination.

Another basic change resulting from OYM's adjustments to her Quarterly Meeting structure involved the direction of the flow of business, funds, and volunteer personnel. In short, the Yearly Meeting changes made possible a shift from "bottom up" to "top down." In the older pattern, the flow was from local, to regional, to Yearly Meeting. After the changes, the direction of flow reversed in important ways. One of the obvious ways is that the initiative for programs moved from the Quarterly Meeting to the Yearly Meeting. That may actually have been a formalizing of what had already started to happen in practice, but it was a significant organizational shift. The shift may be illustrated by focusing on a program area such as Christian education. Previously, a Quarterly Meeting committee, comprised of individuals from the various meetings in the quarter met and formulated plans for education in their areas: for teacher training, for review of curriculum materials, for camping programs, or other matters of concern to the committee. Each Quarterly Meeting committee then named one of their members to serve on a Yearly Meeting committee on Christian education. The committee at the Yearly Meeting level was a "gathering" of the people and concerns and programs from the quarters.

After the change, the responsibility for initiating programs and ministries fell to the Yearly Meeting level education committee. There were still "Area Representatives" named to that board, but their responsibility was now more likely to "promote" the Yearly Meeting initiated programs in the congregations of their quarter instead of to bring to the board what was working in their local churches or quarter.

Previously the funding for Yearly Meeting boards and administrative expenses was furnished by the quarterly meetings from funds they gathered from the local meetings. After the change, local meetings sent their funds directly to the Yearly Meeting. It was the same money in one sense, but there was an important symbolic implication in the shift. The gap between the people giving the funds and the people “using” the funds grew wider.

Over the years these shifts have worked to further erode the midlevel connections of Friends polity in this Yearly Meeting, whether or not that was intended. Though the committee which recommended the changes specifically recognized the importance of Friends meeting together as reported in the Earl Barker article cited earlier, these meetings now rarely occur. Some of the Areas in NWYM do not have any meetings in a year, let alone the three recommended and the one required for the holding of business. In some cases, not even the pastors of an Area meet on a regular basis. In other Areas the pastors of the Area do meet and they care for the business of the Area, specifically the nominating of Area Representatives to represent the Area on Yearly Meeting Boards. Some Areas meet once or twice a year for a rally which may include the opportunity to formally name their representatives to Yearly Meeting Boards.<sup>24</sup>

There is no Area in the Yearly Meeting that functions quite as described in *Faith and Practice*,<sup>25</sup> and most function in ways that are implicitly contradictory to Friends polity. For example, it is likely that if the pastors of the Yearly Meeting attempted to

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<sup>24</sup> This information was obtained through an informal survey conducted among the subscribers to the NWYM Pastors List-serve group on October 27, 2003. A subsequent phone conversation with the Administrative Secretary in the headquarters office of Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends on October 29, 2003 confirmed the sporadic occurrence of Area meetings.

<sup>25</sup> *Faith and Practice: A Book of Christian Discipline Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends Church*, § Organization of Areas, 28 (2001).

conduct business for the Yearly Meeting there would be a huge outcry over this usurpation of power and authority. And yet, that is precisely what happens in some of the Areas. It seems fair to conclude that the reason pastors are permitted to do that is that there is in fact no meaningful midlevel polity connection left in the Yearly Meeting. It simply does not matter to people. Anecdotal evidence, and personal observation by the author, suggest that when nominations for Area Representatives are made, whether by a true Area Meeting, or more likely by the pastors in an Area, the persons nominated are those suggested by either the Yearly Meeting Nominating Committee, the target Board itself, or the Yearly Meeting Executive Council.

It is interesting to consider how “they get away with it,” i.e., how Yearly Meeting boards are allowed to function with Area Representatives being named in a manner contrary to that called for in the *Faith and Practice*. The simple answer seems to be that at the very least no-one is willing to make an issue of it, and perhaps no-one even recognizes the issue. “No-one” includes both average members in local congregations, but it also includes board and Yearly Meeting leaders. This author takes that to be an indication that as leaders and people of NWYM we have lost our “memory” of the theological significance of our polity, and likewise we have *de facto* lost the endorsement of our polity that the annual Area Meetings for business assume. The provision in *Faith and Practice* requiring such meetings and the related procedure for naming persons to Yearly Meeting boards has not been repealed; it simply is not being “practiced.”

### Where Do We Go From Here?

Chapter 2 has established a Scriptural case for caring, accountable relationships among Christians and congregations. Chapter 3 has shown that the faith and practice of early Friends followed these Biblical models in establishing a polity of connection among Friends congregations. This chapter has established that the midlevel connections among the congregations of NWYM are in serious disrepair and consequently there has been a shift away from the denomination's historic polity. Where do we go from here? Should NWYM seek to re-instigate all the features of the Quarterly Meeting in order to put in place again a system that provides built-in reminders that local congregations are "not alone" in the Friends Church, but a part of a network of congregations accountable to one another? Is that even possible or likely? Are there other efforts that might be made to restore connections that are more likely to achieve the goal?

Before answering these questions, it seems advisable to look at the broader church, beyond the neighborhood of "Friends," to see what we might learn from others about how connections can be maintained in healthy ways. The Presbyterian movement has some significant parallels in structure to Friends, and a well-deserved reputation for doing things "decently and in order." It seems worthwhile to look at the status of mid-level connections among the largest group of Presbyterians in the United States. With similar polity, and existing in the same general cultural milieu as Friends, Presbyterians may serve as an important "control group" to add perspective on the options that may be available to Friends in an effort to strengthen the church's understanding and practice of her polity.



## Chapter Five

### PRESBYTERIAN POLITY AND PRACTICE

Based on what has been demonstrated so far in preceding chapters, especially the last chapter, it might be easy to conclude that Northwest Yearly Meeting should seek to reconnect by restoring the Quarterly Meeting structure. However, it is difficult, if not impossible, to guarantee that rebuilding the structure would result in meaningful connection among Friends congregations. It seems good to look at another Christian church as a kind of “control group” to see how their own understandings and practice might shed light on the experience of Friends. In the sections of this chapter I will 1) make a case for why Presbyterians are an appropriate choice as a control group for this study, 2) demonstrate the structure of Presbyterians that parallels Friends structure, 3) note what Presbyterians still have in place that Friends have lost, 4) explore the present state of *meaningful* connection among Presbyterians, 5) and reflect on the functions of denominational structure in American Christianity today.

#### A Rationale for Examining Presbyterian Polity

First, like Friends, the Presbyterians are a connectional church and have historically operated with similar levels of organization. Whereas Friends refer to a local congregation as a Monthly Meeting, the comparable unit in the Presbyterian Church is referred to as a “particular church” and it is governed by what is called the Session. As

Friends historically had a midlevel structure called the Quarterly Meeting, the comparable midlevel unit among Presbyterians is called the Presbytery. The Yearly Meeting of Friends is matched among Presbyterians by what they call the General Assembly. Because Presbyterians are much larger in their number of congregations, they have an additional midlevel structure called the Synod, which is a grouping of Presbyteries in a larger geographical region. In both denominations the basic structural levels are geographically and regionally organized, with a few exceptions. For this paper I have chosen to focus on what is now known as the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, often in its own literature and among others referred to simply as PC (USA).

A second reason the Presbyterians serve as a suitable control group for Friends is that like Friends the Presbyterians articulate an understanding of the church that goes beyond the local congregation. In a statement drafted by one of the constituent denominations which merged to form the United Presbyterian Church (USA) and which still later became the body under study here, the General Assembly stated:

The Presbyterian Church is not a unity in the sense that it consists of an undivided oneness without distinguishable parts; neither is it a group of smaller bodies with common history and tradition which find it advantageous to work together in close harmony for the accomplishment of purposes common to all of them. Our Church is an organism. Its unity is not a unity of articulation, part touching part, like the bones of a skeleton, but the unity of life, the parts united by vital bonds, thus constituting a living whole and that whole imparting impulse and strength and order to the several parts, as the body to its members.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene Carson Blake & Edward Burns Shaw, *Presbyterian Law for the Presbytery: A Manual for Ministers and Ruling Elders* (Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., 1959), 18. The quotation is from the minutes of the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1927.

The connectional nature of the church, in contrast to the congregational understanding of some Christian groups, is succinctly stated in the current *Book of Order* of the PC (USA) with these words: “The particular churches of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) wherever they are, taken collectively, constitute one church....”<sup>2</sup> This principle is spelled out further in the context of authority this way: “The nature of Presbyterian order is such that it shares power and responsibility. The system of governing bodies, whether they have authority over one or many churches, sustains such mutual relationships within the structures as to express the unity of the church.”<sup>3</sup>

There is a third reason Presbyterians serve as a valuable comparison and control group with Friends. They have demonstrated considerable sensitivity to articulating the theological and biblical basis for what they teach and do. As their leaders have put it:

The Presbyterian Church long has provided American Protestantism—indeed world Christianity—its think tank. As church historian and author of *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, Richard Lovelace, summarizes, “The Presbyterian Church is and has always been an arena of theological recovery and discovery.” It is that arena of thought, analysis, study, conversation, and deliberation—all carried out in the midst of doing ministry and mission (we’re not just an institution of higher learning)—that has caused the Presbyterian Church and its sister Reformed bodies to exercise an enormous influence upon the whole unfolding mission of Christ throughout the world.<sup>4</sup>

Because Presbyterians are prone to spell out so carefully the theological basis of their church structure, their implementation of and adjustments to midlevel governance structures provides a helpful guide with which to consider the actions Friends have taken in relation to these same structures, but usually without theological reflection.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part II Book of Order 2001-2002*. (Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly [of The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)], 2001), G-4.0301 a. [Note: The *Book of Order* has no pagination; instead references are cited by paragraph numbers.]

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., G-4.0302.

<sup>4</sup> Jack Haberer, *GodViews: Convictions That Drive Us and Divide Us*. (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2001), 163.

Fourth, despite significant differences between Friends and Presbyterians in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as well as in the present century, the two groups do have common historical and theological roots. Historian Geoffrey Nuttall considers both groups to have come out of the Puritan movement with the Presbyterians making up the most conservative party of the larger movement and the Quakers the most radical.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, the Presbyterian Church is an important focus of study for the purposes of this paper because the size of the denomination allows it people and financial resources to do serious study of itself and of the religious scene in America. The Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends simply does not have the resources to fund the kind of study that Presbyterians did a decade ago. That project resulted in the seven volume series called *The Presbyterian Presence*. The many essays that became part of that study provide not only Presbyterians but many Christians with valuable reflection on what has occurred in the development of Protestant Christianity in America's history and what issues denominations face today.

Despite the reasons that warrant using the Presbyterians as a control group, there are important differences between them and Friends in their ecclesiology. Though significant, these differences in themselves do not interfere with the connectional nature of the denominations in either case.

Perhaps the most important difference between the two churches is that though both name Christ as the ultimate Leader of the church, they have chosen very different ways of discerning the leading of the Lord for his Church. Whereas Friends proclaim a Christocracy in which the Lord conveys his will to the members of the church collectively through prayerful listening and discussion, regardless of status or role in the

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<sup>5</sup> G.F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1946), 13.

church structure, Presbyterians have chosen a different process, though they believe the Holy Spirit is just as involved in it. They are open and explicit about seeing their meetings as “representative democracy.” Though the particular congregations of the Presbyterian Church have annual meetings of the entire active membership for the election of officers, beyond that, the on-going operation of the congregation is handled through its “session,” a body of representatives. Likewise, the midlevel groups known as presbytery and synod handle business without the general membership being included in the process. Only representatives, evenly divided among ordained clergy and lay Elders, may conduct business in those bodies.

A related difference between the two denominations is the actual conduct or set of procedures for the doing of business. The Presbyterians stipulate that business is conducted according to Robert’s *Rules of Order*, or an acceptable alternative, and decisions are reached by voting, where the “majority rules.” Friends use no voting in their decision-making processes and use no formal procedure for making “motions.” Among Friends the goal is for the group (whoever is present) to reach a “sense” of what Christ wills for the church in regard to the matter before the group.

The following statement reflects the heavy dependence of Presbyterians on “rules” for procedure and for “order” in the resolution of business. Speaking of what became the UPC (USA), Eugene Carson Blake and Edward Burns Shaw wrote:

It is clearly a Church of law, which is not, however, to be understood as being opposed to love or spirit, but rather as opposed to disorder and injustice which so easily pervert right human relationships when authority is personal in individuals or in groups, or when there is no accepted way of deciding issues that inevitably arise among men, however much they may be committed to Jesus Christ and to one another.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Blake and Shaw, *Law for the Presbytery*, 13.

The authors are quick to point to the value of human relationships by noting that church law, “presupposes a fellowship of men and women, with their children, in voluntary covenanted relationship with one another and with God through Jesus Christ. The law rests upon the fellowship and is not designed to work without trust and love.” As noted previously, neither the process by which Presbyterians reach their decisions, nor the fact that they limit that process to representatives negates the value of comparing their connectional structure to that of Friends.

### The Role of the Presbytery as a Midlevel Structure

The presbytery structure has roots in the Westminster *Form of Presbyterian Church Government* dating to 1645 in Scotland, and according to Lewis Wilkins, Jr. served to provide Presbyterians in the “diaspora,” including those in the American colonies, with an identity distinct from either Anglicans or Congregationalists.<sup>7</sup> Today the presbytery is defined by the PC (USA) as, “a corporate expression of the church consisting of all the churches and ministers of the Word and Sacrament within a certain district.”<sup>8</sup> Each church is represented by its minister(s) and an equal number of elected ruling Elders.<sup>9</sup> Detailed guidelines are followed to keep the representation equal between these two groups, but also to assure racial, gender and ethnic diversity. It takes a minimum of twelve ministers and likewise a minimum of twelve particular churches to constitute a presbytery.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Lewis L. Wilkins, Jr., “The American Presbytery in the Twentieth Century,” in *The Organizational Revolution: Presbyterians and American Denominationalism*, ed. Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder and Louis B. Weeks (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 98.

<sup>8</sup> *Book of Order*, G-11.0101.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, G-11.0102.

Though the presbytery is not the “highest” authority in Presbyterian polity (the General Assembly is, or the Permanent Judicial Commission in legal issues), there is a sense in which it is the most important authority in that polity. Essentially, the presbytery is the basic “building block” of the church. Blake and Shaw summarize the presbytery’s role by writing, “in this Church, the Constitution has reserved to the presbyteries a very large portion of Church authority and powers.” In the *Book of Order* it takes but a few lines to enumerate the “powers” of the particular church, but it takes pages to enumerate the responsibilities and powers of the presbytery. Those powers include, among many others:

to develop strategy for the mission of the church in its area...to coordinate the work of its member churches, guiding them and mobilizing their strength...to divide, dismiss, or dissolve churches in consultation with their members...to control the location of new churches and of churches desiring to move...to ordain, receive, dismiss, install, remove, and discipline ministers...to establish the pastoral relationship and to dissolve it at the request of one or both of the parties, or when it finds that the church’s mission under the Word imperatively demands it...to serve in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline...to consider and act upon requests from congregations for permission to take the actions regarding real property....<sup>11</sup>

It is important to emphasize the significance of some of these responsibilities and powers held by the presbytery. For example, local congregations, or “particular churches” as they are known in the PC (USA), do not own their property. They hold it “in trust” for the benefit of the presbytery and the larger church.<sup>12</sup> When a particular church is discontinued (as noted above, only by authority of the presbytery) or withdraws

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<sup>11</sup> *Book of Order*, G-11.0103 a, b, c, i, j, n, o, y.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, G-8.0201.

to join another denomination, the use of its property is determined by the presbytery, in accordance with the constitution of the PC (USA).<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, Ministers of the Word and Sacrament (Presbyterian terminology for ordained clergy) hold their membership in the presbytery, not in the particular church where they serve. Particular congregations, though they do their own pastoral searches and issue a call to prospective Ministers, must do so from those approved by the presbytery, and a Minister is “installed” only with the consent of the presbytery. The *Book of Order* makes clear that Ministers have membership in the presbytery “by action of the presbytery itself...”<sup>14</sup> Likewise, in congregations large enough to warrant additional staff, these may be “elected” by the particular church only with the consent of the presbytery.<sup>15</sup> These and other powers of the presbytery provide the particular churches with on-going and repeated reminders that they are not “the highest authority.” They are not in the same position as a local church with congregational polity, and the conduct of their affairs is always subject to the review of higher bodies.

There are important theological principles that underlie this Presbyterian polity and distinguish it as part of the “reformation” of the Church. David B. McCarthy, a Presbyterian pastor, names three.<sup>16</sup> First, noting John Calvin’s background as a lawyer, he notes that Reformed polity has a great concern for “order.” From their perspective, the concern for order is recognition that the process by which the church reaches a decision is just as important as the content of the decision. A second theological

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., G-8.0401.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., G-6.0201.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., G-6.0202 b.

<sup>16</sup> David B. McCarthy, “The Emerging Importance of Presbyterian Polity,” in *The Organizational Revolution: Presbyterians and American Denominationalism*, ed. Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder and Louis B. Weeks (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 303, 304.



principle which supports Presbyterian polity is the “equality of all people before God.” In the context of the Reformation, declaring the “lay” Elders equal to clergy and insisting on equal numbers of both in the presbytery was a significant shift from the Roman model of the church used throughout the west where clergy ruled. Third, there is a principle of accountability present in Presbyterian polity. McCarthy says, “In Calvin’s church, every member was accountable to the consistory or session; Calvin also instituted an annual visit to the pastors of Geneva’s out-lying churches; these pastors were accountable to the seignury, much as our pastors are accountable to the presbytery.”<sup>17</sup> McCarthy acknowledges that in practice today many ministers and members are not held accountable, but he affirms the theological importance of accountability built in to the polity.

One theological principle that McCarthy does not name, but which is implicit within Presbyterian or any other connectional polity, is the concept of the “visible” church as extending beyond the local congregation. This theological understanding is perhaps so fundamental to Presbyterian polity as to “go without saying.”

It is interesting to reflect that the origin of Quaker polity came out of a historical context in which these same theological principles were paramount to church leaders, though the specific application of the principles varied from the Presbyterian form. Fox and his contemporaries were concerned about the presence of persons they called “Ranters” in their meetings and the consequent lack of “order,” especially “moral order.” “Gospel Order” was the language Fox used to describe the polity he and others prescribed for the church. The desire to establish accountability was clearly part of how Friends hoped to distinguish themselves from the Ranters. As to the matter of equality, Quakers’

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 304.

concern to live out the equality of persons extended much further than Presbyterians or most of the rest of the churches spawned by the Reformation, not only in the conduct of the church's business, but even including the exercise of ministry without ordained clergy.

### A Preliminary Observation

If this look at the structure and practice of Presbyterians were to go no further, it suggests so far that when Friends gave up their Quarterly Meeting structure they sacrificed some crucial theological understandings and likewise lost their most "visible" and "self-enforcing" expression of these matters. Friends, at least those of a theological "bent," may still affirm the importance of "Gospel Order" and the connectional ecclesiology of our polity. They may still affirm the need for congregations to have accountability to one another. But in many geographical areas there are no longer regularly scheduled business meetings. There is no longer the need to have Representatives to the Yearly Meeting approved through the Quarterly Meeting. There is no longer a necessity to forward business intended for the Yearly Meeting through the Quarterly Meeting for endorsement and approval. The "visible" connections have been lost to a significant degree, leaving only a theoretical connection. One consequence of this is that in practice many congregations function no differently than a typical "Congregational" church, and more importantly, most of the members have little concept even of theoretical connections, let alone actual connections. Their "connection" to the Yearly Meeting is lived out in ways substantially comparable to Baptist congregations which belong to a "convention": they see themselves as cooperating with other

congregations only for pragmatic reasons and chiefly in those areas, such as missions and publications, in which the “group” provides ministry difficult to fund and produce in a local congregation.

Should Friends seek somehow to re-establish their Quarterly Meetings to regain what was lost? Do the Presbyterians demonstrate for us the continuing value of the mid-level connections they call presbyteries? Before we answer those questions, it is important to push our review of the Presbyterian experience a bit further, for there is more to learn.

### Current Issues in the Presbyterian Church

The Presbyterian Church often makes it into the news headlines, usually in reference to some matter of conflict. In this, it is like most “mainline” denominations. The editors of the seven volume study on the Presbyterian Church, *The Presbyterian Presence*, say about these denominations, “All have experienced significant theological tensions and shifts in emphasis. All are characterized by problems in their organizations as institutions.”<sup>18</sup> A typical and easily recognized specific issue is the matter of how the church should deal with homosexual practice among its members, and especially among its clergy. Should “gay marriages” be “blessed” by the church? Should practicing homosexuals be ordained to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament? Presbyterians are not the only Christians struggling with these issues, but it is interesting to reflect on how connectional polity either helps or hinders Presbyterians in dealing with controversy.

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<sup>18</sup> Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder and Louis B. Weeks, eds. *The Confessional Mosaic: Presbyterians and Twentieth-Century Theology*, *The Presbyterian Presence: The Twentieth-Century Experience* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 8.

Jack Haberer in a recent book about the Presbyterian Church argues that the church is becoming more and more “balkanized,” just like the world around it.<sup>19</sup> Observing the strong conflicts among leaders and congregations of the church arising out of deep passion for the differing ways they see God and God’s work in the world, he seeks to find a way to describe these divisions. He coins the term “GodView” to describe what he calls “Theo-ideological impulses,” which are in reality *a priori* assumptions upon which people build other values.<sup>20</sup> He suggests that these GodViews arise from a combination of one’s personality type, one’s experiences, needs, influences, spiritual giftedness and spiritual formation.

Haberer identifies five distinct GodViews that he sees currently present in the Presbyterian Church.<sup>21</sup> There are the ***Confessionals***, which he describes as “committed to discerning, proclaiming, and preserving the truth.” The ***Devotionalists*** are “hungry for God; they love to pray; they worship, meditate, and study.” The ***Ecclesiasts*** are those who “serve on committees, teach church school classes, sing in choir, attend community-wide ecumenical events, and give generously.” ***Altruists*** “see human tragedies that others overlook, and they do something about them. They give to the needy, serve in local soup kitchens, build community-wide homeless shelters, and serve on the boards of charitable organizations.” And, finally, the ***Activists*** comprise the group that “addresses far-reaching realms: systemic evils, racial prejudices, gender exclusion, power-mongering, and injustice in every form.”

Haberer sees each of these GodViews as legitimate parts of the church, and as each having their own biblical and confessional basis. But one can guess that not all of

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<sup>19</sup> Haberer, *GodViews*, 33.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 39, 40.

the representatives of these various GodViews have full respect for each of the others. It does not take much reflection on Presbyterian polity to realize that with these various GodViews, each advocating for its passionate views about God's will for the church and the world, the presbytery becomes a significant venue for the exercise of advocacy. Those who control the presbytery, and especially its budget, will control the "particular churches" within the presbytery. Representatives that will go to the General Assembly are selected on a rotation basis, but must be approved by the Presbytery. Those who attend the General Assembly have the opportunity to set the agenda not just for the advocates of their own GodView, but for the whole church.

The conflicts arising out of these GodViews competing for the church's allegiance and attention has produced among Presbyterians different assessments of the value of their polity. David McCarthy asserts that "polity constitutes the means whereby Presbyterians adjudicate their theological differences," and that in the face of greater theological pluralism, "polity should become more important..."<sup>22</sup> William H. Hopper, Jr. takes a somewhat more pessimistic view of the role of polity in the current debates of the church. Arguing for a greater emphasis on local congregations at the expense of national and regional church programs, he writes:

When it comes to thinking about the church, Presbyterians intuitively know a painful truth: there is a profound gap between the local church and the larger church, between congregations "right here" and governing bodies "out there." This gap is the result of a lack of trust and widely divergent understandings of the nature and purpose of the church. Denominational boards and committees often seem to have markedly different agenda for the church from the understandings of the people in the pews.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> McCarthy, *Importance of Polity*, 302.

<sup>23</sup> William H. Hopper, Jr., *Authentic Congregations* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2000), 8, 9.

Hopper does take several pages to acknowledge the danger of what he calls “localism” and the corollary of ignoring issues that local congregations would rather not, but should, face. He does acknowledge and affirm the connectional nature of the Presbyterian Church. But he also advocates for experimentation with ways to involve more people in expressing their views and participating in decision-making beyond the existing representative processes of the session and the presbytery.<sup>24</sup>

An even more pessimistic view of the value of Presbyterian polity is expressed by Robert Henderson, who writes:

For all of our vaunted “connectionalism,” it is only our *theological* consensus and our *missional* consensus which are the glue that gives us coherence. It is these that give us integrity in our calling to be about the *Missio Dei*, the mission of God. If there is no consensus on these, then there is nothing that ‘connects’ us. Some would insist that our polity connects us. Not so! Polity only has to do with the form of witness, not the essence. A “denomination” is actually the aggregate of congregations consenting to be accountable to each other in theology and mission. This is good and helpful. But if this *consensus* is absent, then there may still be the same number of congregations, but there is no reason for the denomination.<sup>25</sup>

Obviously, Henderson is one that Jack Haberer would likely describe as a ***Confessionalist***. But Henderson does not call for separation from those he considers to have left the true mission of the church. Rather, he speculates that the “structure” of the denomination will become increasingly irrelevant. Writing in 2000 he states his belief that many of the eleven thousand congregations of the Presbyterian Church “are basically independent and congregational, despite the denominational label. In the post-denominational era, some will choose to go a different route. This is all to say that we are looking at a period of ecclesiastical confusion (chaos) that could last up to a decade or

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 12ff., 85ff.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Thornton Henderson, *Blueprint 21: Presbyterians in the Post-Denominational Era* (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 2000), 2.

more.”<sup>26</sup> He believes that when local leaders and congregations look at their connection to a denomination they ask questions like these:

Why do we identify with this denomination? What is our connectedness and consensus? What on earth does all of this have to do with our constitutional consensus? Or more, what does it have to do with Jesus’ mandate and mission for his church? Does it enhance our mission? Does it have life? Is there some better way to cooperate in mission and accountability? How do we relate to the larger holy catholic Church? There will unquestionably be some confusion, some wandering, some church closings, some realignments, and an increasing number of *ad hoc* networks.<sup>27</sup>

Interestingly, Haberer, who strongly advocates for all the GodViews he has enumerated to stay together in the church, echoes some of the sentiments of Robert Henderson about the value of polity. He quotes Richard Mouw, President of Fuller Seminary, who remarked to him in a personal conversation in May, 2000, “Deep does not call to deep in legislative bodies.”<sup>28</sup> Referring more specifically to presbyteries, he notes their supposed connectional function, and writes:

But in many places and for many members, the connectionalism ends with adjournment until the rapping of the gavel calls the next meeting to order. For most, the connecting between meetings goes on via affinity groups.

The lack of genuine, lasting fellowship within regional governing bodies ought not surprise us. The governing bodies are, well, just that: governing bodies. They are structured to order and govern the church’s service to God, congregation, and world.<sup>29</sup>

He makes still another point about the decreased significance of presbyteries:

In past generations, clergy and active elders attending presbytery meetings would expect to hear from the leaders breaking news coming out of denominational headquarters and ecumenical councils, not to mention the latest gossip about colleagues in other parts of the presbytery and country. Regional denominational executives provided the pipeline of information.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Haberer, *GodViews*, 160.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 155, 6.

But who needs such a pipeline when news reports from denominational headquarters arrive daily in your e-mail—and when friends keep e-mailing friends their friends' news?<sup>30</sup>

Haberer and Henderson are quite different in their attitude toward theological diversity, but they agree about where real connection lies. Haberer says, “Frankly, affinity groups organized around common causes and interests, and facilitated by modern technologies, are replacing governing bodies as the primary point of connection between clergy and lay leaders.”<sup>31</sup>

Which of these interpreters of the Presbyterian scene is accurate in anticipating the significance of polity in the near and long-term future of the church remains to be seen. But it is at least clear that polity, particularly the midlevel polity that is the focus of this dissertation, is not viewed by all as part of the “solution” to what are the “problems” of the Presbyterian Church. Polity does not guarantee against unhealthy “localism” in congregations. And it does not secure the denomination from theological or cultural drift. And it does not guarantee meaningful connection between and among congregations.

### Functions of Denominational Structure

The seven volume self-study of the Presbyterian Church cited in this chapter in various places includes one essay that addresses not only Presbyterian experience, but the broader pattern of denominationalism in America. That chapter, by Craig Dykstra and

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.



James Hudnut-Beumler,<sup>32</sup> raises a significant issue that is relevant not only to mainline denominations like the Presbyterians, but also to denominations like Friends. The authors note that regardless of polity, American denominations have tended to develop in certain functional patterns over the centuries of their existence in this country. In particular, they note the likelihood that we are about to see a transition to still a new functional pattern for denominations, and they ask what should or could that pattern be.

They begin by describing three patterns that have dominated American experience, each one being gradually replaced by the next. They describe these functional patterns in terms of three metaphors, “the constitutional confederacy,” “the corporation,” and “the regulatory agency.”<sup>33</sup> These metaphors are taken from the larger culture, based on the theory of institutional isomorphism which they attribute to sociologist Paul DiMaggio. That theory suggests that institutions developed in different fields within a culture during the same period will take on similar shapes.<sup>34</sup>

The first phase of American denominations was like that of a “constitutional confederacy” and this pattern prevailed throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Just as in the nation there were no strong national agencies comparable to today, likewise in the churches associations were primarily for interaction, but there were no national program agencies. But as the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought to the forefront of American culture the corporation, complete with its bureaucracies, so the churches in this second phase developed national program bureaucracies. There was great emphasis on the efficiency and coordination of

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<sup>32</sup> Craig Dykstra and James Hudnut-Beumler, “The National Organizational Structures of Protestant Denominations: An Invitation to a Conversation,” in *The Organizational Revolution: Presbyterians and American Denominationalism*, ed. Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder and Louis B. Weeks (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 307-31.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 314.

programs for the whole denomination. This model continued to function well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The authors note the breakdown in the corporate model that began in the 1960s and continued through the 1970s. Just as the general culture began to question the “imperialism” of the west, so Christians began to doubt the validity of “imperialistic” models of mission and world outreach. Christian “chauvinism” came into disrepute among many American Christians. With the domestic “frontier” largely settled and “conquered” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the decisions to withdraw from “foreign” efforts, setting those “national” churches free to function on their own, American Christianity needed a new functional pattern. These authors say that what developed, almost by default and without forethought, was comparable to a “regulatory agency.”

Throughout most of last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century denominations have tended to focus on “rules” and “statements” and “policies.” Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler write:

The regulatory nature of the current denominational structure has two dimensions. First, in the face of competition over a steadily shrinking financial pie, regulation consists of the development of procedures and policies for adjudicating the distribution of dwindling resources. Second, regulation consists of the development of patterns of governance and control over the budgets and activities of denominationally related institutions that the former corporation no longer can support and influence through the provision of funds and services.<sup>35</sup>

The authors note that in many ways the regulatory function of denominations does help local congregations face into the need for appropriate change. An example would be requirements that representation at presbyteries reflect the ethnic and gender diversity of the congregations in the region.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 321, 2.

But the authors note that the “requirements” of regulatory agencies come with a “cost” to the organization. “The cost often takes the form of a deepening resistance not only to the procedure required but, in some cases, also the larger justice aim for the sake of which the procedure was designed in the first place. It may also breed resentment and even rebellion against the regulating body.”<sup>36</sup> Even when congregations agree with the goal of a regulation, the fact that they are forced to comply results in a certain amount of alienation and even “rebellion” against the denomination. Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler argue that one of the chief issues for denominational leaders in our time is how to lead

without the organization becoming defined primarily by mandatory regulation. Bureaucracies, especially in the context of voluntary association, are much more likely to thrive, we would suggest, when they are very cautious about *commanding* loyalties that can and should be earned by admittedly much slower and more expensive efforts of education, local communal deliberation, and persuasive appeal to the best instincts of the faithful.<sup>37</sup>

In the conclusion to their essay, the authors express their view that the functional pattern they describe as “regulatory agency” does not seem to be helpful to the church at this point in history and culture. They conclude:

Some way is needed out of the cycle of dissatisfaction that our current situation seems to breed. We suspect that the way will be found only as some new and compelling vision emerges of what a national denominational organization might fruitfully be.

Perhaps an alternative metaphor is just beyond our horizon. If the past is any indication, the churches may well borrow again from institutional patterns alive in the larger society. We seem to be living in a time of social structural change that runs fairly deep. What this means for us, we will have to wait and see. We can be sure, however, that the fashioning of new patterns of organizational life from whatever materials are at hand will require a good deal of imagination, care, and even courage.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 324.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 326.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 330.

## Conclusion

The study of the polity and experience of the Presbyterian Church demonstrates that whatever strengths there are in connectional polity, it cannot guarantee actual and meaningful connections between and among congregations. This chapter has demonstrated that even though the Presbyterian Church still has in place the midlevel connections which NWYM Friends have given up, it too has trouble experiencing *meaningful* connection. That suggests that reinstituting Quarterly Meetings would not necessarily accomplish the goal suggested by this dissertation. Additionally, this chapter has noted how the transitions in the way American denominations actually function raise questions about what denominations in this culture may look like in the near future. The observations in this chapter raise important questions about how Friends might seek to renew their own connectionalism. If not through “resurrection” of the Quarterly Meeting, what might bring about meaningful connections again? The chapter coming offers concrete suggestions toward resolution of this problem.

## Chapter 6

### PROPOSALS FOR RECONNECTING THE FAMILY

Chapter two established that biblical Christianity is a community of faith; it is relational in essence both with God and with fellow believers. Further, the biblical record demonstrates relational connections of accountability and caring beyond the local church. Chapter three established that the early Quaker understanding of the church was relationally based with a strong sense of community in which people were accountable to Christ and to one another as the People of the Covenant. Chapter four documented the unfortunate weakening of midlevel connections among Friends in Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends during the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, showing that this was not just a *de facto* alteration of the church's historic polity, but that it has resulted in significant loss of community in the denomination. Chapter five demonstrated that the Presbyterians, with like history and polity to Quakers, have maintained the midlevel connections that Friends have sacrificed. Nevertheless, even with these official connections in place, there is a perception across the theological spectrum of Presbyterians that they, too, need to work on building *meaningful* connections between their congregations. The Presbyterian experience argues against a "simple" solution for Friends of re-establishing Quarterly Meetings, the part of their structure that was altered in the 1960's and 70's.

## Theoretical Guides

It is the task of this chapter to offer proposals for re-establishing meaningful connection between and among Friends congregations in NWYM. As theoretical guides for these proposals, we will use foundational theological principles of Friends, but also the discoveries of Robert Putnam and Lewis Feldstein detailed in their recent book, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community*.<sup>1</sup>

Guiding Theological Principles. From the Friends understanding of the church, three principles stand out for evaluating whatever suggestions may be offered for re-building connections among the congregations of Northwest Yearly Meeting. First, Friends have understood the church to be a people more than an institution. They have seen themselves as a Covenant Community, and at least historically this Covenant Community was a “priority community.” It had priority in the sense that it influenced and shaped whatever other communities Friends might be a part of. In light of this principle, the task of re-building connection among the congregations of NWYM is a task that ought to be focused on people and their relationships more than institution *per se*.

Second, Friends have always believed that the primary task of the church was to listen for the Leadership of Christ and to follow Christ together in obedience. That means that whatever specific actions are suggested and/or taken in pursuit of re-building connections among Friends must be experienced as the will of the Lord for the church more than the “plan” of some person(s).

Third, Friends have historically understood the church as involving accountable and caring relationships beyond the local congregation. It is the gradual loss of this

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<sup>1</sup> Robert D. Putnam, Lewis M. Feldstein, and Don Cohen, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003).

understanding that is at the heart of the motivation for this dissertation. Part of what it will take to pursue reconnection among Friends will be to reeducate ourselves as to what we believe about the church.

In the background of each of these three principles is the history and tradition of Friends. This history and particular traditions are not “authority” for the present. Rather, they are examples of how Christ has led this church in the past and so they provide “check points” to hold before the Lord while asking, “Is this still something You want us to do? Or was this for that time alone?” It may well be that Friends will discover that some of their “ancient” practices had great value for the church and could be inspired and used of the Lord anew for building His church.

The Discoveries of Robert Putnam and Lewis Feldstein. In Robert Putnam’s earlier book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*,<sup>2</sup> he described a dramatic thirty year decline in America’s social institutions, including the church. He documented declining attendance, declining participation in community activities, and more. In *Better Together*, the book used for this chapter, he joins Feldstein in documenting some specific examples of where community involvement is actually countering the decades-long trend, where people are rediscovering the value of being together and working together toward common goals. This study of more than a dozen examples of building community includes two churches: Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California and All Saints Church in Pasadena, California.

The value of using Putnam’s and Feldstein’s latest book is that it not only provides examples of where community is being built, and how, but they also provide a

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<sup>2</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

specific category of social science research and related vocabulary that helps to see the task of NWYM in a broader context. What has so far in this dissertation been called “meaningful connections” for Friends could be discussed, in the language of Putnam and Feldstein, as “building social capital.”

They define social capital as “social networks, norms of reciprocity, mutual assistance, and trustworthiness.”<sup>3</sup> Examples of social capital would include a coffee klatch, an activist organization, a bowling league, a union, and many other kinds of community groups. The authors note that there are many types of social capital, but they focus on two major categories they label as “bonding social capital” and “bridging social capital.” Bonding social capital is a network among people who have similar characteristics and interests and who are inwardly focused. Within the context of the church, the community or *koinonia* that many Christians talk about is focused on their own local church and as such would be an example primarily of bonding social capital. Bridging social capital, in contrast, incorporates different types of people and tends to be outward-looking.<sup>4</sup> The connections that are the focus of this dissertation, building relationships beyond the local congregation, are closer to what these authors call “bridging social capital,” though not bridging the degree of diversity Putnam and Feldstein envision. They offer further description of these two forms of social capital and the consequences of each:

Bonding social capital is a kind of sociological Super Glue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD-40. If you get sick, the people who bring you chicken soup are likely to represent your bonding social capital. On the other hand, a society that has *only* bonding social capital will look like Belfast or Bosnia—segregated into mutually hostile camps....

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



The problem is that bridging social capital is harder to create than bonding social capital—after all, birds of a feather flock together. So the kind of social capital that is most essential for healthy public life in an increasingly diverse society like ours is precisely the kind that is hardest to build.<sup>5</sup>

Putnam and Feldstein offer summary themes that arise from the case studies presented in this book. What did they discover about building social capital, especially bridging social capital? For one thing, the evidence is clear that those who succeeded at building social capital invested a great deal of time and energy in developing relationships and interpersonal connections. In fact, that was at the heart of what they did.<sup>6</sup> Another theme that emerged from their study is that appropriate efforts in creating social capital have a spill-over effect, making it easier for those involved to resolve other issues beyond the concern of the immediate local group.<sup>7</sup> One might speculate, for example, that in the context of the concerns of this dissertation, if social capital were built among the congregations of a particular Area in the process of pursuing teacher training for Christian education volunteers, that might set in place a network of relationships that could be re-used, and more easily, in pursuit of some other matter of concern to Friends in that Area.

Another theme the authors highlight is that smaller is better. They report, “Researchers have repeatedly found that social capital is higher in smaller settings—smaller schools, smaller towns, smaller countries, and so on.”<sup>8</sup> This finding may augur well for a small denomination like Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends. It is interesting

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 2, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 270.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 275, 76.

to compare this finding with what Lyle Schaller has written about those denominations which are least impacted by the cultural trend away from denominationalism.

Schaller says smaller denominations still maintain an important role with their constituent congregations. Reasons for this include, “the advantages of a smaller scale, ...a comparatively homogenous belief system, the respect for tradition, the centrality of the parish ministry...the high priority given to evangelism and missions, the lean denominational budgets,” etc.<sup>9</sup> In other words, for Friends the “denomination” may still be more of an asset than it is for some groups. Anonymity is not a problem among Friends, as it is in larger denominations. Northwest Yearly Meeting is small enough for those at the core of its membership to name a good percentage of the leaders of the denomination. Members may have “gripes,” about those leaders, but they know who they are. There are no huge budgets lost to bureaucracy as with some groups. Anyone who wants to know “where the money goes” among Friends can have easy access to the financial records of the denomination, and most of the money goes to facilitate missions and evangelism, those ministries that retain significance and value to local churches. Schaller’s observations and the findings of Putnam and Feldstein suggest that the smallness of NWYM may be an asset in creating social capital.

Still another theme that Putnam and Feldstein observe in the case studies they report on is the value of creating “a cellular structure with smaller groups linked to form a larger, more encompassing one.”<sup>10</sup> They also call this a “network of networks.”<sup>11</sup> This suggests the possibility that whatever social capital may be created between particular

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<sup>9</sup> Lyle E. Schaller, *Innovations in Ministry: Models for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 64.

<sup>10</sup> Putnam, et al., *Better Together*, 279.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

congregations in one Area might be linked with still other congregations in that Area and with similar efforts in other Areas, potentially expanding the connections horizontally within NWYM. Interestingly, as originally conceived Friends polity is essentially a network of networks.

An important observation Putnam and Feldstein make is that those who succeeded in creating social capital focused on what the people they were working with cared about rather than their own “outside” agenda. They learned what the participants cared about by inviting those people to tell their stories.<sup>12</sup> A related observation was that in these case studies, social capital was not the goal, but a side effect of whatever the participants’ actual goal was.<sup>13</sup> This suggests that those interested in re-building connection among the churches of NWYM would be wise to focus on what people in the churches are asking for (whatever that might be), and let connection come along the way.

Another theme the authors discovered in their research was that “organizing is re-organizing.”<sup>14</sup> Those projects which seemed to be most successful were those that built on existing friendship networks. In fact, they found that relationships were more important than ideological commitment or even self-interest.

Finally, it is important to note that these authors and the particular groups they studied found the internet and email connections important only in certain contexts. The “web” is no magic creator of “virtual community.” What the researchers found was that when email connections are a complement to already existing relationships, the internet can be a useful tool. But among strangers, e-communication was not particularly

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 288.

significant. They use the metaphor of a metal alloy to argue that internet connections and face-to-face connections may be combined to gain strength of relationship.<sup>15</sup>

### Proposals for Re-Building Connections in NWYM

The observations and suggestions about to be offered here for re-building the connections among the congregations of Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends represent a multi-faceted approach. 1) A preferred vocabulary is suggested for discussing all of these proposals. 2) A review of recent experience in the Yearly Meeting gives important clues to how community and connection may be built. 3) Existing efforts at connection are reviewed and held up for reemphasis or reinterpretation. 4) Strategies are offered for involving pastoral leaders in reeducating Friends about their understanding of the Church. 5) “Tweaks” to the existing structure are explored as possible ways to make the midlevel connections of congregations more obvious and explicit. 6) Further, specific proposals are offered as potential amendments to *Faith and Practice* with the view of strengthening connectional ties among Friends. Finally, informal affinity gatherings and person-to-person connections are explored as possibilities.

A Preferred Vocabulary. Perhaps the language of “family” and “family reunion” and “getting in touch with our extended family” might appeal to average church members as an image on which to focus in this task of reconnecting Friends congregations to each other. It is a fair assumption that language of polity and “institutions” would not be acceptable to most average church members. Not only is the general cultural trend uncomfortable with “official” language, but many Friends see their church as less “institutional” than many others, and they like it that way.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 293.

Family language, on the other hand, is “friendlier” and “Friendlier.” The phrase “A Family of Friends” is familiar to many in the churches because it is the title of a booklet prepared for membership classes.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, there is an important biblical basis for using this language. The apostle Paul in his letters to the Romans, the Galatians, and the Ephesians (Romans 8: 15, 23; 9:4; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5) uses language about followers of Christ being “adopted” into God’s family and given the status of God’s heirs. In a study too lengthy to summarize adequately here, Robert Atkins, Jr. has shown how Paul’s use of the metaphor of adoption helps him communicate inclusion for the diverse kinds of people who came to make up the early church.<sup>17</sup> Atkins sees this metaphor as particularly apt for Paul’s egalitarian view of the Christian community. It is likewise an apt metaphor for Friends because of their similar view of the Church.

A Review of Recent Experience in NWYM. There have been a few important steps taken in the last couple of years by denominational leaders in NWYM that have served to begin a process that may show the way for Friends to reconnect. Two years ago the General Superintendent and a cadre of interested persons began to offer in strategic locations a weekend retreat opportunity called “Journey to Wholeness.” The purpose of these retreats was to invite people into a time of concerted worship and prayer, especially for inner healing. As these weekends have occurred, there have indeed been persons deeply touched spiritually, but one unanticipated consequence was that Friends from different congregations began to meet one another and discover common needs, interests, victories and concerns. There is a growing number of “alumni” of these weekends who

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<sup>16</sup> Jack L. Willcuts, *A Family of Friends: Friends Church Membership Course* (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 1960).

<sup>17</sup> Atkins, *Egalitarian Community*, 182ff.

know each other and care about each other. This experience makes language of “extended family” seem very natural for them.

Another program started in the last year has focused on training for intercessory prayer. Like the “Journey” sessions this program was placed in strategic locations to allow people from various congregations to attend a workshop near them. These training sessions have brought people together once a week for several weeks. Again, the “network” of people who feel part of something bigger than their own congregation has grown. These two programs are a clear example of Putnam and Feldstein’s observation that “social capital” is frequently a byproduct of pursuing some other goal. Further, they have been an “offering” to the local churches from the denomination, and importantly, an offering placed conveniently enough that many people could take advantage of these ministries. Thus these programs also affirm Lyle Schaller’s contention that those denominations which are viewed most favorably by members are those seen as “serving” the local congregation.

The Council of Elders’ inauguration of “Response Teams” is another example of recent experience that has taught NWYM leaders something about connection. Organized to provide for constructive intervention in local churches with some acute problem, the response of congregations has been instructive. The resistance in some cases is evidence of the need this dissertation seeks to address. But even in those congregations that have been resistant to a visit by a Response Team the result has been positive. Even though the “agenda” of the Team was focused on problem-solving, the side-effect has been the creation of new relationships, new trust, and new appreciation for “help” from the Yearly Meeting. Positive “social capital” has been created in these cases.

This suggests that whatever other training Response Team members are given for their participation in this ministry to local churches, they could also be alerted to the possibilities for the creation of bridging social capital. Local congregations are already responding with words of “thank you” to the teams. A few explicit comments by Team leaders about the value of “connecting as Friends” and “family helping family,” may help to cement an understanding in the minds of local leaders of the value of their connectional relationship to other Friends.

The Board of Evangelism of the Yearly Meeting has recently begun to be intentional in connecting established churches with what are called “New Works,” fledgling church plants nurtured under the supervision of one of the board’s superintendents. Encouraging this kind of nurture and accountability between newer and older fellowships has enormous potential to build the “family” feeling. The fact is these groups do have something to offer each other. The established church has stability, and often resources that can be shared. The “New Work” frequently has new energy, creativity, and in many cases important insight about how to reach unchurched people. Even though the focus of these relationships is evangelism and church planting, the by-product is the creation of bridging social capital.

In the case of each of the ministries and programs described above, there was no goal in the beginning of establishing meaningful connection among churches. But it has occurred in the process. Thus, the recent experience of Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends is a confirmation of the principle Putnam and Feldstein have seen at work and

described in their book: social capital is the by-product, not the main agenda of the successful efforts they are reporting.<sup>18</sup>

Existing Intentional Efforts at Connection. It is important to report that leaders of Northwest Yearly Meeting have not been without efforts to connect the people of the Yearly Meeting. Some of these efforts have been highly productive of social capital; others have need of reconsideration. One explicit effort at connection is a publication that is produced by the Yearly Meeting Publications Commission for distribution as an insert in bulletins of local churches. It is actually entitled “Connection.” Published monthly it includes a few brief articles in an attractive format. These articles are written by members of local churches and the writers are briefly identified with information about their location and personal interests. Photographs and “people focus” make this a piece that is likely to be read, even by those unfamiliar with the writers.

Another effort of the Publications Commission is a web site for the Yearly Meeting with pages providing background information on the denomination, location of the various congregations, major programs, publications and more. This site provides a separate page for every congregation in the Yearly meeting and each of those pages, where appropriate, contains a link to that congregation’s own web site. NWFriends.org, as the site is known, has a surprising number of “hits” for such a small organization. The most recent statistics available are from last year when the “distinct hosts served” in one week was 710. The average requests for web pages per day was 514, and the average distinct files requested per week was 613.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See above, p. 114.

<sup>19</sup> Gerald Lemmons <gmlemmons@juno.com>, RE: NWYM Web Stats [Email to Richard Sartwell <r.sartwell@comcast.net>], 8 January 2004.



Another website is sponsored by Barclay Press, a publication ministry linked to the Yearly Meeting. This site offers information on books published by this ministry, but also books from other publishers that may have interest to Friends. The site offers these books for sale, but also includes reviews, a link to the denominational devotional publication, articles of interest to Friends and usually by Friends, and a daily journal that is written by a volunteer for a few weeks at a time and then authored by a different volunteer, and so on through the year. For the month of December, 2003 the Barclay Press site had 1,195 unique visitors with “page views” in the following numbers:

Writers’ Lounge – 3,254  
 Daily Journal – 998  
 Articles – 984  
 Reviews – 172  
 Devotional – 119<sup>20</sup>

There is enough participation on these two websites to suggest that if those working at building connections between congregations intentionally sought to integrate internet connections with face-to-face connections they might well discover the “alloy” to which Putnam and Feldstein referred.

The Yearly Meeting programs for youth and young adults have a history of creating strong peer connections across local church boundaries. Summer camps, winter retreats and a program structure that participants actually take leadership in has created a network of young people around the Yearly Meeting who know each other, stay in touch with each other, and see themselves as “part of something bigger.” Because many people in the congregations of NWYM have had this experience as youth, there is a kind of

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<sup>20</sup> Dan McCracken <dmccracken@barclaypress.com>, RE: Web Stats, [Email to Richard Sartwell <r.sartwell@comcast.net>], 9 January 2004.

“community of memory” that can be appealed to when trying to promote the value of the “wider family of Friends” to those who are “no-longer-youth” in the congregations.

One other existing effort at connecting Friends with one another deserves mention and that is the Queries. The reading and consideration of these questions is an “ancient” practice of Friends, and as discussed in chapter three was originally taken quite seriously with a good deal of time and energy given to reviewing them. They are probing questions. For example, the following examples are taken from the current Queries of Northwest Yearly Meeting:

*Query 3* Does your inward faith turn outward? Do you pray for your friends and associates and for those engaged in spreading the Gospel...?

*Query 4* Do you acknowledge God’s ownership of all that is under your care? Do you give of your time and abilities in service to church and community and gratefully use your possessions as a trust to honor God?

*Query 5* Do you come [to meetings for worship and business] ready to commune with God and to fellowship with believers, willing to participate in contemplation or in spoken ministry?<sup>21</sup>

The practice of publishing the twenty Queries continues in the contemporary Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends, but with questionable value in terms of connection.

No longer are the answers to the Queries from local congregations shared at a Quarterly Meeting. Consequently no one knows how other congregations have dealt with the Queries or what their claimed state of spiritual welfare might be. The actual dealing with the Queries in particular congregations varies greatly from one church to the next. In some cases the Queries are handled quite conscientiously with good participation from members of the congregation. In others the Queries may be handled quite perfunctorily with almost no one in the congregation aware that they have been discussed. And in some places the Queries may have been ignored entirely. In sum, the value of connection

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<sup>21</sup> NYM, *Faith and practice*, 8.

*within* local congregations by review of the Queries is questionable, and as a tool for connection *between* congregations it is non-existent.

How might the Queries be restored in the service of connection among Friends? In one sense, perhaps, there is no answer to this question. If the Queries themselves are not probing enough questions to elicit serious soul-searching, it would not necessarily help for an Elder or a pastor, or someone else in the congregation to say, “We really ought to take these seriously, Friends!” And yet, a Spirit-inspired comment from the right person in a particular congregation might very well actually stir the hearts of people to take the Queries more seriously.

Perhaps recasting the Queries in the context of spiritual direction, or more appropriately for Friends, “spiritual friendship” might give them new relevance and vitality. It would be interesting to see what might develop if a small group of persons who do recognize the value of this ancient tradition among Friends gave some prayerful attention to how the Lord might guide in bringing new clarity and motivation to the use of the Queries.

One significant avenue to explore would be to think of the Queries as a tool with which to explore the issue that Larry Crabb raises in a recent book about the need to rediscover true spiritual community among Christians. He writes, “I speak of spiritual community as a gathering of people who experience a kind of togetherness that only the Holy Spirit makes possible, who move in good directions – and *want* to – because the Spirit is at work.”<sup>22</sup> The same topics covered in the Queries which now too often seem

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<sup>22</sup> Larry Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth: Where People Connect and Are Forever Changed* (Nashville, TN: Word, 1999), 22.

like a wet blanket, could be the kindling for a spiritual fire to warm the relationships of Friends to new levels of health and meaningful connection with one another.

Strategies for involving pastors. Theologically and traditionally Friends do not hold pastors in quite the same place as some other Christian denominations do. The Friends pastor is not a “priest” in a unique sense. She or he is not an office-holder in the sense in which some Christians view their pastors. Theologically the Friends pastor is seen as one “released” for ministry by the support of the congregation, that is, set free from the need to support himself or herself financially in order to give significantly more time to ministry than the average church volunteer can usually give.

Nevertheless, because of the functional role the pastor has, there is great opportunity to raise issues before the congregation through preaching and teaching and in business meetings. The pastor is often the “gatekeeper” for focus and attention in a local church. He or she is one who has great opportunity to suggest the “family” activities. And similarly, there is great opportunity to ignore certain issues. Reestablishing meaningful connection between and among Friends congregations is not totally dependent upon pastors, but it is a goal they can assist or hinder. For that reason it seems wise to include pastors in the early stages of trying to bring open discussion to the issues of this chapter.

One strategy to gain involvement of pastors is to seek to gain the opportunity to discuss the issues of connecting among the churches in the context of the annual pastors meeting called “Focus.” This 2-3 day gathering of pastors is designed as an opportunity for continuing education. It would be very appropriate to present historical, biblical, and theological grounds for strengthening the ties among Friends churches and to involve the

pastors in discussion of these topics. There is reason to believe pastors have interest in this subject because of an informal discussion held in the Focus conference in September, 2003. When the group of about 50 pastors and spouses was asked, “Why do you attend a conference like this?” there were varied answers. But among their answers were these:

To be with those who are like minded.  
 To be in community.  
 I’m interested in other churches.  
 To find someone of the same mind as I am.  
 It’s a family reunion – we share stories.  
 I want to be aware of what’s going on in the Yearly Meeting  
 There’s an excitement about what God is doing.  
 To encourage each other.  
 We owe it to each other.<sup>23</sup>

As a natural follow-up to the Focus conference, pastors could be provided with suggested themes for Bible study, such as the passages discussed in chapter two of this dissertation. Special attention could be given to those passages which clearly demonstrate caring and accountability across local church boundaries. One study not mentioned in chapter two but which has important significance for this issue is suggested by Anthony Robinson, a pastor in the United Church of Christ. He notes the need for Christians to see themselves not only as “givers,” but also as “receivers.” He writes, “There are countless Bible stories that help us explore this reality: that the gifted and strong are also the needy and weak in their own particular ways.”<sup>24</sup> He cites the story of Naaman in 2 Kings, John’s account of the Last Supper and Peter’s need to let Jesus wash his feet. These biblical accounts and others can be used by pastors to encourage congregations to offer and receive from one another and thereby “strengthen the family.”

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<sup>23</sup> Discussion at Pastors’ Focus Conference, edited by Richard Sartwell (Hood River, OR, September 20 2003), 1.

<sup>24</sup> Anthony B. Robinson, *Transforming Congregational Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 67, 8.

The “ancient” practice of Friends of supporting traveling ministers is experiencing somewhat of a renewal in certain yearly meetings of Friends. As noted in Chapter Three, in the earliest years, and before Friends adopted a pastoral system, much of the communication and spiritual life of the yearly meeting was carried from one congregation to the next by these traveling ministers. In that way important truths were spread around the larger fellowship.

Marjory Abbott and Peggy Parsons, Quakers from different yearly meetings, have written, “Travel in the ministry was an act of community in many ways,” noting how it took the support of the broader community with finances, taking care of work and perhaps even family responsibilities for one traveling.<sup>25</sup> Abbott and Parsons, in a collection of first-hand reports and testimonies soon to be published, have gathered important evidence of the value of this ministry for connecting Friends with one another. David Niyonzima, an African Friend describes his experience of visiting congregations throughout central Africa, sometimes unannounced, sometimes speaking, sometimes just sitting in worship with them. He writes,

I have found that people feel served by that – when I come and worship with them.... When they give me time to speak, and I bring greetings from the other churches – I connect the local churches together. Sometimes I bring news, or concerns from other business meetings. I also share things that I see God doing around the yearly meeting.<sup>26</sup>

Martha Paxon Grundy reflects on her own experience of visiting various Friends congregations, especially small ones. “It lets them know that what they do is important, not only to remind them that they are part of a larger religious...community, but because

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<sup>25</sup> *Led by the Voice of Light: Friends Public Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Marjory Post Abbott and Peggy Senger Parsons, eds., unpublished manuscript due for publication 2004, 29.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

faithful worship has ultimate, cosmic importance. Visits help small groups shape and strengthen their sense of identity....”<sup>27</sup>

The practice of traveling ministers is not currently in renewal in Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends. Very few persons in the Yearly Meeting describe themselves as called to such a ministry. But a call could be put out to the people of the Yearly Meeting for persons to prayerfully consider if God is calling them to such a ministry and to submit themselves to their local Elders for consideration of whether they concur that God has gifted them for such a ministry. The Yearly Meeting Council of Elders is the logical group to initiate such a call for prayerful consideration.

Clearly, traveling ministers will need to be listening to the Lord of the Church for instructions on what ministry they are to offer and what messages they may be called to bear. But it is interesting to recall that among the first generation of Friends such ministers met regularly to consider together what common messages God might be giving for the church-at-large, as well as to particular Meetings.<sup>28</sup> If the concerns lifted in this dissertation for stronger connections among Friends congregations are of the Lord, it could be expected that the Lord would lay on the hearts of traveling ministers similar concerns to be brought to the various churches. But regardless of the content of messages borne by traveling ministers, their simple on-going visitation among the churches would have the side-effect of building connections (social capital) among the churches.

The relevance of this matter of traveling ministers to the on-going role of pastors should be obvious. Pastors need to see this ministry as a complement and a supplement to their own ministry. Likely many pastors do have memories of visiting ministers

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>28</sup> See Chapter 3, p. 69.

speaking in their churches when they were growing up, and so the concept should not be new to them. In any case, the potential role of traveling ministers may be another subject that needs highlighting and historical and biblical review in the context of a Focus conference in order to gain the interest and cooperation of pastors.

Structural Tweaks. There are some slight adjustments that could be made to the existing structure of the Yearly Meeting that could make the midlevel connections through Areas more obvious and more real in practice. As noted in Chapter Four, the changes made in the Quarterly Meeting structure still kept an official midlevel connection in the Quarters (now known as Areas). However, in practice most of the Areas do not in fact appoint their representatives to Yearly Meeting boards in an official meeting for business and worship for the churches of the Area. It would be a simple matter for the Clerk of the Yearly Meeting to officially communicate with Clerks of local churches each year with a citation from *Faith and Practice* about how Area representatives are named in an annual business meeting of the Area. That would be an on-going reminder that would serve to lessen the likelihood that some Areas would “forget” to name their representatives, resulting in a “bypass” of the normal channels for naming board representatives.

Another minor structural “tweak” that might have the potential for major impact would be to adjust the annual report forms that local churches and pastors complete. Lyle Schaller has commented on how report forms send very clear messages to local leaders about what is considered significant. He writes:

what is counted *and rewarded* conveys to congregational leaders what denominational leaders believe are the most important aspects of congregational life. . . . That which is counted most carefully, reported with the greatest publicity, and rewarded with the most praise and



commendation will be perceived as the most important aspect of parish life.<sup>29</sup>

Report forms could identify activities and programs that facilitate connection between congregations and could ask for how the local church has been involved in these.

In an even more innovative touch, Schaller suggests that denominational report forms be redesigned to include intentions as well as past actions. He observes, “...questions asked *in advance* can change behavior. Thus the reporting system should be seen as a behavior modification system.”<sup>30</sup> The advantage of asking for reports of intention as well as reports of past action is that the report form sends a signal to those completing it about what they and their congregation can do over the next reporting period to have worthwhile activities to report. So, for example, questions on a report form designed to encourage connecting activities might look like this:

*What plans do you have for the coming year to encourage members of your congregation to attend a “Journey to Wholeness?”*

*How will you encourage members of your congregation to visit other Friends congregations to learn what God is doing in their midst and report it to your people?*

*How many members of your congregation are active participants in a group that includes persons from more than one Friends congregation?*

With this same intentionality leaders could begin to structure yearly meeting programs and ministries in ways to foster these interchurch connections. For example the Board of Evangelism, which has just recently discovered the value of linking established congregations with New Works, could as a matter of policy seek to have such links in

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<sup>29</sup> Lyle E. Schaller, *Reflections of a Contrarian: Second Thoughts on The Parish Ministry* (Nashville, TN: The Abingdon Press, 1989), 50.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

place wherever possible in the launching of New Works. Again, “family” language could be used to speak of these relationships.

*Faith and Practice Adjustments.* There are a few changes that could be made that would require amendments to the denomination’s *Faith and Practice*, but that hold significant promise for strengthening Friends’ connectional polity. For one thing, even though the current job description of the General Superintendent includes the words, “to exercise general supervisory care over all work in the Yearly Meeting,”<sup>31</sup> there is considerable confusion about if and when a superintendent may take initiative to intervene in a local congregation. There is similar confusion over if and when the Yearly Meeting Council of Elders can or should intervene in a local congregation, even though the current job description of the Council of Elders includes the words,

Serve as peacemakers in the Yearly Meeting, offering reconciliation as needed; ascertain serious problems or declining spiritual vitality in local churches or in the Yearly Meeting and offer counsel to constituent churches and organizations in an effort to solve problems or restore spiritual vitality; recommend action by the Board of Evangelism.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps in both the case of the General Superintendent and Council of Elders the right of intervention in local churches should be explicitly stated. One “check” on the potential for too much authority being assumed by either the General Superintendent or the Council of Elders could be the requirement that they must confer and concur on the appropriateness of intervention in local churches, rather than giving either the authority to do so without consulting the other. Regardless of what the *Faith and Practice* may have meant to empower the Superintendent and Elders to initiate, the fact is there is confusion

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<sup>31</sup> *Faith and Practice*, 30.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

surrounding this issue and consequently tentativeness at times that may have resulted in “late” interventions that were not as helpful as earlier ones might have been.

A second area where alteration of the *Faith and Practice* could be helpful is in the creation of Area Superintendents. Even as this dissertation is being written there has been discussion in various boards of the Yearly Meeting about the need of creating three new positions for Area Superintendents. Formal proposals have not yet reached the representatives of the churches, but the informal discussion has centered on a few key concerns. One of the concerns is that while the Yearly Meeting is relatively small in number of congregations and “new works,” these are scattered over a large geographical region. This makes it very difficult for a General Superintendent to make frequent visits to the local churches. Some advocates for the new positions feel they will enable more regular visitation of the congregations.

A related concern is that many congregations feel “far removed” from the headquarters of the denomination. The hope of those who advocate for the new positions is that these will make for an improved relationship between local churches and the Yearly Meeting structure. In view of the discussion in Chapter One about the broader cultural trend of suspicion of denominations, this proposed action can be seen as an effort to mute that sentiment among Friends congregations.

Still another hope of those advocating for Area Superintendents is that these persons can provide expertise, energy and encouragement to local congregations for the task of evangelism in their Area. This is specifically the hope of the Board of

Evangelism of NWYM which is prepared to propose creation of the new positions and also to fund them from their Board budget.<sup>33</sup>

While each of these three concerns could be met with Area Superintendents, there is a fourth concern that arises from the topic of this dissertation. These persons could be key advocates and implementers of the varied opportunities for connection among the congregations of their Area. If an Area Superintendent were in place, who better to remind the local churches of the need and opportunity to appoint Area representatives each year for service on Yearly Meeting boards? Who better to help spread the news from church to church of how God is blessing others in the Area? Who better to alert in a timely manner the General Superintendent or the Council of Elders about needs in local churches? In short, without necessarily taking anything away from other responsibilities assigned to these superintendents, if they approach their ministry with a mindset of helping the congregations connect with each other they could make a significant difference in the “family” feeling of the Area. I would recommend that if the position of Area Superintendent is created that the job description include responsibility for strengthening connectional ties in the Area and the Yearly Meeting.

A third area that would potentially involve a change in *Faith and Practice* would be in the powers and job description of the Board of Evangelism of the Yearly Meeting. As the relevant paragraphs currently read, there is no mention of interim ministry, nor the value of interim ministry for churches in transition. Likewise, there is very little experience in Northwest Yearly Meeting of true intentional interim ministry, especially interims who have had specialized training for doing interim ministry. There have been

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<sup>33</sup> Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends Church, Board of Ministerial Service, Minutes, October 20, 2003, 03-48, 2.

in the past seasoned pastors who have done interim ministry and done it well, but they ministered primarily out of their own giftedness and extensive experience, and unfortunately at this point in time there are few such persons available for this kind of ministry. While trained interim ministers have almost no place in NWYM, those denominations (chiefly “mainliners”) which have had active interim ministry programs with trained staff have found over the last few decades that this ministry is one of the best opportunities to “reconnect” local churches to the denomination.<sup>34</sup> This suggests that the Yearly Meeting would be well advised to consider adopting a plan to develop, train, and place intentional interim ministers.

Intentional interim ministry can be defined as, “a studied response to the unique need and opportunity that a change of pastors brings.”<sup>35</sup> More specifically, according to experienced interim minister Paul Svingen, the tasks of the interim pastor are: to intentionally face conflict which may exist in the congregation, to use a problem-identification process, to develop a “contract” with the congregation naming the specific interim issues that will be addressed by the congregation and the interim minister, and to develop a plan for terminating the interim and reaching closure.<sup>36</sup>

As it stands at present, “troubled” congregations in NWYM frequently remain so over extended periods of time. Because such congregations, like most churches in the Yearly Meeting, are relatively small they usually do not have the budget to support a full-time, experienced pastor. Frequently they become the first ministry opportunity for

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<sup>34</sup> Alan G. Gripe, *The Interim Pastors Manual* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1997), 10.

<sup>35</sup> *Temporary Shepherds: A Congregational Handbook for Interim Ministry*, ed. Roger S. Nicholson (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1998), xvi.

<sup>36</sup> Paul N. Svingen, “The Interim Minister: A Special Calling,” in *Temporary Shepherds: A Congregational Handbook for Interim Ministry*, ed. Roger S. Nicholson (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1998), 54.

young and inexperienced pastors – those least prepared to deal with the especially hard circumstances of a dysfunctional church. Such congregations typically develop “a long list of short pastorates.”<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, many leaders in the Yearly Meeting know of these congregations, know the “track record,” and truly fear the discouragement that may come to a young, inexperienced pastor, but feel there is little they can do to stop what seems inevitable.

This situation seems to cry out for intervention and proactive efforts to help congregations and pastors experience much healthier transitions. Both the Board of Evangelism and the Council of Elders have items in their “duties and functions” that could justify their involvement in this issue, but since the Board of Evangelism has traditionally been the board that deals with continuing education of pastors, it may be the preferred group to take initiative on a policy. The Appendix contains a suggested curriculum for training intentional interim ministers and a suggested policy for the Board of Evangelism or other appropriate board to adopt concerning troubled churches and interim ministers.

Informal Affinity Groups. Finally, the encouragement of informal affinity groups across local church lines may be one of the most helpful things that could build the connections this dissertation envisions. As noted on pages 119-120 of this chapter there are already some prime examples in recent months of activities sponsored by the Yearly Meeting that had no intention of building community and connection but which in fact did produce such community. The “Journey to Wholeness” and the Intercessory Prayer training are prime examples of this.

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<sup>37</sup> These are the words of Gilbert George, an experienced Friends pastor, in a personal conversation with the author.

The potential for affinity gatherings is almost unlimited. There are various ways Friends could be invited to share with others from different congregations in their Area. Putnam and Feldstein in their book cited the example of the many interest groups that are available through the Saddleback Church in southern California:

Couples groups, singles groups, a group for single parents of teenage children and one for mothers of preschoolers, Woman to Woman ministering, men's morning Bible study, deaf Bible study, a group combining volleyball and Bible study, groups for women with breast cancer and for men caring for women with breast cancer, a group for "teens-in-temptation," one for families with incarcerated loved ones, groups for separated men and separated women, a group for sufferers of chronic pain or chronic illness, and a "Geeks for God Ministry" for Cisco-certified networking professionals, among many others.<sup>38</sup>

There are no Friends congregations in Northwest Yearly Meeting that average the thousands of constituents that the Saddleback Church does. But there are at least a few hundred Friends in each Area, and in some Areas many more. There are people with similar interests, concerns, and needs scattered among the congregations. Area-wide affinity groups could provide for Friends what they might not otherwise experience unless they were part of a megachurch. One specific example may demonstrate the significance of seeking to foster affinity groups.

Are there small business owners who struggle with how to survive in a difficult economy? More importantly, are some of these owners consciously trying to do business as Christians in the way they promote their product or service, in the way they treat employees, in the way they involve themselves in the broader community? Would they value the chance to get together on a monthly or semi-monthly basis for prayer and discussion and mutual support? If so, this kind of meeting would be doing more than one thing at the same time. It would, hopefully, provide encouragement for these small

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<sup>38</sup> Putnam, *et al.*, *Better Together*, 129.

business owners, and even constructive solutions for some of the problems they face. But at the same time it would be developing connection between and among congregations in an Area. And just as importantly, it would be “fleshing out” Friends’ convictions about how the venue for ministry and service is all of life and not just limited to a building called the “church,” or even exclusively to the people called one’s “church.”

How might these affinity groups be gathered? The ones which truly “succeed” in more ways than one will likely be those that the Lord “gathers” by the prompting of the Spirit. But that does not preclude one or more persons “lifting the vision” for such groups. As noted above, pastors are key leaders in local congregations and if they become sensitized to the multiple needs and opportunities that could be met by such Area affinity groups, they could be the Lord’s instrument to inspire the creation of one or more groups. In a similar way, committee persons from a local church, or members of Yearly Meeting boards might be the ones to initiate interest in some affinity gathering. The annual Yearly Meeting sessions themselves might be a very appropriate venue for the initial gathering of some affinity groups. Informal gatherings could be arranged for “physicians,” or “small business owners,” or “public school teachers,” etc., with opportunity for persons in like employment to make connections that could be maintained through the year with an e-group.

Also, as noted above, revised report forms might “plant seeds” for listening to the Lord and responding with Spirit-led creativity to gather Friends into particular interest groups and/or ministries. And if positions for Area Superintendents are created in the near future, those superintendents could be a major communication link between congregations. As they visit churches they could report, “Did you know that a small



group of business owners gathers the first Tuesday of every month at the Woodview church to discuss...?”

### Conclusion

The deterioration of connections between Friends congregations has gradually taken place over a period of several years. It will likely take several years to rebuild these connections with measures like those outlined above. It will take intentionality and work to pursue this goal, and it will take recognition that the work is a *spiritual* work as much as anything, because what is being attempted goes against the trends and preferences of our culture. But if Friends are to be faithful to God’s call on them, and faithful to their vision of the Church, this is work they must do.

They must do this because, as was shown in Chapter 2, the biblical model of the church is relational with demonstrated concern for one another across local church boundaries and demonstrated concern for the broader world. They must do this work to be faithful to their particular historical heritage and call from the Lord, as was shown in Chapter 3. They must do this work to restore the meaningful part of what was lost by changes made in the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as was shown in Chapter 4. They must do this work, as was shown in Chapter 5, if they hope to avoid the contention that Presbyterians and many other Christians have experienced, despite official “connection.” And they must do this work if they hope to have anything to offer this world that is worthy of the vision of Christ for it.

## APPENDIX

### SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR A PROGRAM OF INTENTIONAL INTERIM MINISTRY IN NWYM

#### Suggested Policy Guidelines

In the event that the NWYM Board of Evangelism (or other appropriate board) chooses to develop a program of Intentional Interim Ministry within the Yearly Meeting, the following are suggested policy guidelines:

- Intentional Interim Pastors are offered as an option to churches in transition with strong encouragement by superintendents and the Board of Evangelism to local churches to utilize this ministry.

- Costs of an interim pastor are covered by the local congregation with financial assistance available through the Board of Evangelism for churches in special circumstances.

- Interim Pastors recommended by the BOE and the superintendents will be trained and certified either through the Interim Ministry Network or by taking another training opportunity acceptable to the BOE.

- Review and evaluation of interim pastorates will be conducted by the BOE and the General Superintendent, or their designated representative(s).

- Written agreements between local congregations and interim pastors will include: goals of the interim period; costs and how paid; responsibilities of the Interim

Pastor, responsibilities of the local Elders, other local leaders, and when appropriate the pastoral search committee.

- No interim pastor may be considered for candidacy as a regular pastor in a local church in which s/he currently serves as an interim minister.

### Resources Available to Train and Equip Interim Ministers

There are associations in the United States whose goal is to recruit, train and equip persons for interim ministry. The association with the strongest credibility seems to be the Interim Ministry Network, an international association of more than 1600 interim ministry specialists, denominational leaders and church consultants. They provide formal training programs around the United States that include both intense periods of instruction and extended periods of supervised internship. The IMN also publishes a newsletter called “The In-Between Times.”

The Alban Institute based in Bethesda, Maryland offers a variety of published materials useful for constructive intervention in conflicted congregations, materials prepared for interim ministers, materials for systems analysis in local churches, etc. Beyond basic training for interim ministers, this organization has a wealth of specialized materials for dealing with particular problems in the church.

Three books are especially helpful in understanding the nature of the interim ministry situation. Alan G. Gripe’s *The Interim Pastor’s Manual*, published by Geneva Press is exactly what its title suggests. Gripe has written from the perspective of the person serving as an interim pastor. He discusses the generally accepted stages that congregations pass through during transition between regular pastors. The same stages

are discussed from the congregation's perspective in the book *Temporary Shepherds: A Congregational Handbook for Interim Ministry*, edited by Roger S. Nicholson and published by the Alban Institute. A third work that would be helpful for interim ministers is Lyle Schaller's *The Interventionist* published by Abingdon Press. Schaller's book offers categories of questions for an interim minister or other "outsider" to ask of a congregation when trying to understand their circumstances and local church culture.

Suggested Curriculum Components of a Training Course  
In Interim Ministry Offered by Friends Center

NWYM's Friends Center could assist Friends interested in being trained for interim ministry and who do not feel they can participate in national training programs offered by the Interim Ministry Network or other associations. Suggested components for such a course include:

**Biblical Precedents for Interim Ministry**

The wilderness experience of the Israelites

Deborah and other Judges

John the Baptist ("prepare the way")

Paul ("I planted, Apollos watered")

**Circumstances Which Might Warrant an Intentional Interim Ministry<sup>1</sup>**

The pastor has died, become disabled, retired, or resigned

The congregation needs preparation for a new style of ministry

The pastor has been removed

There is conflict and need of healing

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<sup>1</sup> Alan G. Gripe, *The Interim Pastor's Manual* (Philadelphia, PA: Geneva Press, 1987), 8.

There is a change of character in the neighborhood and consequent need to reassess and reshape the mission of the church

The pastor and/or the congregation want to test some experimental ministry over a stated period of time

There is a gap in church programming that needs attention, but not permanent staff

There is a need of continuity during a time of extended pastoral transition

### **Understanding the emotions that may be present in congregations facing transition**

The dynamics of termination and institutional grief processes

Relief and/or anger over a pastor's leaving

Insecurity about the present and the future

Coming to grips with the reality of the congregation's situation

Awareness of need of help

Hope for the future

Excitement about a new pastor and a new start

### **Stages of the Interim Pastorate<sup>2</sup>**

Stage 1: Pre-entry (Educating the congregation on the nature of interim ministry and clarifying the process of selection)

Stage 2: Entry (Discussion with leadership of the local church, clarification of interim objectives, contractual agreement)

Stage 3: Main Body of Work (Working on the objectives and tasks agreed upon)

Stage 4: Exit (Intentional closure activities for the interim and welcoming activities for the new pastor)

Stage 5: Post-Termination (Review and evaluation of the process and experience)

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 29-36.

### **The Five “Developmental Tasks” of the Congregation in an Interim<sup>3</sup>**

- Coming to terms with the local church’s history
- Discovering a new identity
- Allowing and empowering new leaders
- Renewing denominational connections
- Committing to a new leadership and a new future

### **The Five “Process Tasks” of the Interim Pastor<sup>4</sup>**

- Joining the “system”
- Analyzing the organization as a system
- Connecting with the denomination
- Focusing and assuming responsibility
- Exiting and evaluating

### **The Qualities of an Effective Interim Minister<sup>5</sup>**

- Willingness and capability to earn the trust of local leaders
- Credibility (experience, competence, commitment, etc.)
- Genuine openness to diverse opinions
- Professional competence
- The mind of a chess player (the ability to anticipate the consequences of decisions made now)
- Diagnostic capability
- Competence to suggest appropriate prescriptions for the congregation’s circumstances

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 38ff.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 51ff.

<sup>5</sup> Lyle E. Schaller, *The Interventionist: A Conceptual Framework and Questions for Parish Consultants, Intentional Interim Ministers*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 56-8.

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