



Faith and Practice

Friends Southwest

2023 Edition

www.fsw.church

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	6
CHAPTER 1: Our Beliefs	7
Historical Introduction	7
Founder George Fox	7
<i>A Growing Movement</i>	7
Early Names	7
Welcoming Persecution	8
Attractive Testimonies	8
Early Organization	8
Influence in America	9
Nineteenth Century Divisions	9
Umbrella Groups Today	9
Local Origins	10
Faith and Practice	10
<i>An Affirmation of Faith</i>	10
<i>Friends Convictions</i>	11
Salvation, Transformation, and Sanctification	11
The Indwelling and Gifts of the Spirit	13
The Nature of and Gifts for Ministry	13
Baptism and Communion	14
Leadership, Decision-making, and the Church	15
Love, Peace, and Violence	15
Truthful and Gracious Speech	15
<i>Values</i>	16
The Written Word of God and the Living Word of God	16
The Great Commission and the Great Commandment	16
Leadership of the Elders and Priesthood of the Believers	17
Personal Intimacy with Christ and Corporate Consensus from Christ	17
Godly Character and Spiritual Gifts	17
<i>Friends' Perspective on Contemporary Issues</i>	18
Abortion and Euthanasia/Assisted Suicide	18
Sexuality	19
Marriage	20
Race and Reconciliation	21
Mental Health	22
Wealth and Materialism	23
Christians and the Political Process	24

CHAPTER 2: Church Organization 26

The Friends Southwest Objective	26
<i>The Purpose of the Local Church</i>	26
<i>Participating in the Local Church - A Committed Partnership</i>	27
Expectations of Committed Partners	28
Becoming a Committed Partner	28
Positions Requiring Partnership	29
Resignation or Discontinuance	29
<i>Fully Organized Church</i>	29
<i>Organization of the Local Church - Officers and Committees</i>	30
Office of the Pastor	30
Elders/Ministry and Counsel	30
Authority of Elders/Ministry and Counsel	31
Clerk/Presiding Officer	31
Recording Clerk/Recording Officer	32
Nominating	32
Finance	32
Treasurer	33
Property and Finance (Trustees)	33
Corporate Organization	33
Missions	33
Other committees	34
Minutes	34
<i>The Business of the Local Church</i>	34
Business Meetings	34
The Friends Way of Doing Business	34
Conducting Business 34 Frequency of Business Meetings	35
Business Requiring Congregational Approval 35 Called Business Meetings	35
Minutes	35

CHAPTER 3: Regional Organization 36

The Purpose of Friends Southwest	36
<i>History of Regional Friends Denominations</i>	36
<i>Organizational Structure of Friends Southwest</i>	36
Final Authority	36
<i>Executive Staff</i>	37
Superintendent	37

Other Executive and Field Staff	38
Job Descriptions	39
<i>FSW Elder Board</i>	39
Composition	39
Elder Duties and Responsibilities	40
Personnel Duties	40
Execution of Documents	41
<i>Representatives</i>	41
Annual Conference	42
Essential Business of Representatives	42
Participating in Sessions	42
General Nominating Committee	43
Clerks/Officers	43
First Fruits Covenant Giving	44
Friends Way of Doing Business	44
<i>Friends Southwest Boards</i>	45
Organization of Boards	45
Duties and Responsibilities	46
Inactive Board and Committee Members	46
Membership and Terms	46
<i>Faith Boards</i>	46
Friends Center	47
Missions	47
<i>Service Boards</i>	47
Recording and Commissioning	48
<i>Related Organizations</i>	48
California Friends Homes	48
Evangelical Friends International	49
Evangelical Friends Mission	49
Southwest Friends Financial Development Corporation	50

APPENDIX 51

Contents 51

*Faith and Practice Revisions 51**Historical Faith Statements 52*

George Fox's Letter to the Governor of Barbados - 1671 52

Richmond Declaration of Faith - 1887 55

Friends Southwest Elements Statement 66

Tools for Individual and Church Accountability 69

Leaders Accountability Questions 69

Individual Accountability Questions 69

Congregation Accountability Questions 70

Healthy Church Values and Behaviors 72

Centrality of Christ, the Living Word and Authority of Written Word 72

Life transforming walk with Jesus by the Holy Spirit 72

Intentional Disciple-making 73

Transforming communities through active compassion, mercy and justice
ministries 74

Globally and Regionally minded and engaged 74

Embraces community and connectedness on all levels 75

Heartfelt worship 76

Simple, Sacrificial and generous living and giving 77

Fosters godly, growing and learning culture for leaders 77

Functional and fruitful systems and structures 78

Final Thoughts 79

Basic Best Fiduciary Practices for Ministry 79

INTRODUCTION

The people of Friends Southwest are committed to life with Jesus Christ. Guided by Scripture and changed by the Holy Spirit, we seek to live a new way of life and to invite others to faith and life in Jesus. Believing that Jesus is ever present, we are compelled to love God and love others, exemplifying the mercy, justice, reconciliation, and restoration found in God's kingdom.

This document, entitled *Faith and Practice*, describes the beliefs, values, structures, and processes of Friends Southwest and its churches. This document is a way to understand who we are and who we are endeavoring to become. It includes history that summarizes the origins of Friends, the theological tenets we hold with other Christian traditions, Friends distinctives, and our approach to current social issues. Further, it guides us on how we have agreed to live and work together, outlining the organization of our churches and denomination.

Additional resources for churches can be found online at <http://fsw.church/>.

CHAPTER 1: Our Beliefs

Historical Introduction

The Friends Church began in England in the mid-seventeenth century and spread within a few decades throughout the British colonies that bordered the Atlantic Ocean. As an extension of the Protestant Reformation, Friends emphasized a direct, personal encounter with Christ, typified in the experience of its most prominent and enduring leader, George Fox.

Founder George Fox

Born in 1624, Fox participated regularly in the Church of England with his parents until the age of nineteen. During these years he observed an empty formalism and a dead religion that failed to quench his spiritual thirst. He also became deeply disturbed and depressed over the presence of sin in his own heart. Fox wandered from place to place, seeking help from various people and also from reading his Bible.

Finally, in 1647, when his hope was nearly gone, Fox found the answer to his spiritual restlessness through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that made his heart “leap for joy.” Through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, he discovered that Jesus is a living Savior who overcame temptation, sin, and Satan, and that through Christ’s power and grace, so could he.

A Growing Movement

Fox was not alone. Scores of others in England had experienced the same spiritual longings. As he began to talk and preach about his new-found faith in Christ, Fox encountered many eager listeners and sometimes attracted great crowds that quickly turned into a growing movement. Within ten years, from about 1650 to 1660, the Friends grew to an estimated 50,000 followers. During this period, they were the fastest growing religious group of any kind in the English-speaking world.

An early distinction of Friends was their emphasis on evangelism and missions. Fox explained that God had called him to “turn people from darkness to light, that they might receive Christ Jesus,” and he encouraged other Friends to join him in this great cause. Both men and women traveled as missionaries throughout England, among the British colonies, and to various other nations. They preached the gospel to anyone who would listen, and at times, even to those who refused. It was both an evangelical and an evangelistic movement.

Early Names

This Friends movement held a number of names in the early years. Prompted undoubtedly by their evangelistic efforts, one of their early labels was “Publishers of Truth.” They not only printed and distributed thousands of tracts, they also “published glad tidings” - telling people far and near about the truth of the gospel message. Another early name was “Children of Light” (referring to the light of Christ in the gospel of John). A derogatory nickname that they received from outsiders was “Quakers,” a label that many ended up embracing as a term of endearment. The official name that

they finally chose for themselves, however, remains in place today. The term *Friends* is taken from Jesus' own words.

Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends for everything that I learned from my father I have made known to you. (John 15:13-15)

Welcoming Persecution

Not only were Friends a rapidly growing movement in the seventeenth century, they also carried the distinction of suffering more persecution than other English Protestant groups. In general, they refused to run away from persecution, and sometimes they seemed to run *toward* it, as if the threat of maltreatment sounded a trumpet call to advance to the spiritual battle line. Rather than hiding underground, Friends insisted on meeting openly in their usual places, and they accepted arrest, fines, imprisonment, and even death as a part of their testimony and calling. Between 1660 and 1689, an estimated fifteen thousand Friends went to prison in England, of whom four hundred and fifty paid for their convictions with their lives.

By 1661 in America, authorities had already whipped, branded, imprisoned and deported a number of Friends missionaries, while four of them - William Robinson, Marmaduke Stephenson, William Ledra, and Mary Dyer - concluded their ministries at the end of a noose in Boston. Persecution was an ever-present threat for Friends, if not a reality, until the Act of Toleration passed in 1689, ensuring some of the religious freedoms that we still enjoy.

Attractive Testimonies

From an early period, Friends became known for various "testimonies" or beliefs evidenced in their behaviors, demonstrating to the world their priorities and matters of conscience. One testimony emphasized honesty, plain speech, and the consequent rejection of all swearing and oath taking. They took Jesus' instruction seriously to let your "yes be yes, and your no, no." As a result, they concluded that if they swore that they were telling the truth, even in a court of law, it implied that they might be lying if they did *not* swear. They gained a reputation that their word was as good as their bond.

Another early testimony for Friends emphasized the importance of peace. They maintained convictions against violence, war, and abuse of all kinds, and that God had called believers to live in peace with everyone. Friends traditionally stressed simplicity of life and equality among all peoples. These concerns could be seen in their plain clothing (dressing alike as common folk), their respect and care for Native Americans, and their significant leadership role as abolitionists. As a general rule, Friends freed their slaves long before the Civil War and some served as the chief conductors of the Underground Railroad.

Early Organization

The Friends' first efforts at organization led to the development of local churches, or *Meetings*, which combined to form larger regional gatherings for worship and business, convening monthly, quarterly, and yearly. This system allowed for a formalized reporting

structure, group decision making by coming to unity in obedience to the Holy Spirit, church and ministerial accountability, and the development of approved leadership. British Friends started to meet annually in 1671, the same year that the first large regional grouping or Yearly Meeting of Friends in America became organized in New England. Early leaders were known as elders, overseers, or ministers. With an understanding that God alone ordains, Friends recognized those individuals whom God had chosen by “recording” them as ministers, a practice continued today. Friends also acknowledged the role of women in ministry from an early period, affirming many who served as missionaries, ministers, and leaders as called by God. The first paid pastors for Friends began to serve in America in the 1870s.

Influence in America

The message of Friends spread throughout colonial America as the result of missionary efforts that began in 1656 with the ministries of Mary Fisher and Ann Austin, climaxing in 1672 with the visit of George Fox and other key leaders. Friends lived in almost every colony but were prominent in a few, especially in Rhode Island, the Jerseys, and the Carolinas where some of their members served as governors, legislators, judges, and in other positions of influence. In 1682, King Charles II gave a large grant of land in America to a prominent Friend, William Penn, as repayment for a debt owed to his father. The region was named “Penn’s Woods” (or “Pennsylvania”) in honor of William’s father, and Friends exercised a **significant** political influence there until the 1750s.

Nineteenth Century Divisions

Although Friends have always desired to maintain unity, some sharp divisions occurred in the nineteenth century. In 1827, a split took place over theological issues. One branch, the *Hicksites*, followed the teachings of Elias Hicks, a New York farmer/preacher who espoused false doctrines, discounting important Christian beliefs such as the authority of Scripture, the virgin birth and the atoning blood of Christ. In contrast to Hicks, *Orthodox* Friends held to the kinds of evangelical Christian beliefs discussed later in this section of *Faith and Practice*. Joseph John Gurney, one of the most influential of the evangelical leaders, emphasized the importance of Bible study and contributed to evangelistic efforts among Friends.

In 1845, another rift opened among Orthodox Friends in America, this time over matters of tradition. The *Wilburites* followed the lead of John Wilbur and wanted to maintain traditional Quaker practices in dress, speech, and ministry. However, others followed the continuing impulse of Gurney and became influenced eventually by the Holiness revivals that swept across America, especially in the West.

Umbrella Groups Today

The divisions in the nineteenth century led to several, mutually exclusive groupings of Friends which exist to this day. The Friends General Conference represents the most liberal theological group of Friends, and they are the visible remnant of Hicks’ beliefs. Some of them would not even claim to be Christian. The Conservative Friends are the direct theological descendants of John Wilbur. These groups reside mostly in the Midwest and eastern United States. Another group, the Friends United Meeting, founded in 1902, is an organization that attempts to appeal to a variety of Christian Quaker expressions.

Friends Southwest is a member of a fourth group, Evangelical Friends International (EFI), which began in the early 1960s. EFI aims to “fulfill the Great Commission in the spirit of the Great Commandment” through church planting and active missions efforts throughout the world. Today, EFI includes over 1,000 local churches in twenty countries, while Friends of all types live in forty-six countries on six continents.

Local Origins

The first Friends in California came with scores of others as a part of the “gold rush” of 1849. With the advent of the transcontinental railroad in 1867, more Friends moved west, carrying with them the spirit of the holiness revivals occurring at that time in their previous churches. Friends Southwest began officially in 1895 as an outgrowth of the Iowa Yearly Meeting. The original name of “California Yearly Meeting of Friends Church” was changed in 1986 to Friends Church Southwest Yearly Meeting to reflect the growing geographic region of our denominational group. Friends in the Southwest extend from California, Arizona, Nevada, and Utah. The legal name, Evangelical Friends Church Southwest, was adopted in 2001. In 2022 EFC-SW filed a DBA as Friends Southwest (FSW). While the legal name EFC-SW remains in place, for consistency in this document EFC-SW will be heretofore referred to as Friends Southwest or FSW.

From the outset, Friends Southwest emphasized the dual priorities of evangelism and education. By 1900, they had started eleven new churches, two new mission fields in Alaska and Central America, and the “Training School for Christian Workers” which later became Azusa Pacific University. These desires to plant new churches, reach new mission fields, and train next-generation leaders for the sake of the gospel continue to be areas of priority and focus for Friends Southwest.

Faith and Practice

As early as the seventeenth century, Friends maintained guidelines for their religious practices and concerns in official lists. By the eighteenth century, after collecting, adding to, and amending these writings, Friends began to publish them in books of *Discipline*. Combined with statements about history and theological beliefs, these publications became known eventually as *Faith and Practice* books, one of which you are now reading. The purpose of this book is to provide current, new and potential committed partners an overview of the basic beliefs and organization around which we unite. We invite you to join us in the continuing history and vision of Friends Southwest.

An Affirmation of Faith

These biblical beliefs represent the tenets of the Christian faith we hold in common with other believers.

1. We believe in the one and only God, who exists eternally in three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
2. We believe that all humans, male and female, were created by God, in his image, to be loved and known by him. We were made to glorify and enjoy God, but our relationship with him and our very nature has been broken by sin, which has

made us all subject to God's judgment.

3. We believe that all of our world, physical and spiritual, visible and invisible was created by God. We believe our world is also broken by sin and remains in corruption and rebellion and in need of God's redemption.
4. We believe that God's gift of his Son is the only and all-sufficient way we can be saved from the guilt, power, and eternal consequences of our sin and restored to a full relationship with him. We believe we receive this salvation only through our repentance and faith in the atoning death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.
5. We believe that Jesus' sacrifice is sufficient for salvation because he is truly God's Son - fully human and fully divine. We believe Jesus' humanity and divinity are demonstrated through both his death and resurrection and his sinless and miraculous life.
6. We believe that the Holy Spirit will lead those who believe in the Lord Jesus into transformed lives. This radical and divinely empowered transformation happens as we come to see Jesus more clearly, know him more intimately and follow him more closely. This life is marked by increasing conformity to Christ's goodness and holiness, as we die to our sin and self-seeking. We believe this transformation is accomplished through obedience and self-denial by the believer and empowerment and cleansing by the Holy Spirit.
7. We believe in one universal Church, which is made up of all who have been saved by faith in Jesus Christ and who seek to serve, love, and obey him.
8. We believe that human history will come to an end when Jesus returns and this world is redeemed through the creation of a new heaven and new earth. We believe that all will be raised from the dead- the saved to eternal life with God, the lost to God's eternal condemnation.
9. We believe the Bible, the Old and New Testaments, is the inspired and authoritative written Word of God. We believe the Bible is entirely trustworthy in all that it teaches and reveals, that we are obligated to obey its teaching and that all of our doctrines and practices are subject to its authority.

Friends Convictions

While we fully affirm the unity of the true Christian church, we also affirm God's use and blessing of the many different kinds of Christian bodies, commonly called denominations. We believe that one of the ways that God uses denominations is through each group's distinctive articulation of the Christian faith. We believe that the Christian message is best proclaimed when each denomination humbly but confidently articulates its perspective concerning the issues upon which Christians have a diversity of views.

Salvation, Transformation, and Sanctification

We believe that it is God's purpose and desire to save us from our sins and to transform

us into his likeness. We believe this salvation is offered to everyone, and is available to any who will receive it. We believe that God is greatly grieved when people refuse his gift of salvation, but that his power and rule are in no way diminished when they do so.

We believe that when a person receives Jesus Christ in faith, a genuine transformation takes place in both the person's status before God and in his or her very nature. We believe this happens because God makes the repentant believer righteous. Our righteousness before God is not the result of any meritorious actions on our part. The perfect life and death of Christ makes us righteous before God. However, God does not stop there. The work of his Spirit radically transforms us in salvation, actually making us righteous before him and at the very core of our selves. We receive a new life, one that is now entirely capable of faith, obedience, and love. This new life transforms and restores our relationship with our Lord, enabling us to know and experience Jesus in our daily lives.

We believe this transformation is not completed when we receive Jesus. From the moment of our conversion until our glorification, God is continually at work in us, conforming us to the image of his Son. This grace-filled work of the Holy Spirit that makes us Christ-like in character and conduct is often called sanctification - it is God making us holy as He is holy.

We believe that sanctification is a process through which, by grace, the believer cooperates with the Holy Spirit in his or her own transformation. The Spirit of God empowers, convicts, and encourages each believer to pursue holiness. Our freedom from sin is increasingly manifested in our actions and our very natures. More importantly, our very selves and our behavior become increasingly Christ-like.

We believe this transformation is genuine and radical, and that no part of the human life and spirit is unchangeable or unreachable by God's sanctifying grace. As a result of this transformation, we believe that in every situation we can do what is right and effectively carry it out by the grace of God.

We believe our role in sanctification is to love God, live in Christ, and respond to the Holy Spirit. God calls us to fully commit, or consecrate, ourselves to him. We do this by confessing and turning from sin, purifying ourselves from everything that contaminates our bodies and spirits. Moreover, our Lord calls us to live out his truth, to set our minds on what is excellent and praiseworthy, and to obey his commands turning toward our new lives in Christ.

We believe our task is to work out this transformation through our submission to God's Word in our daily lives and especially in response to fresh experiences of God and the Holy Spirit's leading. We do this by faith and by the power of the Spirit who resides within us. It is quite possible that the apostle Paul said it best "...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:12-13).

We believe that Jesus ushered in the accessibility of the Kingdom of God, which is from everlasting to everlasting, into the world and did so as God incarnate, the one true King, when He came to earth in human form. We await the full expression and rule of the Kingdom of God, when everything will be set right and made new upon Christ's second coming. We live now between the Kingdom already among and within us and its ultimate culmination. While we live between the "already" and the "not yet,"

we are being sanctified and conformed to the image of Christ. We believe the sanctification process in the life of the believer results in reflecting God's character and participating in the work of the Kingdom of God in the world, as Jesus did when he walked the earth. As God renews us in Christ, we reflect His faithfulness, compassion, and love. We become Christ's ambassadors who, compelled by His love, are called to his ministry of reconciliation. As Friends, we enact this in gathering for worship, building community within the church, spreading the gospel, and engaging the suffering of the world. We are called to bear the Kingdom of God and reflect God's character everywhere we go, including loving and helping those who are suffering, oppressed and marginalized. [Exod 34:6; Deut 9:6; Matt 13:24-33; Luke 10:27; John 3:36, 17:17-19; Rom 5:17, 19, chapters 6-8, 12:1-2; 1 Cor 6:18-20; 2 Cor 3:16, 18, 5:14-21, 7:1; Gal 2:20, 5:16; Eph 2:10; Eph 1:13-14; Phil 2:12-13, 4:8; Col 1:21-23, 3:1-4; 1 Thess 4:3-8, 5:23-24; Titus 2:11-12, 3:5; Heb 5:9, 12:1; 1 Pet 1:15-16; 1 John 1:5-2:2, 3:4-10; Rev 21:1-4]

The Indwelling and Gifts of the Spirit

We affirm that every believer receives the Holy Spirit at the point of their conversion, and not as the result of any rite, such as water baptism or the laying on of hands. We believe that the only essential biblical sign that one has been baptized with the Spirit is a transformed life. As the Spirit of Christ dwells within us, he is fully present to lead us and directly teach his will to us. One benefit of the Spirit's indwelling is that all believers are given spiritual gifts for the benefit of the church and the world. We affirm that these gifts are given for service and the glorification of God, and that no gift is ever meant to serve as a necessary sign of the Holy Spirit's presence in the life of the believer. We affirm with the Scriptures that not every gift has usefulness in every situation, and that some gifts, such as tongues and prophecy, have biblical guidelines on their use in public worship.

We do not, however, find any biblical assertion that these gifts have ceased, and we want to be careful not to place any non-biblical boundaries on their use. [2 Cor 1:22; Gal 5:22; 1 Cor 12:7; 1 Cor 12:30; 1 Cor 14:1ff; 1 Cor 14:39]

The Nature of and Gifts for Ministry

We affirm that every believer in Jesus has the capacity and responsibility to know and experience God directly. No mediation by any other than Jesus Christ is ever required to find God's direction or to experience his presence. Christian ministry is the privilege and responsibility of every believer, graciously given as a gift by God through his Holy Spirit. This ministry cannot be restricted to a special class within the church, nor can the authority for ministry be passed on by any other than the Holy Spirit.

We believe the Holy Spirit's calling and gifting of a person are never limited by mere human factors such as sex, ethnicity or social status, that God wants his Church to recognize, affirm, and train all whom he has called, and that we are disobedient to the Holy Spirit if we do otherwise. We want to be especially clear regarding the role of women in leadership. From our very beginnings, we have found no scriptural basis for limiting certain leadership and ministry roles to men. Today, we continue to affirm, not as a concession to modernity but in obedience to the Bible and the Holy Spirit, that the Lord is calling both women and men to serve as leaders and pastors in his church. [Acts 2:17-18; Eph 1:17; 1 Tim 2:4; 1 Cor 7:7; Eph 4:8; Gal 3:28; Rom 16:3,7]

Baptism and Communion

We affirm that the one essential baptism is the baptism into Christ by the Holy Spirit. It is the most important baptism spoken of in scripture. This baptism is for all believers. By the presence of the Holy Spirit all believers share a continuing communion and collective experience of Christ's presence. Jesus is always and ever present among his people because of his promise to do so.

We affirm that the experience of living in communion with the Lord Jesus Christ involves our entire person and life, and cannot be restricted to a particular ritual or physical observance. We believe the Bible regards our entire lives as the intended settings for God's working and presence, so that no particular practice should be regarded as uniquely "sacramental." The sign or distinguishing mark of a Christian can never be contained in any rite or ritual alone, but rather is always a life conformed to Christ. [John 6:47-69 (emphasis vs. 63)]

Recognizing that beliefs about baptism and communion vary widely across the Christian Church, Friends hold a distinct conviction. Friends believe that no ritual or rite can save you or make Jesus more present than he has already promised to be. Jesus' salvation is accomplished through grace alone, and the gift of His Spirit residing within the believer means he is always present and available to us.

Many of our churches practice water baptism and communion with the elements, and many do not. Our churches shall have the freedom to include the physical acts of water baptism and communion with the elements as part of our lives of worship. Those who do not practice these physical acts distinctively testify to Friends' convictions about the work of Christ and the true nature of salvation through Jesus Christ. We also recognize that water baptism and the use of physical elements in communion can be very helpful and meaningful expressions in the life of the believer. Those who do practice these physical acts do so according to the deep truths they represent. [Eph 4:5; John 15:4ff; Matt 28:20; John 14:16; Luke 22:7ff; 1 Cor 11:17ff]

As Friends, we continue to affirm that the practice of water baptism and communion with the elements were never meant to be regarded as necessary for the salvation or sanctification of the believer. We do not believe that the Bible ever considers them necessary acts of obedience. We affirm that the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself is all sufficient in providing for us everything we need for salvation, worship, life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him. [2 Pet 1:3; Eph 1:3; Phil 3:3]

For further consideration see the Elements Statement adopted in 1994 which includes biblical convictions and guidelines for use, found in the appendix.

Leadership, Decision-making, and the Church

We believe that all who truly follow and trust Jesus make up His Church and that each local church is an expression of the larger work God is doing. We recognize that God calls and equips particular men and women to be leaders in his church, and it is the role of every member to affirm and cooperate with that calling, while maintaining their own responsibilities for service and leadership as well.

We fully affirm that Jesus is the head of the church, not as a metaphor, but as a matter of practical reality. This makes the church different from all other institutions. While all members are equally part of a local church, the church is not a democracy. Jesus Christ himself is the leader of each church. This means that decision-making in a local church is primarily a task of spiritual discernment. While it is our task to weigh options and discuss various proposals and ideas, we believe that by humbly and prayerfully submitting our opinions and perspectives to the Holy Spirit's direction, the Lord will guide us to unity regarding his direction for a particular decision.

This unity cannot be discerned by voting, nor is it merely human consensus, which is arrived at by compromise and mediating conflicting opinions. Rather, unity in decision-making is a gift our Lord Jesus gives his church when they collectively seek his will as its head. [Eph 3:6; 1 Cor 12:28; Heb 13:17; Col 1:18; Acts 15 (emphasis vs. 28)]

Love, Peace, and Violence

We believe God desires reconciliation with all peoples and between all peoples, having made peace with sinful humanity through his cross. As our gracious salvation has taken away any enmity between God and believers, so also we believe God calls his people to exemplify love in our relationships with each other and the world.

As Jesus did in his own life, we believe that we are called to bear witness to God's love for us and his love for our enemies by suffering for them, if necessary, even unto death. We believe God calls his people to practice peacemaking as a basic element of Christian obedience and discipleship. Violence, in its essence, is evil and inhumane, and contrary to the gospel of love and peace. Consequently, our new life in Christ calls us to rid ourselves of violence in its many and different forms, refusing to use it as a tool for good. With regard to military service we encourage prayerful and conscientious study and obedience to our Lord's call to peacemaking. While each person must live out his or her understanding of Scripture, the time-tested Friends' counsel is to decline to serve, or where the state allows, to give alternative service. In keeping with the teachings and example of Jesus, we are each called to oppose war and violence, to alleviate suffering, work for reconciliation, and promote justice in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and the power of his love. [Matt. 26:51-54; Luke 6:27-36; Romans 12:14-21; 1 Cor. 6:7; 1Tim. 2:1-8; 1 Peter 2:19-24; Is. 2:4]

Truthful and Gracious Speech

We believe our ability to communicate with one another was given to us by God. As our maker, He is the creator of speech and language. This gift, like every other gift from God, is to be guarded and used wisely. Friends have a testimony about how we are to

speak. Following Jesus' command, Friends decline to use oaths of any kind, even in legal settings, preferring to use a simple affirmation. In earlier times, Friends refused to use the second person plural, "you," to address an individual of higher rank or social status, using the singular form, "thee" or "thou" to address all individuals. [Matthew 5:33-37; James 5:12]

At the heart of this testimony was a belief that language was given to us to communicate truth. Taking an oath implied that somehow one's other words were not always as true; an abasement of language and an implied dishonesty. Formal address required bowing to a social convention based on a passing human reality, and not on the eternal values of the kingdom of God.

We believe the Lord is calling us to redeem our speech. Words were given to us to tell the truth. We should be very aware of the constant temptation to exchange clarity for what presents best and simplicity of speech for calculated expressions. When we disagree, we can and should express ourselves clearly and honestly, but we must be careful not to dishonor those with whom we disagree. Most of all, we must embrace the positive use of words. The Scriptures command us to bless, encourage, and honor each other. More than avoiding the misuse of words, the Lord is calling us to put speech to work for the gracious and beneficial purposes for which he created it.

Values

Values are a practical expression of our beliefs. They move us from a formal belief statement to a functional belief system. They help us put our faith into practice. These are not our only values, but rather ones that we hold as priorities in the life and practice of our churches. The following complement each other.

The Written Word of God and the Living Word of God

We value the Bible, the written word of God, as God's revelation and our final authority in all matters of faith and practice. We live in Christ because of the saving message of salvation through Jesus, our Lord and Savior. This value gives us respect for the authority of Scripture, a love for the teaching and preaching of the Bible and an intense desire to obey its teachings.

Along with the written Word of God we value the Holy Spirit of God, who inspired the Scriptures and illuminates our understanding. We believe that He teaches us to obey all that Jesus commanded, and grants us grace and power to live out the Word of God in daily life. Jesus said, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." (John 5:39-40) We value the written Word because it leads us to the living Word, Jesus Christ. This value causes us to worship God in spirit and in truth. Christ, the living Word, teaches us himself, but never in contradiction to Scripture. We encourage our churches and people to spend time in silence, listening to the Holy Spirit during both public and private worship.

The Great Commission and the Great Commandment

We value Christ's great commission to preach the gospel to every creature and to disciple all the nations. We believe the great commission begins at home, where we live, work, play and participate, and extends to every nation, culture and people group

worldwide. We go in Christ's authority and with His presence. This value causes us to invest in cross-cultural missions, disciple making, church planting, pastoral training, and sending out missionaries and workers into the harvest.

Along with the great commission we value the great commandment to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves. This value causes us to honor and protect every individual, high and low, rich and poor, unborn and disabled, mentally ill and terminally ill, exceptional and institutionalized. We seek to obey the often-repeated commands in Scripture to love one another and to do good.

Leadership of the Elders and Priesthood of the Believers

We value the leadership of elders and pastors. We select our leaders on the basis of holy living, spiritual leadership, personal morality and ethical conduct. We hold our shepherds and leaders in high honor for their hard work, love of God's people and work in the ministry. This value leads us to select elders prayerfully and carefully. Then we listen to their wise counsel as we seek the mind of the Spirit. We record or commission pastors and staff members as we recognize their gifts and abilities and the call of God upon their lives for public ministry.

Along with the leadership of pastors and elders we value the priesthood of all believers; the people of God who pray, worship, teach, discern, witness, bless, encourage, love, give and serve. This value causes us to gather in church for worship, teaching, fellowship and service. We develop team ministries and speak up for Christ wherever we may scatter – home, neighborhood, school, work, recreation, travel.

Personal Intimacy with Christ and Corporate Consensus from Christ We value personal intimacy with Christ. This personal, saving relationship comes from the cross, resurrection and outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon us. We respond with a heart of devotion and listen to the voice of our good shepherd through God's Spirit, word, people and works. This value causes us to open ourselves to Him through the practice of spiritual disciplines, to discover our true identities as children of God, and to find our freedom in Christ Jesus.

Along with personal intimacy with Christ we value corporate consensus from the Holy Spirit. We believe that group guidance takes precedence over individual guidance. The body of Christ helps us open our eyes to self-deception and encourages us toward sound judgment, good sense and God's guidance. This value causes us to use Friends business procedures that pursue the mind of Christ. We come to unity in decision-making through prayer and discussion rather than by voting. When we do not find ourselves in unity, we believe that we are the ones who are confused. God is not confused because He has only one will.

Godly Character and Spiritual Gifts

We value all the biblical character qualities, believing that we are being transformed into the image and likeness of Christ. The fruit of the Spirit produces a Christ-like life that lives above reproach in obedience to the Scriptures. This life flows from our daily connection with Christ as we respond to him by our repentance, faith, hope, and love. As we present our bodies and souls without reservation to God we experience life transformation, the filling and cleansing of the Holy Spirit and the renewing of our minds. This value causes us to hold one another accountable for holy living, gracious

attitudes, loving actions, honest speech and enduring perseverance. Both formally and informally we hold expectations of living not for ourselves but for Christ. As we do so, we become more and more Christ-like.

Along with Godly character we value spiritual gifts given to each of us by the Holy Spirit. He decides who receives each gift, and in what proportion. These gifts become unique as they mix with our God-given personalities, talents and abilities. While using spiritual gifts is personally enjoyable, their main purpose is to build up the body of Christ and to serve others in our work and witness. This value causes us to invite everyone in the church to find a ministry, to work together in teams and to reproduce workers, leaders, groups, classes and churches.

Friends' Perspective on Contemporary Issues

As Friends, we desire to bring Jesus' good news to the painful issues of our day. It is our intent to follow the example of Christ as we approach these complicated topics. We desire to engage these conversations with spiritual counsel and biblical perspective in both the church and the larger community. This is not an exhaustive list. We do acknowledge the issues are complex and continually evolving. Therefore, they cannot be entirely addressed in a static document.

We must remember Jesus calls us to love others as Christ loved us - even while we were sinning, struggling, doubting and wrestling. As we engage the complex issues of our day with the truth of the Gospel, we must commit with great steadfastness to loving others in word and action and to do so unconditionally, with gentleness and humility.

Abortion and Euthanasia/Assisted Suicide

We believe that all human life is a gift from God and that each person bears the image of God. We believe that Scriptures teach that we are knit together in our mother's womb (Psalm 139:13-14) and that God is the author and sustainer of life. Moreover, we believe, with the Scriptures, that one's life is never entirely one's own. We belong to God, first of all, but in a very real way, we also belong to one another.

The motivations to pursue an abortion are various and complicated. They often involve fear, concern for the quality of life for the child and mother, as well as confusion and sometimes convenience. Yet abortion is a tragedy from every vantage point. We believe the Lord has ordained every life for a purpose, and abortion violates the purpose for which the child in the womb was destined. Additionally, abortion does great harm to the woman herself - often leaving deep scars psychologically and spiritually. Many women, as well as men, suffer with guilt, regret and grief over the decision to abort. We affirm the value of the life of every child, and we affirm the dignity and value of every woman. Our position on the destructiveness to life that abortion renders includes concern for the woman who felt the need to make such a sorrowful decision. Therefore, while we stand against abortion, we must also stand with women who find themselves pregnant by coming alongside them with support and resources. Further, we stand with women who have experienced abortion by loving them and leading them to the forgiveness and restoration found in Jesus Christ.

Euthanasia and assisted suicide are often fueled by compassion and confusion regarding suffering. Sadly, at the core, these practices violate the basic principle of life,

that God ordains and authors the days of one's life. Any judgment about the potentiality or quality of one life is a diminishment of human life in all of its forms. We recognize that human suffering can be very real, but we also affirm that God's presence is just as real.

We believe our best answer to abortion and euthanasia is to value life profoundly and to embody Christ's love completely in our communities, especially towards those who have undergone an abortion or have been part of an assisted suicide. We recognize that these sinful choices are frequently made under great stress and confusion. We realize as well, that while we must speak clearly against these practices, we must just as clearly proclaim God's love and the availability of forgiveness to those who have experienced them.

Sexuality

In the creation account, the Lord declares that man and woman are both made in his image and thus bear his likeness. His creation of humankind included the creation of our sexuality. We are, as humans, sexual beings, just as we are cognitive, emotional, relational and spiritual beings. Similar to what is stated in the section on marriage, our sexuality is best understood when we view it as a context for our relationship with God. As Friends, we do not separate our human experience from our spiritual lives. In other words, everything God created has a spiritual component to it - whether it is a direct component or a metaphorical one. Thus, our sexuality is meant to be a metaphor of our relationship with God. The intimacy, the exclusivity, the joy, the connectivity, the vulnerability, the birthing of new life, and the pleasure derived from a committed sexual relationship are meant to help us understand more fully the relationship God intends to have with us His people. Further, we His church are called the bride of Christ, waiting in anticipation for the culmination of our relationship with Jesus.

It makes sense then, in light of such import, that the enemy of our souls who seeks to mar the image of God in every way, would go after our sexuality with ferocity. If even our sexuality is meant to help us understand the relationship God desires to have with us, then our sexuality is a target for the enemy of God. This helps us to understand why all humans struggle in many ways with sexuality. In order to meet the demands of the struggle, we are all in need of the counsel of the scripture and the Spirit who guides us into all truth.

Since sexuality has been given and created by God, our sexuality is to be both celebrated and protected. We believe that God has created sex as an expression of our being made male and female, and intends our sexuality for mutual self-giving, and not for self-satisfaction. Sexuality is meant for our good, for our flourishing, and to draw us ever closer to God himself. Thus, God has given us boundaries to ensure our experience of this precious part of us is as He intended. This means the only appropriate context for sexual activity is marriage between one man and one woman, publicly declared and legally binding. Sexual activity outside of marriage, be it premarital or extra-marital, homosexual or heterosexual, distorts and harms God's intention for our sexuality.

As we affirm our sexuality, we also affirm that abstinence from sex in singleness is equally formative for our relationship with God, self and others. Just because one is single does not mean one stops being sexual. Thus, as a single person dealing with sexuality, the complicated nature of this journey will be best navigated by living in

devotion to Jesus and within a community of faith. While sex is certainly an expression of love and self-giving within marriage, we must remind ourselves that sex is not the only, or even the ultimate means of expressing love. The life of Jesus, who gave up even his own life so that we might live, is surely the best witness to this truth.

Within marriage, sexual experiences that involve mental or emotional manipulation, coercion and abuse are always sinful. Godly sexuality without exception involves the honoring of one another. Involvement with pornography, sexting, lustful behavior or innuendo, and things such as these, degrade people and are harmful. They are clearly a means of sexual self-gratification, damaging those made in the image of God. All sexual sin undermines one's relationship with God, one's spouse and others, while destroying one's self-respect.

As with any other area of struggle and sin in our lives, God's redemption, forgiveness and healing are available to us.

Marriage

Marriage is a spiritual reality as well as a human experience designed by God. Not only does it provide companionship and a means of procreation, but it is a spiritual covenant before God. Marriage is also a profound metaphor of our relationship with God. The exclusivity, the intimacy, the naked vulnerability, and the lifetime covenantal nature of the biblical picture of marriage is intended to reflect what God desires with us and from us. It is a picture of Christ's relationship to His church. When understood this way, it aids us in our understanding of how to navigate the challenges and joys marriage offers.

Marriage is a committed union between one man and one woman that God intends to last for a lifetime, regardless of trials, financial pressures, sickness, or distress. As a gift of God, a marriage covenant provides the framework for intimate companionship and is the only appropriate context for sexual fulfillment and procreation. When a husband and wife submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, loving and honoring one another, a marriage becomes the beautiful picture of the relationship between our Lord and his Church that God intended.

Divorce is a tragic end to a relationship that God intended to be permanent. God hates divorce, in part because he understands the painful consequences of deviating from his best for our lives. In every case of divorce, one or both persons have been disobedient to the Lord. While the scriptures indicate that God allows divorce under circumstances that break the covenant, the decision to divorce ought not ever to be taken lightly, or as an assertion of rights, but prayerfully, listening to the counsel of God's spirit. While culturally acceptable, we must not capitulate to the culture and, in anticipation of God's forgiveness, proceed casually towards divorce. To do so is to misappropriate the grace and kindness of God, and to misunderstand God's intended purpose for marriage.

In cases of domestic violence or abuse, separation may be necessary and appropriate for the safety and health of the individual or family. In such cases the assistance of trained Christ-loving professionals is highly recommended. Further, prior to any divorce or separation, we strongly encourage the pursuit and humble consideration of godly counsel and advice. Those who have suffered a divorce or separation can find hope, healing, and restoration in the body of Christ.

Children are a blessing and gift from the Lord. As stewards, parents have the wonderful responsibility to raise their children to love and serve God, providing a safe and secure environment for them to grow physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. God's plan is for children to obey their parents, and they learn best through the example, nurture, discipline, and instruction of parents who love both God and them.

In any broken familial relationship, be it a marriage ending in divorce or children estranged from parents, God's desire is transformation and restoration. While this takes many forms, the goal remains the same, to honor God as we navigate the complexities of our broken world.

Race and Reconciliation

We believe that all people - of every race, ethnicity, and language - bear the image of God and are recipients of the love God showed the world when he sent his son, Jesus. [Genesis 1:26-27; John 3:16; Matthew 28:16-20]

As those reconciled to God through Christ, we are called to be ambassadors of reconciliation throughout the world. The reconciliation of God intentionally crosses cultural and ethnic lines, healing destructive divisions present in the world and not consistent with God's love.

God's restorative work through Jesus leads to *shalom*, a biblical vision of peace that began in the garden, was proclaimed by the angels, and is promised by Jesus. It is a peace with God and a peace among people and all creation that includes salvation in Christ and transformation of the world. God's peace reaches every aspect of human existence and results in the well-being and flourishing of every life. From early days, Friends have sought this peace and have acted on ways to cultivate it for all people. We continue this work, propelled by the words of Jesus, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9) [Romans 5:9-11; Colossians 3:11-17; Ephesians 2:11-22; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Colossians 3:13; John 4; Acts 10; Galatians 3:26-29; Genesis 1:31; Luke 2:13-14; John 14:27; Colossians 1:19-20]

Prejudice, fear, cultural and racial superiority, discrimination, and all other forms of racism are sin and work against the very *shalom* God's kingdom restores. The living and present Christ teaches us to love others as we love ourselves. For *shalom* to exist and reconciliation to occur, Christians must acknowledge past and present pain, seek truth across divided lines, and respond with repentance and forgiveness. The mission of the believer includes listening to each other, seeking to understand, honoring one another, and striving for each other's well-being. [Matthew 22:36-40; James 2:8-9; Romans 12:9-21; Philippians 2:1-4]

As we reflect God's character and bring his kingdom to bear on earth, we seek God's justice - a right way of being and doing that is for all the people of the earth. We long for the day when Christ sets all things right, and we pray for God's will to be done "on earth as it is in heaven." It is the work of the believer to stand against injustice and to proclaim God's justice through our words and our actions. Where racism and other sin have resulted in societal injustices, Christ followers advocate for the oppressed and marginalized. Jesus expects his followers to show mercy and to help those in need. In Scripture, we find God's justice corrects oppression, provides for people in poverty,

cares for immigrants and refugees, and advocates for children without families. [Revelation 21:1-8; Matthew 6:9-13; Matthew 12:17-21; Micah 6:8; Luke 11:42; James 1:27; Matthew 25:31-46; Mark 7:9-13; Deut. 10:17; Prov. 14:31; Jeremiah 9:23-24; Jeremiah 22:3-5; Isaiah 1:16-17]

The New Testament depiction of heaven reveals humanity from every language and people worshiping God together. It is for the glory of God and the benefit of the world that believers of every race, ethnicity, and language live in unity in Christ. However, churches are commonly separated by race or ethnicity. As Friends, we seek to remove obstacles to fellowship, including personal biases related to race and culture. We pursue unity, not by adhering to the norms of a dominant culture, but through love for God and one another, recognizing our differences and valuing our varied contributions to the Kingdom. We affirm the gifts of the Spirit in all believers, and we seek the leadership of people of diverse ethnicities and cultures. We desire to see among Friends Southwest churches, congregations and leaders representing the racial and ethnic diversity of the communities in which we live. [Revelation 7:9-10; John 17:20-23; Matthew 5:23-24; John 13:34-35; John 15:9-17; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27]

Friends have historically advocated for social change, including the abolition of slavery and prison reform. Today, we implore Friends to oppose racism and other expressions of hatred and pride, and to uphold the justice of God, reflecting the *shalom* of God that will be fully realized when Christ returns. [Revelation 21:1-8]

Mental Health

When we approach the topic of mental health, we must do so considering the whole person. Having been made in the image of God, we are not merely physical beings. We are spiritual, emotional, cognitive and psychological beings. Further, we must respect the complexities of our bodies, spirits, and minds. We do so, however, knowing that we are not a mystery to God. God created us. He knows every hair on our heads, and knows our thoughts before we think them. In recent years the topic of mental health has become a more familiar one than it was in the past. We believe this is a positive development as it allows us to minister the compassion, healing and wisdom of Jesus more effectively to those we serve and desire to reach. The goodness of the gospel, is Christ is able to empathize with our weakness and vulnerabilities be they spiritual, mental, emotional or physical.

Increased diagnosis of conditions such as depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, addiction and PTSD, among others, have opened public access to the world of mental health helping to inform people as to potential causes and leading treatments. With this heightened awareness of mental health issues, many Christians are finding less stigma in bringing their struggles into their communities of faith. Such openness is an opportunity for the church to come alongside the suffering with compassion, support, spiritual care, and friendship. It also creates opportunities to partner with trained professionals so we may wisely assist in the process of healing. Like other health conditions these situations benefit from both the medical profession and the church.

We believe it is incumbent upon us as leaders and brothers and sisters in Christ to be well informed regarding mental health so as not to cause harm and alienate anyone struggling with mental health. While the issues are quite complex, and will not all fall in

line with our worldview, we know support, faith, and community, when handled wisely, will assist in someone's journey of wholeness. As with any ailment, we recognize the role of prayer and faith to be imperative and effective. We also believe healing comes in many forms and is rooted in the providence of God's will. As Friends, we believe the church should support treatment of the whole person from a variety of modalities including therapy, biblical counsel, the community of faith and medical intervention. When the whole person is being cared for, the process of health and growth becomes more efficacious. By caring for the whole person and not reducing an issue to a "spiritual matter" only or a "physical matter" only, we help each other learn to bring our whole selves into and under the love of God. The faithful friendship, support, and prayers of the church, along with the correct professional intervention can facilitate a more complete restoration for an individual suffering from mental illness.

Wealth and Materialism

In his words recorded in the Gospels, Jesus addressed the issue of wealth more than almost any other issue. Thus, we know that the danger presented by the abundance of possessions is not new. In line with the teachings of Christ, Friends continue to maintain a concern about the effects of wealth on their Christian discipleship and witness.

We live in a society and under an economic system that has created unprecedented wealth, and in our particular era, our culture seems especially concerned with its pursuit. As Friends, we want to remind ourselves that our primary pursuit is the heart and mind of Christ. We observe that while the Scriptures seem to put no specific limits on the gaining of wealth, its teachings about money and possessions do run counter to the dominant values of our culture. We would like to highlight three.

First, the Bible boldly states that our possessions, wealth and the earth itself are not *ours*, they belong to God. We are merely stewards or caretakers of what we have earned, been given, and possess. What we have is never merely the result of our efforts. It always fundamentally belongs to God. This means our financial values must be those of the Scriptures: regular generosity, sacrificial giving, security in Christ, and the mindfulness of what we have in relation to those who are without. It means we are stewards and caretakers of God's creation in all its forms. Greed, which is antithetical to the teachings of Christ in every regard, is easily consuming and can blind us to ways we contribute to systems not focussed on the good of others.

Second, the Bible is very concerned about how wealth is produced. Our earlier Friends testimony of honesty in business is an expression of part of this concern. While affirming honest practices, the Scriptures also focus on fairness and justice to those who are the most vulnerable in the economic system. This concern creates more than just a responsibility to treat those who work for us well. These teachings also indicate that we cannot turn a blind eye to unjust situations elsewhere which lead to our own benefit. Our purchasing and investment patterns should reflect this biblical concern for the poor and the oppressed.

Third, in subtle ways the values of our economic system undermine or contradict biblical values. The Bible tells us we are valuable because we are made and loved by God. Our economy assigns value according to what we produce or the power and wealth we possess. Our society defines happiness by consumerism, inducing us to worry about the quality of our lives against a rising standard of affluence. The

temptation to envy is virtually built into our economic system, both for those who have wealth and those who do not. The Bible says the quality of our lives is not in what we have, but in who has us. The Scriptures ask us to highly esteem our families and our churches. Our economic system goads us into longer hours, longer commutes, and obsessive competitiveness. We are told and we tell ourselves, that this is done “for our families”; while in fact it is precisely those practices which hurt our families and keep us from our churches.

We believe, with Jesus, that he intends for us to have an “abundant life.” But Jesus’ definition of abundance is seriously at odds with our culture’s viewpoint. We should rejoice when the opportunity for wealth comes our way, but never grasp for it at any cost, and always regard the Scriptures’ concerns about how wealth is gained and maintained. For all of us, whatever level of wealth we possess, we believe that God calls us to the continuing disciplines of generosity and sacrificial giving, and to maintain the values of the kingdom rather than those of the marketplace.

Christians and the Political Process

In recent years, many Christians have become involved in the political process. We believe this is good, and we rejoice that we live in a country that allows our participation. Several observations about the Bible inform our perspective. First, the Bible tells us that we are commanded to obey, respect, and pray for the government. These commands are not qualified according to whether we support the current government or not.

Second, the Bible never envisions or looks forward to a Christian state, or the establishment of a Christian nation. The kingdom of God is ~~to be~~ everywhere, and its success can never be wrapped up with the success or progress of a particular nation. While our spiritual convictions should inform our political ideologies, it is imperative not to conflate the two.

Third, the Scriptures tell us that our primary citizenship is in God’s kingdom. We are always to seek first the values and benefit of God’s kingdom over our country of residence or nationality, especially when the values and purposes of the kingdom might clash with those of our nation.

The Bible calls the church to speak the truth with boldness, and in our society we have three primary means of influence – voting, free speech, and participation in the political process. We believe every Christian should be an informed voter, committed to genuinely understanding the issues. We believe that God’s people can and should speak clearly to the issues of the day, but that our speech should always be respectful and persuasive, never merely angry or argumentative. We believe that God does call individual believers to seek elected, appointed and consultative positions in government.

We should be reminded that in God’s plan, no government can do what the church is intended to do. We are called to disciple all the nations. We are called to live out our faith in a way that transforms our culture and gives effective witness to the truth of the gospel. As we work for change in society, in some situations it will be appropriate to work with groups outside the church. But we must be careful. The success of the kingdom of God should never be identified with the success of a particular political movement or proposal. God’s purposes are always greater than the political process, and our primary task is always to be workers for the purposes of his kingdom.

Additionally, political issues, personal opinions and convictions should never lead us to break fellowship with others in the body of Christ. As followers of Jesus, it is important that we know how to disagree in love and treat one another with humility and regard. Unity in our brother/sisterhood in Christ should be held in highest esteem over any political view.

CHAPTER 2: Church Organization

The Friends Southwest Objective

The objective of Friends Southwest is to glorify, love, and obey the Lord Jesus Christ as the only head of the Church. Friends Southwest recognizes that we are a part of Christ's global Church composed of genuine disciples from all generations and from all over the world.

FSW also seeks to observe the biblical standard of equality of all members. Opportunity, privilege and responsibility are to be given to all regardless of race, sex, ethnicity or class. All are to have the opportunity to participate in the ministry of Christ by using their spiritual gifts. [Galatians 3:26-28, I Corinthians 12:13, Acts 2:17, 18, Ephesians 4:11-13, I Corinthians 12:4-7]

**See section entitled The Nature of And Gifts For Ministry in Chapter 1.*

The Purpose of the Local Church

We find a beautiful and compelling picture of the role and purpose of the local church in the book of Acts. Based on our understanding of the book of Acts, the church is meant to be a community of believers - followers of Christ. This community is characterized by commitment to one another and to the teachings of Christ. The church is to be a community of people who worship and study God's word together; who give generously to one another as well as to others who are in need; who consistently remember the Lord's life, suffering, and resurrection on our behalf; and who engage in mission to bring the good news of God's kingdom to all parts of the world.

As Friends churches then, these remain our primary purposes. We exist to continue partnering with Jesus' Spirit to embody the life of Christ, practicing His life so that all people would become persuaded to be His disciples. The local church engages in disciple-making out of a joyful heart of sacrificial love, bringing glory to God as people and communities are transformed by his Spirit.

We gather together in order to learn from Jesus and learn from one another about Him. For the church to thrive, each believer uses the gifts God has given them to serve each other. Not a merely human gathering, we invite Jesus' Spirit to lead us and empower us to do His will in all things. The result of a Spirit-filled gathering is the transformation of its participants to become more like Jesus and to be equipped to minister in His name.

Additionally, as Friends Southwest, we do not merely exist as individual churches but as a connected group of churches. We come together as a denomination to ensure commitment to these biblical goals and to engage each other as one large expression of the kingdom, believing we are better together than we are on our own. Thus, while individual churches have many freedoms and varieties, we have chosen as a larger movement to engage with one another according to certain commitments and principles.

The following section outlines important guidelines and organization, not only for leaders in the church, but for its active and committed partners as well. The following paragraphs delineate what we have agreed upon together as a family of churches. Understanding how we have bounded our roles and clarified our structure as an overall organization allows us to maintain unity and be most effective in our individual expressions on a local level.

As a family of churches we agree there is freedom in vision and direction for each church, as long as it stays true to the values and beliefs stated herein. Faith and Practice allows flexibility when the term “may” is used. “Must” and “shall” indicate a mandatory requirement. Friends Southwest has final authority in relation to each local church (see the chapters *Regional Organization* and *The Local Church and the Denomination*). FSW is available to help in a variety of ways so that the local church can succeed. While it is common for local FSW churches to vary in size, language, and style, each church offers a place where people can find Christ and experience the values and convictions that make Friends churches unique.

Participating in the Local Church - A Committed Partnership

While there are variations in the expressions of local Friends churches, the beautiful picture God gives us will be realized by committed partnership. Committed partnership is a way we are publicly counted as the people of God. Committed partners are those saying, “Count me in! You can count on me contributing my resources. Count on me as part of the flock you watch over, as a partner in the work of ministry. Count on me to wrestle together in prayer, and to reach out with the good news. Further, I will help others, tend the wounded with love and care, and proclaim the greatness of God in worship.”

What we are calling “committed partnership”, many churches refer to as “membership”. In the past we have referred to this as membership as well. Now however, we prefer the term “committed partnership” because it implies collaboration on mutual goals. Partnership is both a privilege and responsibility. As partners sent out on a mission, we adventure and risk together. In other words, committed partners are disciples who live life in community following the example of Jesus, in loving fellowship in order to help others. [Acts 2:44, 4:32]

The first and most important criteria to becoming a committed partner in a local church is being a sincere Christ follower. Secondly, one desiring to be a committed partner must share in the mission of the local church and publicly commit to contributing to the well-being and ministry of the church. As Friends, those who desire to enter committed partnerships with the local church are in agreement with the teachings of faith taught in the Scriptures and held by Friends Southwest. The effectiveness of the local church depends upon the faithfulness of its partners as they depend upon the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Committed Partners are contributors who share in responsibility and workload. Consider committed partners like a team in that the partners belong to one another,

share a specific cause, and contribute to the good of the whole group.

Therefore, **partnership** is *not* for those who are outside of Christ. **Partnership** is *not* a means to salvation, but it is helpful for a Christian to declare commitment to Christ and to the local church. It means personal agreement with basic Christian beliefs as practiced by the local congregation of the body of Christ. When a group of Christians commit themselves to **partnership** and to loyalty to the church, it enables them together to accomplish more for the glory of God.

Partnership allows participation in decision making according to this *Faith and Practice*. **Partnership** does not give any member any proprietary or voting rights in the local church or FSW. **Partnership** is a spiritual commitment that an individual makes to the local church, and it cannot be passed on, bequeathed to, or otherwise assigned to another.

Expectations of Committed Partners

As a family of churches we agree together on the following for those desiring to become partners in a local church:

- I will endeavor to attend worship regularly and participate in other meetings of the church.
- I will serve with my time, talent and spiritual gifts in ministry to others as God instructs, watching over others in care and prayer and offering aid when they are in sickness or distress.
- I will financially contribute with a cheerful heart to the work of the church and for the spreading of the gospel to the world.
- I will seek to be loving and courteous in speech, to be slow to take offense and to be always ready for reconciliation, recognizing that our commitment to and care for each other is essential to our testimony and ministry.
- I will cooperate with the leadership of our church and the proceedings of Friends Southwest, working to build a mutually trusting relationship.
- I will endeavor to maintain regular times of personal prayer and Bible study, and should I be blessed to have children, I will raise them in the ways of the Lord by the power of His Spirit.
- I will look for and be ready to share the hope that is within me whenever the Lord gives opportunity.
- I will endeavor to live above reproach in the world, to be honest and fair in my dealings and exemplary in my conduct and to avoid practices harmful to my personal witness and to the testimony of our church.
- I understand that I will no longer be considered a partner if I discontinue attending for a period of twelve months.

Becoming a Committed Partner

While the expectations for partners are agreed upon by all our FSW churches (see *expectations listed above*), the path by which someone engages in the process is determined by each local church. For example, some churches may choose an application process; some, an interview with an elder; some, a conversation with a pastor. Each pathway must be well thought through, approved by the local church

elders, and congruent with each church's systems and structures. In all cases no one person holds the ability to determine another's partnership. Further, while the paths are varied, the commitment of being a partner is consistent.

Positions Requiring Partnership

Some positions of leadership in our local churches require church partnership: Pastoral Staff, Elders/Ministry and Counsel, Nominating Committee, Officers, Trustees/Finance and chairpersons of committees.

Resignation or Discontinuance

The Elders/Ministry and Counsel should carefully review partnership for nonattendance or for disciplinary reasons about once a year.

Fully Organized Church

The first step in the life of a church is to become fully organized. A church is recognized as fully organized when it is self-governing, self-sufficient financially, and self-propagating. These requirements are detailed below:

Self-governing is defined as a fully-developed system of functional structures. This includes a lead Pastor who has been vetted and approved by FSW; the existence of Elders/Ministry and Counsel (3 or more elders in addition to the pastor); a group that oversees finances (e.g., a finance committee); a method for developing leaders; and a pathway to invite people into committed partnership with the church, and a rhythm of congregational business meetings.

**See the sections on Officers and Committees and Participating in the Local Church.*

Self-sufficient is defined as financial health and generosity. This includes meeting all financial obligations, including its full First Fruits giving to FSW, through the congregation's giving and other sources of income. This also includes an ongoing commitment to giving towards missions and church planting.

**See the section on First Fruits Covenant Giving and the appendix for Basic Best Fiduciary Practices for Ministry.*

Self-propagating is defined as multiplication. This includes bringing others to faith in Christ, growing disciples, and raising up elders and leaders. Planting another church or sending out leaders such as a pastor, church planter or missionary is also understood as multiplication.

When a church meets the requirements to be fully organized, the church must be officially recognized by the Elders of Friends Southwest. The elders of the local church must write a letter documenting itself as self-governing, self-sufficient, and self-propagating and present the letter to FSW elders for recognition. Once it is recognized as a fully organized church, the local church must designate officers to sign legal documents on behalf of the church, in accordance with the laws in the jurisdiction where it is located. At this time, a nominating committee should be convened.

It is important to understand every local church experiences seasons. There may be

times when a church does not meet the criteria for being fully organized; for example, when a church is being planted, adopted, relaunched, or experiencing decline or some other major transition. In these seasons, the church needs nourishment, care, and counsel. In such situations, the FSW Elders and staff provide resources and oversight to help the church gain health and become fully organized. *For specifics, see the sections on Church Planting and Church Closures.*

Organization of the Local Church - Officers and Committees

Once the status of a fully organized church has been accomplished, convening other committees and groups of people will enable a church to grow in healthy ways.

Listed below are the primary offices and committees required for a church to run in a healthy manner. As long as these essential functions are met, a local church may call them by various names. For example, some may use the term Senior Pastor or Lead Pastor. Some churches may call their spiritually governing board Elders or Ministry and Counsel. Some refer to committees as teams or task forces. For uniformity we will call them Pastor, Elders/Ministry and Counsel, and committees.

Office of the Pastor

The Bible speaks of pastors as elders, overseers, leaders and shepherds, among other roles. They are called and gifted by Christ to lead his Church and equip God's people for works of service. Jesus is the Great Shepherd and his pastors serve with Him to care for the people in their charge in ways that reflect the heart of Christ. The whole church is to respect pastors and elders and "hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work." (1 Thess. 5:13) [Eph. 4:11-13; 1 Tim. 3:1- 7; Titus 1:5-9; Heb. 13:7, 17; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Heb. 13:20; John 21:15-17; 1 Thess. 5:12-13]

**See the chapter titled Pastoral Roles and Relationships.*

Elders/Ministry and Counsel

The elders are a group of spiritually mature volunteers who commit to overseeing the spiritual life of the church. Together they will be called the Ministry and Counsel, or simply the Elders. Each must be a committed partner of the church in good standing and be called of God to spiritual leadership as an elder. Lead Pastors and members of Ministry and Counsel are all considered to be elders of the local church by Friends Southwest. All elders must respond affirmatively to God's call to live above reproach. Their prayerful concern for the spiritual welfare of the people in the church and in the universal body of Christ may require frank and open discussion rooted and grounded in love. They are to keep all meeting discussions in confidence. One member must be selected to serve as chairperson of the Elders/Ministry and Counsel, often referred to as Associate Clerk, and will work with the pastor to set the agenda and run the meetings. [Eph.4:12]

The Elders/Ministry and Counsel give guidance to the operations of the church. Members of Ministry and Counsel are committed to pray for the pastor and to be their encouragers and co-workers in the service of the Lord Jesus. Elders are to support and offer counsel to the lead pastor as one of their primary roles and priorities. The lead

pastor supports and directs the staff. In the local church, no staff person or committed partner may initiate the process to hire or dismiss a lead pastor. The elders initiate the process of dismissing or asking a lead pastor to resign, as well as approve the hiring of a new lead pastor. The process of hiring a new lead pastor is done in collaboration with FSW. (See "Calling Pastors" in Chapter 6.) The Elders/Ministry and Counsel, in consultation with the Finance Committee, will be responsible for recommending that the pastors and staff members are adequately compensated in salary, retirement and benefits.

As a church is beginning, it must have at least three elders (not including the lead pastor), with the goal of reaching a number more requisite to the size of the growing congregation. It is also important that, whenever possible, family members not serve together on an elder board, as it adds layers of complication. The chairperson may be selected annually by either the Elders/Ministry and Counsel or the Nominating Committee. Minutes of each meeting must be taken.

Historically, one-third of the Elders/Ministry and Counsel are nominated each year for a three-year term. Members are limited to two consecutive terms before being required to take at least one year off. The reason some rhythm of rotation is important is that it limits one group of people from gaining undue influence. Undue influence can lead to a spiritual abuse of power. However, flexibility is warranted in situations of great transition where consistency is of the utmost importance to make the wisest decisions for the church. Furthermore, often in smaller churches, there often are not enough people qualified to serve as elders, and therefore, the term limits must be adjusted. The qualifications and wisdom of the elder is of greater importance than the rule of rotation. Lastly, trust takes time to build. In certain situations, maintaining a strict system of rotations disrupts the unity and cohesiveness of the board. Therefore, a system of rotations and the need for flexibility must be managed with discernment and wisdom.

It may be advisable for churches with large staffs to limit staff attendees to the Elders/Ministry and Counsel to one or two pastors if the individual church desires. Others may be invited at times to meet with the Elders/Ministry and Counsel.

Authority of Elders/Ministry and Counsel

Except for decisions required to be made by the congregational meeting, the Elders/Ministry and Counsel must be the final point of appeal for all matters of unresolved disagreement involving staff, committees and other entities within the congregation. As the state views the church as a corporation, the Elders/Ministry and Counsel also serve as directors of the corporation according to the laws of their jurisdiction.

**See the section on Essential Business under Business Meetings.*

Clerk/Presiding Officer

The Clerk of the Meeting, or Presiding Officer, is a church officer appointed to conduct the business meetings of the church. This is different from the Associate Clerk, or chairperson of the Elder Board. The Clerk/Presiding Officer must be recommended by the local church nominating committee and approved by the congregation. It is often helpful for the Clerk/Presiding Officer to attend the meetings of the Elders/Ministry and Counsel on an ad hoc basis.

The Clerk of the Meeting is to be a committed partner in good standing, evidencing spiritual maturity and spiritual discernment. Careful listening and humble leadership are essential characteristics for this position.

An Associate Clerk/Associate Presiding Officer will preside over meetings in the Clerk's absence.

Recording Clerk/Recording Officer

The Recording Clerk/Recording Officer must record and maintain the minutes of congregational business meetings, maintain records of legal documents, and keep records of those who become committed partners. All financial decisions must be explicit and detailed in business meeting minutes. These records are to be kept in a safe yet accessible place, and a back-up set of records are recommended for the minutes and legal documents. A copy of the minutes will be available to the people of the church, signed and dated by the Clerk/Presiding Officer and by the Recording Clerk/Officer.

The Recording Clerk must be a committed partner in good standing, selected by the nominating committee and approved by the congregation.

Nominating

The Nominating Committee is a group of people responsible for putting forth names to be considered for service on various boards. The Nominating Committee must be approved annually at a congregational meeting. All members of the Nominating Committee are to be committed partners of the church and should represent a variety of ages and interests. The Nominating Committee prayerfully considers people's gifts and skills and confers with the pastor who meets with them, selecting people to serve the church as officers and members of committees. The spiritual gifting of members of the nominating committee ought to include discernment, prayer, wisdom, and administration. The Nominating Committee reviews the responsibilities of the position being discussed and evaluates each nominee's qualifications and willingness to serve. The Nominating Committee then submits the list of nominees for the various positions to the congregational meeting for approval. The Elders/Ministry and Counsel and Church Officers must be so nominated and approved. Other committees and ministry teams may be filled in alternate ways if the local church congregational meeting so approves.

Members of the church may suggest names for consideration by the Nominating Committee. The Nominating Committee is important to the spiritual vitality of the church and is to function throughout the year as openings occur in the offices and committees.

Finance

The Finance Committee will prepare the budget of the church and submit it to the congregation for approval. They will provide training in stewardship, administer fundraising programs and encourage an emphasis on giving. They will review and document expenditures compared to the budget. The committee will serve as consultants to Elders/Ministry and Counsel on salaries, retirement, insurance and other benefits paid to the pastoral staff. They will be selected by the Nominating Committee

and approved by the congregation. The Finance Committee must follow the Fiduciary Best Practices found in the Appendix.

Treasurer

Since being a fully organized church requires a finance committee, designating a treasurer that plays a specific role is the next step. The Treasurer must be a member of the finance committee. The treasurer must keep and maintain, or be responsible for, the accounting of all receipts, expenditures and financial transactions of the local church. The local church appoints a treasurer, selected by the nominating committee and approved by the congregation, who is a committed partner in good standing. The treasurer must make a regular report to the Finance Committee of the financial transactions and of the current status of funds. The treasurer must be responsible for overseeing the process of depositing of all money, securities and other valuables in congruence with Fiduciary best practices wherein no one person holds all access to funds, accounts or assets. All monies and checks must be made out to the church account in the assigned bank or credit union and not to individuals in the church. An annual review of the financial records is strongly recommended.

**See Basic Best Fiduciary Practices for Ministry in the appendix.*

Property and Finance (Trustees)

The Trustees sign legal documents and act according to the authority given to them by the congregational meeting. The local church must appoint three or more committed partners in good standing as the Trustees. They will be selected by the nominating committee and approved by the congregation. One-third of the trustees are to be appointed each year for a three-year term. Elders may be appointed as trustees.

Corporate Organization

Corporate Organization refers to the requirements to be an incorporated entity in the state. All jurisdictions in which local FSW churches are located require the designation of (1) a chief executive officer, president, or chairman of the board, (2) a corporate secretary, and (3) a chief financial officer or treasurer, although the names of these offices may vary from one jurisdiction to another. Normally the Associate Clerk/chairperson of the Elders/Ministry and Counsel is designated as the chief executive officer. The local congregation, acting upon recommendations of its nominating committee, will designate the persons who will hold these offices under state law, and their terms of office will be one year or until their respective successors are appointed. Non-profit status and IRS filings are important issues to understand to ensure that a church is operating under the laws of their state.

Missions

The Missions Committee will seek to keep missions and the missionary mandate of Matthew 28:18-20 before the congregation and will draft and oversee the church's mission budget. One member of the committee will be selected to serve as the chairperson for an unspecified time. The chairperson of the missions committee must be a committed partner of the church. Another member will be selected to record the meeting minutes. They will be selected by the Nominating Committee and approved by the congregation.

Other committees

Each local church is to appoint other committees or teams as needed to carry out its ministry most effectively. Each committee is to give a report to the congregational meeting held each calendar year. **The chairperson of each committee must be a committed partner of the church.**

Minutes

Each committee will keep a written record of decisions made, brief rationale, and any further action that needs to be taken. These will be collected and stored for future reference. Minutes are helpful in keeping the business of the church moving forward as they are a clear record of decisions.

*~~*See the appendix for an example outline.~~*

The Business of the Local Church

Business Meetings

The Friends Way of Doing Business

In the New Testament, unity in the church is connected to our purpose as believers. Unity is challenging and takes effort to seek God's will together. As a result, Friends have a unique way of doing business. We do not vote. Instead we discuss and prayerfully reach agreement on what we believe to be the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is sometimes called "the sense of the meeting" or simply "consensus." It is more than simply reaching the lowest common denominator of agreement. At its best, it is discerning the mind of Christ and His direction as the head of the Church. For this reason, all business meetings begin with a period of worship. The intent is that the participants will continue to pray for guidance as they conduct the business in the spirit of worship. Spiritual life and business are two sides of the same coin and should never be separated. The goal is to submit to the rule of God's kingdom as we serve him together. See *Leadership, Decision-making, and the Church* under the section titled *Friends Convictions*. [1 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Acts 4:32; Philippians 2:2]

Conducting Business

Business meetings may be designated for all attendees or only for committed partners, depending on the agenda items and at the discretion of the elders. Business meetings are to be held in the spirit of worship, seeking to perceive and to do God's will. Time is permitted for careful consideration and participation by all in attendance. Each participant is responsible to pay attention to their own heart, and to the offerings of others as they listen to the Holy Spirit, so that questions, discussions, and challenges are processed honestly, respectfully, and guided by the desire to be unified and submitted to God. When it seems to the Clerk/Presiding Officer that the meeting has reached a decision, he or she will state what appears to be the "sense of the meeting," which is the agreement that has formed among the people who are present.

The Clerk/Presiding Officer will ask for a verbal approval; and if it is approved, the item will be included in the minutes. No vote is taken, but actions are approved only when the group can proceed in substantial unity. **Having listened to all voices, substantial**

unity is sensed by the clerk. ~~While no votes are counted, substantial unity is evidenced by a majority of people agreeing on a unified direction.~~

If the Clerk/Presiding Officer senses a time of unproductive discussion, he or she may call for a time of quiet prayer. The item may be postponed or referred to a committee if there is still not a sense of unity. It is possible for any who might disagree to prioritize unity and “stand aside” in order to allow the meeting to reach a decision. By standing aside, the person goes on the record that they do not want to stand in the way of unity but cannot with a clear heart approve. We believe in both individual and corporate guidance, yet corporate guidance takes precedence over individual guidance in discerning the consensus or sense of the meeting.

Frequency of Business Meetings

The minimum frequency for having a congregational business meeting is one time per year, yet more frequent meetings may be set by the congregation.

Business Requiring Congregational Approval

While the Elders or Ministry and Counsel are poised to approve many decisions regarding the spiritual life, health, and business of the church, there are some items that require congregational approval:

- Calling or dismissing the senior pastor
- Approving the annual budget and other budgets so delegated
- Purchasing or selling real estate property
- Approving major building projects
- Incurring long-term indebtedness
- Approving all nominations

The Elders/Ministry and Counsel or designated committees may deal with all matters other than the items listed above.

Called Business Meetings

The Elders/Ministry and Counsel will schedule any called business meeting that is not set on the church calendar. An individual request for a special called business meeting must be approved by the Elders/Ministry and Counsel.

Notice of any business meeting, called or special, must be given at a regularly scheduled church service at least seven days prior to the meeting, stating the subject(s) for the meeting. It is recommended that the meeting also be announced in print, e-mail or other means of communication. No other business is to be transacted except the announced item(s).

Minutes

Each business meeting will keep a written record of decisions made, a brief reason why, and any further action that needs to be taken. These will be collected and stored for future reference and made available for committed partners. Minutes are helpful in keeping the business of the church moving forward as they are a clear record of decisions.

~~**See the appendix for an example outline.*~~

CHAPTER 3: Regional Organization

The Purpose of Friends Southwest

The purpose of churches coming together to form a denomination is to increase kingdom impact. At Friends Southwest, we believe we can do more together as a family of churches than what we can do as individual churches alone. Our mission is *“Fueling a Spirit-led movement in which Jesus changes people who change the world.”*

As a family of churches, we want to support one another, encourage one another, correct one another, and pray for one another, just as the Scriptures call us to do. We hold unity as our highest priority, as Jesus instructed.

History of Regional Friends Denominations

Friends, from earliest times, have sought to foster fellowship and cooperation in advancing the cause of Christ in the world. To this end, they formed connected bodies of churches which live in mutual subordination and accountability. These bodies were comprised of Friends churches, in particular national or geographical regions, who gathered together at least once a year for worship and to conduct the annual business of the denomination. Each of these groups came to be known as Yearly Meetings. Today, the term Yearly Meeting may be used as an equivalent to refer to the denomination. For FSW, Yearly Meeting is no longer part of our official name. Friends' history shows that each regional Yearly Meeting held final authority, making them functionally separate regional denominations.

The regional Yearly Meetings in North America are known together as Evangelical Friends North America (EFCNA). Historically, larger groupings of Yearly Meetings (regional denominations) provided shared ministries, but each had its own Faith and Practice, including its own statement of faith. While the evangelical Friends movement has much in common, some differences in polity, and a few minor variations in doctrine, do exist among Yearly Meetings/regional denominations.

Organizational Structure of Friends Southwest

Friends Southwest (FSW) consists of the committed partners of its local churches. Every individual who joins a Friends church becomes a member of the denomination. There are several groups of people that are responsible to make decisions in pursuit of the mission of FSW. Friends Southwest is an organization with an authority structure that creates order and gives us roles by which we function. The Representatives are the official body of Friends Southwest, to consider and act upon various items of business that come before it. They meet at least once per year to conduct the business of the denomination. Additionally, a group of Elders, who are nominated and approved by the Representatives, functions as the Representatives out of session. The Elder Board conducts all items of business requiring attention by a governing body between sessions of the Representatives. There is also a Superintendent with ministry and executive staff who are charged to lead the mission of FSW. *(For specific responsibilities, see “Executive Staff”.)*

The main function of Friends Southwest (FSW) is to equip and enable our churches and people to do together what they cannot do alone. FSW will accomplish this work through its staff, volunteers who organize into boards and task forces, and collaboration with related organizations. The following chapter will describe the organization and function of the denominational staff, FSW Elder Board, Representatives, and boards.

Final Authority

FSW is known as the denomination of Friends churches located in the southwest region of the United States. Under the headship of Christ, Friends Southwest (FSW) is the highest authority among our churches (and members) in all matters of Faith and Practice ~~except for business matters to be discussed and decided at the Annual Business Conference by the representatives as stated herein.~~ Thus, FSW holds the spiritual and legal power among its churches to decide all such matters, including, without limitation, all organizational and operational matters. Its decisions are final. It can counsel, admonish, discipline, dismiss, or close its subordinate churches, as well as, terminate pastors of member churches. It can make administrative decisions and apply church discipline to any of its pastors, staff, elders, members, and/or attendees.

**See Essential Business of Representatives.*

As an incorporated organization in the State of California, Friends Southwest (FSW, EFC-SW, Evangelical Friends Church Southwest, or Yearly Meeting) is deemed an

organization with an authority structure, meaning we are an organization with a structure and order. A structured and ordered religious organization is one in which member churches are organized as a body with other churches having similar faith and doctrine and with a common ruling convocation and ecclesiastical authority over the individual congregations and members of the entire organized churches. Every local Friends church, therefore, is a part of the denomination, coming under its organization and authority. Every individual who joins a local Friends church automatically becomes part of the denomination as well.

Executive Staff

Friends Southwest shall have a Superintendent and such other executive staff as determined from time to time by the Superintendent and the Elder Board. The Elder Board will serve as a personnel committee for the nomination of the Superintendent. Their nomination for Superintendent will be forwarded to the Representatives for consideration and approval or disapproval.

Superintendent

The Superintendent will serve as an additional member, or appoint an executive staff member to serve, on all Boards and Committees and may attend board meetings, committees and task forces as is appropriate. The Superintendent will be accountable to the Elder Board who, in turn, is answerable to the Representatives. The Superintendent will give general oversight of the work of all other executive staff members and coordinate the total mission of FSW.

The duties of the Superintendent will include the following:

1. Stimulate fulfillment of the great commission in the spirit of the great commandment.
2. Develop a vision for Friends Southwest in cooperation with others.
3. Lead Friends Southwest toward:
 - a. Spiritual health
 - b. Numerical growth
 - c. Financial stability
4. Take proactive steps to build health, strength and vitality into Friends Southwest and its mission fields.
5. Lead in overcoming the inevitable setbacks and casualties that result from human failure and our spiritual battle with the adversary.
6. Implement the decisions, policies and beliefs of Friends Southwest.
7. Supervise the executive staff, field staff, and office staff of Friends Southwest.

The Superintendent will ensure that proper and correct accounts of all property, business, and financial transactions are kept and reported. The Superintendent will see that a financial review of the books, vouchers and records is made annually by an independent agent approved in advance by the Elder Board and presented to the Elder Board.

Other Executive and Field Staff

Executive staff members will be called on a continuous service basis. The work of the executive staff will be evaluated each year. The Elder Board will conduct the evaluation of the Superintendent. The Superintendent will conduct the evaluation of other executive staff and report to the Elder Board.

Other executive and field staff will be members of the boards and committees that are appropriate for their specific job descriptions or as assigned by the Superintendent. They will serve under the supervision of the Superintendent.

The executive staff will be responsible for the following items:

1. Communicate Friends Southwest doctrinal beliefs as found in Chapter 1 of Faith and Practice. The goal is to give priority to Jesus Christ and the Gospel while producing thoroughly convinced evangelical Friends with life testimonies consistent with Friends who exalt Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
2. Pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out workers into his harvest field. Then encourage, stimulate and supervise leadership development training for those who respond to God's gifts and call into pastoral ministry, church planting and missions.
3. Communicate the biblical qualifications and the essential quality of spiritual discernment for the Elders/Ministry and Counsel members in each local church. Training seminars and resource materials for elders may prove helpful.
4. Provide questionnaires, resources and personnel to evaluate and stimulate vigorous spiritual life in local churches.
5. Encourage local churches in evangelism, discipleship and leadership training, especially in churches that are not making progress. When average worship attendance of any local church drops below 50, or 35% of its recent average worship attendance, the FSW staff and FSW Elders may approach the church about ways to revitalize its ministry and attendance. The Board and the church together may explore the possibility of the church coming under the care of the FSW staff and FSW Elders or seeking other alternatives that may benefit the church.
6. Facilitate the planting and reproducing of FSW churches among the various cultures represented in the southwestern United States. When a church intends to start a new church, it must notify the FSW staff and FSW Elder Board. They will be helpful in the area of assessment, coaching and training of the new church planter and core leadership. They will remain involved at differing but appropriate levels until the planted church grows and is approved for fully organized status.

Job Descriptions

The Superintendent, in consultation with appropriate boards, will prepare a job description for each member of the executive staff. All job descriptions and any major revisions will be approved by the Elder Board.

FSW Elder Board

The Elder Board of the denomination seeks to discern the Holy Spirit's direction and work with the Superintendent in providing leadership to Friends Southwest. The Elder Board functions as the Representatives out of session. As such, they are the only Board with power to act between Representative Sessions for FSW as a whole. The Elder Board will give godly counsel to the Superintendent. It will elicit reports from boards, ministries and staff as needed.

In case of conflict, the Elder Board is the only body with the authority of the Representatives to resolve problems between boards. The Elder Board will listen to the issues involved and take the necessary action to resolve the issue. Whenever it is deemed wise or necessary, the Elder Board will make recommendations to the Representatives. The Elder Board shall serve as the Board of Directors of the Corporation within the meaning of the California Nonprofit Religious Corporation Law. The Elder Board shall have authority over all issues except for the business issues required to be presented to the Representatives at Annual Conference as stated herein.

**See Essential Business of Representatives.*

The relationship between the Elders and the Representatives is one of collaboration and cooperation, as the Elders function as the Representatives out of session. Therefore, any Representative may freely bring feedback and concerns to the Elders between sessions who, in turn, give prayerful consideration to any matter brought before them. Additionally, the Representatives trust the Elders to make decisions and support those decisions. Lastly, while staff answer to the Elders, the Elders support and empower the staff to do the work they have been called to do.

Composition

The Elder Board is meant to be a ten-member Board. It consists of the Presiding Clerk, the Associate Clerk (chairperson of the Elder Board), the Superintendent, and seven other members. The fact that an Elder Board may not have ten members at a particular time does not invalidate the authority or decision of the Board. When seasons occur that make it extremely difficult, or in fact not possible, to have a full and qualified board, it is strongly encouraged to resolve such a situation as soon as it is viable to do so. Qualifications of Elders include, but are not limited to, biblical character qualities, spiritual giftedness, ministry effectiveness, wisdom, vision and commitment to Friends Southwest. [1 Timothy 3; Titus 1]

The Associate Clerk will serve as chairperson of the Elder Board. The Superintendent and at least one other executive staff person will meet with the Elder Board regularly. The Superintendent acts as a member of the Elder Board except when the board is acting as the Personnel Committee for the Superintendent.

Of the seven other members, six members will be nominated by the General Nominating Committee and one member by the Elder Board itself. The

Representatives must approve all nominations.

The Nominating Committee will prayerfully discern the Lord's will for the best people to serve regardless of locality or other position. Terms of the six members will be for three years, with a two-term limit before taking at least one year off. Each member of the Elder Board must be a committed partner of an FSW church. Usually, an elder is a

present or recent member of their local Elders/Ministry and Counsel, or a pastor, staff member or spouse who is elder-qualified.

Elder Duties and Responsibilities

The Elder Board acts as the official body of Friends Southwest while the general sessions of Representatives are in adjournment. The Elder Board conducts all items of business requiring attention by a governing body between sessions of the Representatives and business that is not clearly the responsibility of some other board or committee. Reports of all important actions will be given to the Representatives at the next session. The decisions of the Elder Board are final. The decisions of the Elder Board shall not be challenged in Court.

The Elder Board will seek the mind of Christ for the present and future of Friends Southwest. Its primary duty is to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church and to obey God's word.

The Elder Board shall encourage faithful adherence to, and full experience of the historic biblical witness of FSW as reflected in Faith and Practice.

The Elder Board will keep a record of proceedings and present its actions and recommendations to the Representatives.

Resolutions, recommendations or statements that might be construed to speak officially for FSW must meet with the approval of the Elder Board or with the Representatives if they are in session.

Any conflicts in schedule or policy among other boards or related organizations will be referred to the Elder Board for discussion, discernment, recommendation and, when appropriate, action. When deemed wise or necessary, recommendations for final action will go to the Representatives.

The Elder Board may appoint task forces or special committees for the good of Friends Southwest, for items that are not clearly the responsibility of some other body.

The Elder Board has the responsibility for the property, financial, and legal matters of FSW.

The Elder Board may extend advice and assistance to persons suffering for their Christian testimonies, as each case may require, and petition governments or appropriate agencies or people in authority on behalf of those who suffer.

Meetings of the Elder Board will normally be held on a monthly basis. They may be called by the chairperson or at the request of any three members. The presence of one-half of the existing members is required to transact business.

Personnel Duties

The Elder Board serves as the personnel committee for the Superintendent and the FSW executive and field staff. Most staff management responsibilities are delegated to the Superintendent, but the Elder Board will hear cases of appeal or grievance. The

Elder Board will make recommendations to the Representatives regarding the employment or dismissal of the Superintendent. The Superintendent, in consultation with appropriate boards, will make recommendations to the Elder Board regarding employment or dismissal of other executive staff.

The Elder Board is responsible for direct supervision of the Superintendent, giving counsel and advice as they discern the Lord's will. It will determine compensation and personnel policies, setting the salaries for the Superintendent and other executive staff. It will carry out the annual performance review of the Superintendent.

Execution of Documents

The Elder Board, except as otherwise provided in Faith and Practice, may authorize any officer or officers, agent or agents, to enter into any contract or execute any instrument in the name of and on behalf of FSW. Such authority may be general or confined to specific instances. Unless so authorized by the Elder Board, no officer, agent, or employee shall have any power or authority to bind FSW by any contract or agreement, or to pledge its credit, or to render it liable for any purpose or to any amount.

Subject to the provisions of applicable law, any note, mortgage, evidence of indebtedness, contract, conveyance, or other instrument in writing and any assignment or endorsement thereof executed or entered into between FSW and any other person, when signed jointly by the Chief Executive Officer and the corporation Secretary of FSW shall be valid and binding on FSW in the absence of actual knowledge on the part of the other person that the signing officers had no authority to execute the same.

Representatives

Representatives constitute the official body of Friends Southwest, to consider and act upon various items of business that come before it. Representatives are named from the local churches and meet at Annual Conference for FSW business, worship, fellowship, and updates. As decision-makers for FSW, Representatives should be attentive to God's Spirit and sincerely aspire to the Friends' way of doing business.

**See the section below.*

Each church has four representatives. Representatives are to include the Senior pastor and the Chair of the Ministry and Counsel. Additional options include an associate pastor, a second elder, or a chairperson of a second board such as missions.

Representatives are to serve in an active capacity. Alternates who meet the aforementioned criteria are to be appointed by each church, and they shall serve when it is impossible for the duly appointed Representatives to be present for any session. The names of Representatives and alternates should be sent promptly to the FSW office in writing prior to a meeting of the Representatives.

Appointed Representatives begin service in January for terms of three years, not to exceed six consecutive years. Upon resignation or vacancy in the office of any Representative, the local church shall appoint a successor to complete the unexpired term.

Annual Conference

Representatives gather at least once a year for business that affects FSW as a whole at a meeting referred to as Annual Conference. Annual Conference will convene on dates that are approved by the Elder Board and publicized well in advance. The FSW Superintendent, staff, and boards will use the opportunity to report to the Representatives, who, in turn, should keep their churches informed of FSW affairs. Other benefits of this gathering include worship, fellowship, and leadership training. Our life together in Christ builds unity and mutual accountability of our churches. These business sessions of the Representatives are also known as the Representative Session of Friends Southwest.

Essential Business of Representatives

The final decisions and actions on the following must be approved by the Representatives.

- Consideration and action on any proposed changes in Faith and Practice - Consideration and action on the proposed Church Health and Growth Budget
- Consideration and action on the proposed annual First Fruits giving percentage
- Consideration and action on incurring indebtedness on behalf of FSW (not including local churches and related organizations)
- Consideration and action on the annual reports of nominations made by the General Nominating Committee and the Elder Board
- Consideration and action upon recommendations from the Elder Board regarding calling or dismissing of the Superintendent
- Consideration and action upon business presented to the Representatives by the Elder Board

Participating in Sessions

At all business sessions of the Representatives, the Representatives present shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. Each church should exert effort to have their Representatives present. Representatives' attendance will be taken and recorded.

The Presiding Clerk presides over Representative sessions. Participation in discussion shall be open to all committed partners and, upon approval by the Clerk, to guests of the sessions. Only Representatives take action by responding "approved" or "disapproved." Representatives may meet in closed sessions at their request or by request of the Clerk or Associate Clerk.

**See section on Clerks/Officers below.*

The Presiding Clerk, consulting with the Superintendent, arranges the agenda for the sessions. Any of the local churches, FSW Elder Board, and other boards, committees and task forces of FSW may submit other business to the FSW clerk in writing 6 weeks

in advance of the Representatives session. This allows time to review the item and add it to the agenda.

Additional sessions of the Representatives may be called at the request of the Elder Board. Notice of such sessions, and the proposed agenda, must be announced at least thirty days in advance.

Following a business session, it is the responsibility of the representatives to communicate with the Elders of the local church the business from the representative sessions.

General Nominating Committee

Another role of some Representatives is to serve on the General Nominating Committee, which annually recommends people for service on FSW boards. The Elder Board shall appoint the General Nominating Committee from among the list of Representatives submitted by the local churches. Board Chairs, FSW staff, Representatives and church pastors/staff will be asked to submit names to the General Nominating Committee to be considered for Board service.

A total of twelve Representatives or alternates will serve on the Nominating Committee, four to be appointed each year for a maximum of two three-year terms, and with no more than two members from any one church. The General Nominating Committee will nominate persons to fill vacancies in offices and boards. Their task is to nominate a full slate of officers and board members for appointment at the next session of the Representatives.

Nominations will be made on a three-year cycle so that each year one-third of the board retires or becomes eligible for a second term. The General Nominating Committee will present all nominations to the Elder Board for their approval, thus making it possible for boards to affect tentative organization prior to final approval by the Representatives. Members of the General Nominating Committee shall serve until their successors are appointed. Vacancies on the General Nominating Committee will be filled by the Elder Board.

Clerks/Officers

A Presiding Clerk, Associate Clerk, Recording Clerk and Assistant Recording Clerk are nominated by the General Nominating Committee annually and must be approved by the Representatives. Their tenure of office shall not exceed ten years, but they do hold office until their successors are appointed. They must be members of one of our local FSW churches.

The Presiding Clerk will open the annual business sessions (or Annual Conference). In the absence of the Presiding Clerk, the Associate Clerk will preside. If neither is present, the Recording Clerk will open the session; and a Clerk may be named from the floor.

The Associate Clerk automatically becomes the chairperson of the FSW Board of Elders, and is designated as the Chief Executive Officer of FSW under California Nonprofit Religious Corporation Law. The Elder Board will designate the Corporate

Secretary and the Chief Financial Officer of FSW under the California Nonprofit Religious Corporation Law.

In addition to presiding over the sessions, the Clerk and Associate Clerk are always welcome to attend meetings of all FSW boards and committees whenever needed, or whenever it might seem appropriate.

First Fruits Covenant Giving

First Fruits Covenant is the method our churches have chosen to provide financial resources for the Church Health and Growth budget.

This approach allows the churches to: (1) participate in the support of the regional office and staff (excluding Faith Board employees); (2) allow individual congregations to promote and model a spirit of generosity within their congregations; (3) allow for individual congregations to partner with other churches in ways they would not otherwise be able to do.

The Church Health and Growth budget is funded through giving from each local church. Each year at the Annual Conference, the churches approve this budget. The Representatives will also approve the percentage of their general giving income which will serve to fund the Church Health and Growth budget, when a change is recommended. All churches will be encouraged to give at the same percentage.

Friends Way of Doing Business

Friends have a unique way of doing business. We do not vote. Instead we discuss and prayerfully reach agreement on what we believe is the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is sometimes called “the sense of the meeting” or simply “consensus.” It is more than simply reaching the lowest common denominator of agreement. At its best, it is discerning the mind of Christ and his direction as the head of the Church. For this reason, all business meetings begin with a period of worship. The intent is that the participants will continue to pray for guidance as they conduct the business in the spirit of worship. Spiritual life and business are two sides of the same coin and should never be separated. The goal is to submit to the rule of God’s kingdom as we serve him together.

**See Leadership, Decision-making, and the Church in Chapter 1.*

In FSW business meetings the Presiding Clerk guides the sessions. This person is often chosen because of fairness, ability and mature character. After presentation of the topic, often by a board or executive staff member, the Clerk gives time for careful and deliberate consideration by the Representatives. When it appears to the Clerk that the Representatives have reached a decision, he or she states clearly what appears to be the consensus or “sense of the meeting.” Then the Clerk calls for approval, or sometimes, disapproval. When the group can proceed in substantial unity, the Representatives say “approved,” and the matter is firmly decided. When the members give approval, a minute is written summarizing the decision.

When a significant minority does not agree, the Clerk may call for a time of silent waiting on the Lord, postpone the item, or refer it back to a board or committee for review or revision. While each person is urged to seek the mind of the Lord, Friends

believe that something unique happens as we try to discern God's direction together. Therefore, corporate guidance takes precedence over the guidance of the individual in discerning the consensus or sense of the meeting. The Clerk has the right to call any person, or the proceedings themselves, "out of order" if an unproductive argument or a wrong spirit should emerge.

Decisions do not need to be unanimous, but they do need substantial unity. Members who disagree with an action may "stand aside;" that is, agree to let the others proceed without their agreeing with the action taken. Those who stand aside are also agreeing not to become divisive and not to oppose the implementation of the decision.

On rare occasions, when the issue is grave and a decision must be made, those who disagree may ask to have their names registered in the minutes as opposing the action. All members, including those of the majority view and those who have stood aside, agree together to conduct themselves in a way reflective of the heart of Christ - humbly, honestly, and full of grace.

The Friends method of doing business is sometimes slow, but it does build unity. At its best, it is beautiful to watch the Holy Spirit bring a group to unity. That's why the Spirit of authentic worship and seeking the mind of Christ Jesus who is always present, is so vital.

Friends Southwest Boards

Our boards are tasked with carrying out aspects of the mission of Friends Southwest. Currently, there are two Faith Boards and one Service Board.

Organization of Boards

All board meetings are open except those of the Elder Board or any board when it is meeting in executive session. The Elder Board may declare any of their sessions an open session. Each board will organize during the annual business session or after all new members have been tentatively approved by the Elder Board. New members, officers and committees will assume their responsibilities at the close of the sessions. Each board will use the Friends way of doing business (*see Friends Way of Doing Business*). It shall have an executive committee of at least three to care for the work of the board throughout the year with the following membership: Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and Secretary. The executive committee will act as an agenda committee for meetings. It will also act for the board between meetings. Any action taken by the executive committee must be reported to the full board for approval.

Each board may appoint from its membership those other committees needed to accomplish its ministry.

Committees may enlist others from outside the board with special talents, resources or abilities to assist them in their work. Individual board members may be given responsibility by its board or its executive committee to implement specific decisions. However, individuals acting on behalf of a board should act only in accordance with the decisions and policies as recorded in their minutes. Outside of board meetings, individuals do not supervise staff or speak for the board.

Meetings will be held at least four times per year, unless otherwise specified. Additional meetings may be called by the chairman at the request of the executive committee or at the request of three members of the board. The chairman must give five days notice to all members, along with the agenda of business to be considered. A quorum shall consist of half the existing number of board members, but no less than three.

Duties and Responsibilities

1. Each board is responsible for its ministry, even if it is implemented by a staff member or volunteers. The action of the board should represent the principles and beliefs of Friends and the constituency of FSW. Proposed projects or actions should have the approval of the board before being implemented.
2. Each board will prepare a budget annually.
3. Each board will cooperate with the FSW Superintendent and staff in the preparation of materials for publication and distribution.
4. Each board will encourage cooperation with other organizations that are in harmony with the Faith and Practice of FSW.
5. Each board will report periodically to the Elder Board about their plans, programs and calendar of activities.

Inactive Board and Committee Members

Inactive members of boards or committees may be dropped by the Elder Board. Those who move away from the FSW region or are entering other fields of service will be discontinued. Those who have two consecutive unexcused absences may be notified by the board or committee that their membership may be withdrawn.

Membership and Terms

FSW boards and committees will consist of between seven and twenty-four members. Having fewer members will not invalidate the Board's authority or decisions. Board and committee members should be committed partners of a local church. At least three-fourths of members will be nominated by the General Nominating Committee unless otherwise specified. The remainder will be nominated and appointed by the board or committee itself. Unless otherwise specified, terms will be three years, with a limit of six consecutive years.

The General Nominating Committee will fill vacancies that occur during the year, with the exception of those who have been appointed by the individual board.

Faith Boards

Faith Boards express our united efforts to fulfill the great commission in the spirit of the great commandment. Each local church must be involved in this activity in its own

setting. However, these boards provide us a means of ministry together for the common cause.

The Faith Boards consist of nine to twenty-four members, appointed by the Nominating Committee of FSW and the board itself. Normal terms of office are three years, with a maximum of two terms or six consecutive years.

The Faith Boards do not receive any First Fruits funds from FSW or its churches. All funds they raise are on a voluntary basis. They are free to raise money, grant scholarships, and expend what finances they raise, within the purposes of the particular Faith board. Each chairperson or related executive staff member will give periodic reports to the Representatives in session and to the Board of Elders.

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent, the Elder Board will hire the executive staff for the Faith Boards. In their daily responsibilities, each Faith Board's executive staff members will be accountable to the Superintendent or person designated by the Superintendent. The Elder Board normally will consult with the Faith Board in the selection process. With board approval, the executive staff member or Faith Board may hire other staff as necessary and, as finances allow, to carry out its ministry. Any such staff shall fall within the organizational structure of FSW as either executive staff or field staff unless otherwise indicated.

**See Executive Staff.*

Presently we have two Faith Boards. These include Missions and the Friends Center. The following section contains the purpose statement of each of these Faith Boards. Each board has a manual or an organizational procedure that describes in more detail their strategy, operational procedures or objectives. These are available in the Evangelical Friends Church Southwest Office.

Friends Center

The purpose of the Friends Center is to serve Friends Churches in recruiting and equipping evangelical leaders to minister more effectively for Jesus Christ and his Church. In partnership with the School of Theology at Azusa Pacific University, the Friends Center serves students in ministerial training. The Friends Center also serves FSW and the Friends movement in its larger leadership development needs, both locally and internationally.

Missions

The purpose of the Board of Missions is to work under the direction of Jesus Christ in planting and shepherding disciples and churches related to FSW in those areas of the world where we are specifically called to work. Our goal is to proclaim Christ, to bring people to know him and to form these believers into an Evangelical Friends Church that shares the goal of taking Christ to the world. We also seek to minister to physical and economic needs as the Lord directs.

Service Boards

Service Boards express our united efforts to serve those who attend our churches. Their activity may take the form of providing assistance to our local churches, or in

addressing an area of mutual concern. Each local church may well be involved in this activity in its own setting.

The Service Boards consist of nine to twenty-four members, appointed by the Nominating Committee of FSW. Normal terms of office are two 3-year terms with a maximum of six consecutive years.

The Service Boards receive funds from FSW as a part of the First Fruits giving to the Church Health and Growth budget. They may also raise other funds as necessary to carry out their approved programs. Each board is expected to give periodic reports to the Representatives in session and to the Board of Elders.

Recording and Commissioning

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the Board of Recording and Commissioning is to observe, evaluate and encourage the developmental process as a person prepares for ministry as a candidate for either Recording or Commissioning.

Duties and Responsibilities

Upon recommendation of the Ministry and Counsel/Elders of the local church, the Board of Recording and Commissioning will interview candidates for acceptance and then supervise the progress until Recording or Commissioning is complete.

**See Recording and Commissioning.*

The board may plan Call to Ministry Conferences, or other gatherings, designed to stimulate people to listen for God's call and respond with their whole hearts. Coaching and mentoring may be part of the equipping process. The board may contact, encourage and pray into ministry Evangelical Friends students in seminaries, Bible colleges and universities, as well as those showing extraordinary gifting in local church ministry.

Membership

At least two-thirds of the board's members must be recorded as Friends ministers or members of the Elders/Ministry and Counsel in local churches at the time of their appointment.

Related Organizations

Related organizations are separately incorporated, but still connected to Friends Southwest. In every case FSW has a formal, recognized affiliation. Usually it nominates some or all of the members of the board of the related organization.

California Friends Homes

California Friends Homes (CFH), a non-profit corporation incorporated September 7, 1962, is under the sponsorship of Friends Southwest.

Objectives

The objectives of CFH include establishing, building, equipping, maintaining, conducting, and operating one or more establishments or homes to provide, for a fee, facilities and services to meet the spiritual, physical, social and psychological needs of elderly persons. CFH will supply those persons with shelter, care, protection, love, understanding, companionship and other essentials to a full and devoted life.

Membership

The board consists of members serving no more than five consecutive three-year terms. Each year the General Nominating Committee will appoint one member. Three members will be appointed by the Board of Directors of CFH at the time of the annual meeting of the board.

The current Superintendent, Presiding Clerk, Associate Presiding Clerk, and one executive staff member appointed by the Superintendent of FSW shall be ex-officio members of the Board of Directors. They will receive notice of, and may participate in, board meetings but may not approve or disapprove actions.

Responsibilities

The management, business and concerns of California Friends Homes shall be exercised by, and vested in, the Board of Directors as provided for in the CFH by-laws and/or Articles of Incorporation.

Evangelical Friends International

On June 23, 1995 the Representatives approved joining Evangelical Friends International (EFI). Friends Southwest names its allotted quota of delegates to the various commissions of EFI North America and pays its allotted share of the EFI assessment.

Evangelical Friends International is affiliated with the National Association of Evangelicals but is not a part of the National Council of Churches nor the World Council of Churches. The Statement of Faith and Constitution of EFI are available through the FSW office.

Dual Affiliation

To preserve unity of purpose, member churches of Friends Southwest must not hold corporate affiliation or membership in Friends organizations independent of FSW. However, individuals who are members of our local churches may seek personal membership and ministry in other Friends organizations as an expression of what they determine to be God's calling for themselves.

Evangelical Friends Mission

Evangelical Friends Mission began in 1978 and is currently the missionary sending agency of Evangelical Friends International-North America. Its board is one of the commissions of EFI-NA and is appointed from the constituent Yearly Meetings.

Purpose Statement

The purpose and passion of Evangelical Friends Mission is to fuel a worldwide movement of people who seek first the kingdom of God, planting churches that live and die to carry out the Great Commission in the spirit of the Great Commandment. In other words, EFM aims to plant living, maturing churches that glorify God and witness to his kingdom, especially among unreached people groups. These national churches, in turn, produce evangelists, pastors, church planters and missionaries to spread the gospel to people groups beyond themselves.

Southwest Friends Financial Development Corporation**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the Board of Benevolence, (dba) Southwest Friends Financial Development Corporation, is to provide a financial resource for churches and other organizations of Friends Southwest. The board acts as trustee and advisor for annuities, trusts and other funds placed in its care.

Incorporation

In 1920 the Board of Benevolences (today called Southwest Friends Financial Development Corporation) was incorporated under the laws of the State of California, following action by the Yearly Meeting, now named Friends Southwest. The board is a California nonprofit religious corporation which does not issue stock, pays no dividends and may not distribute any part of the corporation's income to members, officers or directors except as reasonable compensation for services rendered.

Objectives

The objectives of the Southwest Friends Financial Development Corporation are numerous, and its authority as provided for in its Articles of Incorporation is broad. Its primary function is to establish and maintain annuities and trusts. The board can receive and administer wisely any money or property through gifts, wills, bequests and other financial instruments. It may issue annuities or other charges or trusts, and create such annuities or trusts.

It may also buy, sell, lease or otherwise acquire real estate and buildings and personal property suitable for its purposes. It can lend and borrow money and issue bonds or debentures. With its funds the board may help extend the ministries and message of Friends Southwest. It may contribute toward the establishment of churches, schools, colleges, libraries or hospitals.

Membership

The board consists of seven members nominated by the General Nominating Committee and approved by the Representatives. Each term is five years, not to exceed ten consecutive years. The presence of four members constitutes a quorum.

APPENDIX

*Contents***Faith and Practice - Amendments and Editing****Historical Friends Statements**

Letter from George Fox

Richmond Declaration

Friends Southwest Elements Statement

Resources for Healthy Churches

Tools for Individual and Church Accountability

Healthy Church Values and Behaviors

Basic Best Fiduciary Practices for Ministry

*Faith and Practice Revisions***Amendments**

Amendments to *Faith and Practice* may come from local churches, boards or committees of Friends Southwest. Proposals for change must first go to the Elder Board for consideration, review and recommendation. They must be sent to the Representatives and other affected parties at least 90 days prior to a meeting of the Representatives.

Amendments to Friends Southwest beliefs (See Chapter 1) require careful consideration by the local Elders/Ministry and Counsel to weigh the impact upon our people and churches, our related organizations and the Evangelical Friends movement around the world. The Representatives must consider the proposed amendments in two separate Representatives' sessions, even if they are twelve months apart.

Amendments to our organization, polity and organizational practices may be temporarily implemented, with approval of the Representatives, for a trial and development period of up to three (3) years. During the trial period, a study committee, appointed by the Representatives, will monitor and evaluate the progress and report its findings at least annually to the Representatives.

With 90 days notice and the prior recommendation of the Elder Board, changes to organization, functions, polity and organizational practices may be adopted in a single session of the Representatives.

Editing

Once each decade (2010, 2020, 2030, etc.) a group of writers and editors will be appointed by the Elder Board or the Representatives to update the language of *Faith*

and Practice. The goal is to keep the wording contemporary and readable. While these editorial changes are not intended to change the content, they still must be approved by the Representatives.

Historical Faith Statements

Several approved historical faith statements of significance to Friends Southwest are reproduced below, each with a brief historical introduction explaining something of the context in which it was written.

George Fox's Letter to the Governor of Barbados - 1671

In 1671, George Fox and 12 other Friends leaders traveled to Barbados to visit and strengthen the community of Friends on the island. During his three-month visit, he wrote this well-known letter to the governor of Barbados to refute those who falsely claim that Friends did not hold to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, particularly as related to God, Christ, and the Bible. Since that time, it has come to be widely recognized and reprinted (in extract form) as one of the plainest and most direct statements of early Friends faith directly attributable to George Fox.

At the time of Fox's letter, Friends did not oppose slavery as an institution but held to the New Testament standard of love and fair treatment toward slaves. Later, they were among the first to adopt a position that rejected the institution of slavery entirely, and made owning slaves an offense that could remove someone from membership.

The entire letter is reproduced below, in the English of the day.

Whereupon I, with some other Friends, drew up a paper, to go forth in the name of the people called Quakers, for the clearing truth and Friends from those false reports. It was after this manner:

"For the Governor of Barbados, with his council and assembly, and all others in power, both civil and military, in this island; from the people called Quakers.

"WHEREAS many scandalous lies and slanders have been cast upon us, to render us odious; as that "We deny God, and Christ Jesus, and the scriptures of truth," &. This is to inform you, that all our books and declarations, which for these many years have been published to the world, clearly testify the contrary. Yet, for your satisfaction, we now plainly and sincerely declare, that we own and believe in God, the only wise, omnipotent, and everlasting God, who is the creator of all things both in heaven and in the earth, and the preserver of all that he hath made; who is God over all, blessed for ever; to whom be all honour, glory, dominion, praise and thanksgiving, both now and for evermore! and we own and believe in Jesus Christ, his beloved and only begotten Son, in whom he is well pleased; who was conceived by the holy ghost, and born of the virgin Mary; in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins; who is the express image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature, by whom were all things created that are in heaven and in earth, visible and invisible,

whether they be thrones, dominions, principalities, or powers; all things were created by him. And we own and believe that he was made a sacrifice for sin, who knew no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; and that he was crucified for us in the flesh, without the gates of Jerusalem; and that he was buried, and rose again the third day by the power of his Father, for our justification; and we believe that he ascended up into heaven, and now sitteth at the right hand of God.

This Jesus, who was the foundation of the holy prophets and apostles, is our foundation; and we believe there is no other foundation to be laid but that which is laid, even Christ Jesus who we believe tasted death for every man, and shed his blood for all men, and is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world: according as John the Baptist testified of him, when he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world". (John 1:29) We believe that he alone is our Redeemer and Saviour, even the captain of our salvation, who saves us from sin, as well as from hell and the wrath to come, and destroys the devil and his works; who is the seed of the woman that bruises the serpent's head, to wit, Christ Jesus, the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. That he is (as the scriptures of truth say of him) our wisdom and righteousness, justification and redemption; neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we may be saved.

He alone is the shepherd and bishop of our souls: he is our prophet, whom Moses long since testified of saying, "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things, whatsoever he shall say unto you: and it shall come to pass, that every soul that will not hear that prophet shall be destroyed from among the people." (Acts 3:22-23). He it is that is now come "and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true". And he rules in our hearts by his law of love and life, and makes us free from the law of sin and death. We have no life, but by him; for he is the quickening spirit, the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, by whose blood we are cleansed, and our consciences sprinkled from dead works, to serve the living God.

He is our Mediator, that makes peace and reconciliation between God offended and us offending; he being the oath of God, the new covenant of light, life, grace, and peace, the author and finisher of our faith. Now this Lord Jesus Christ, the heavenly man, the Emanuel, God with us, we all own and believe in; he whom the high priest raged against, and said, he had spoken blasphemy; whom the priests and elders of the Jews took counsel together against, and put to death; the same whom Judas betrayed for thirty pieces of silver, which the priests gave him as a reward for his treason; who also gave large money to the soldiers to broach a horrible lie, namely, "That his disciples came and stole him away by night whilst they slept". And after he was risen from the dead, the history of the Acts of the apostles sets forth how the chief priests and elders persecuted the disciples of this Jesus, for preaching Christ and his resurrection. This, we say, is that Lord Jesus Christ, whom we own to be our life and salvation.

"And as concerning the holy scriptures, we believe they were given forth by the holy spirit of God, through the holy men of God, who (as the scripture itself declares, 2 Pet 1:21) "spoke as they were moved by the holy ghost". We believe they are to be read,

believed, and fulfilled, (he that fulfills them is Christ): and they are "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, (2 Tim 3:16) and are able to make wise unto salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus". We believe the holy scriptures are the words of God; for it is said in Exod 20:1. "God spake all these words, saying", &c. meaning the ten commandments given forth upon mount Sinai. And in Rev. xxii. 18. saith John, "I testify to every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man addeth unto these, and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy", (not the Word), & c. So in Luke 1:20 "Because thou believest not my words" And so in John 5:47, 15:7, 14:23, 17:47. So that we call the holy scriptures, as Christ, the apostles, and holy men of God called them, viz. the words of God.

"Another slander they have cast upon us, is, "that we teach the negroes to rebel"; a thing we utterly abhor and detest in our hearts, the Lord knows it, who is the searcher of all hearts, and knows all things, and can testify for us, that this is a most abominable untruth. For that which we have spoken to them, is to exhort and admonish them to be sober, to fear God, to love their masters and mistresses, and to be faithful and diligent in their service and business, and then their masters and overseers would love them, and deal kindly and gently with them; also that they should not beat their wives, nor the wives their husbands; neither should the men have many wives; that they should not steal, nor be drunk, nor commit adultery, nor fornication, nor curse, swear, nor lie, nor give bad words to one another, nor to any one else; for there is something in them that tells them they should not practice these nor any other evils.

But if they notwithstanding should do them, then we let them know there are but two ways, the one that leads to heaven where the righteous go; and the other that leads to hell, where the wicked and debauched, whoremongers, adulterers, murderers, and liars go. To the one the Lord will say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"; to the other, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels": so the wicked go into "everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." (Matt. 25). Consider, friends, it is no transgression for a master of a family to instruct his family himself, or for others to do it on his behalf; but rather it is a very great duty incumbent upon them. Abraham and Joshua did so: of the first, we read the Lord said, Gen. xviii. 19. "I know that Abraham will command his children, and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham the things that he hath spoken of him." And the latter, we read, said, (Josh 24:15) "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

We declare, that we esteem it a duty incumbent on us to pray with and for, to teach, instruct, and admonish those in and belonging to our families; this being a command of the Lord, disobedience whereunto will provoke his displeasure; as may be seen in Jer 10:25, "Pour out thy fury upon the Heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not upon thy name." Now, negroes, tawnies, indians, make up a very great part of the families in this island; for whom an account will be required by him who comes to judge both quick and dead at the great day of judgment, when every one shall be

"rewarded according to the deeds done in the body, whether they be good, or whether they be evil"; at that day, we say, of the resurrection both of the good and of the bad, and of the just and of the unjust, when, "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe in that day." (2 Thess 1:8 &c. See also 2 Pet 3:3 &c)

This wicked slander (of our endeavouring to make the negroes rebel) our adversaries took occasion to raise, from our having some meetings amongst the negroes; for we had several meetings with them in divers plantations, wherein we exhorted them to justice, sobriety, temperance, chastity, and piety, and to be subject to their masters and governors. Which was altogether contrary to what our envious adversaries maliciously suggested against us.

As I had been to visit the governor, as soon as I was well able, after I came thither; so sometime after when I was at Thomas Rouse's, the governor came to see me, carrying himself very courteously.

Richmond Declaration of Faith - 1887

From Friday, September 23 through Tuesday, September 27, 95 delegates, visitors, and other observers from the Orthodox Friends Yearly Meetings met in Richmond, Indiana for the historic Richmond Conference of 1887. These Friends met "to consider matters appertaining to the welfare of our branch of the church, ...strengthen the bonds of Christian fellowship, ...promote unity in important matters of faith and practice." The delegates at the conference appointed a committee of 12 to "prepare a statement of our Christian belief, as a branch of the Church of Christ."

This declaration made use of existing sources: scripture, yearly meeting disciplines, and early Friends writings. In the words of the conference chairman, "with great unanimity this Conference has adopted the Declaration of Faith that has been submitted." The delegates believed the Richmond Declaration was a fine and strong witness to the world of what Friends actually believed.

In 1902, eleven Yearly Meetings in North America, including California Yearly Meeting (now known as Friends Southwest), adopted the Richmond Declaration of Faith as part of the Uniform Discipline when they formed the Five Years Meeting. The quotations from scripture are from the Authorized Version unless identified as from the Revised Version.

It is under a deep sense of what we owe to Him who has loved us that we feel called upon to offer a declaration of those fundamental doctrines of Christian truth that have always been professed by our branch of the Church of Christ.

Of God

We believe in one holy (Isa 6:3, 57:15), almighty (Gen 17:1), all-wise (Rom 11:33, 16:27) and

everlasting (Ps 90:1- 2) God, the Father (Matt 11:25-27), the Creator (Gen 1:1) and Preserver (Job 7:20) of all things; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, by whom all things were made (John 1:3), and by whom all things consist (Col 1:17); and in one Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son (John 15:26, 16:7), the Reprover (John 16:8) of the world, the Witness for Christ (John 15:26) and the Teacher (John 14:26), Guide (John 16:13), and Sanctifier (2 Thess 2:13) of the people of God; and that these three are one in the eternal Godhead (Matt 28:19; John 10:30; 17:21); to whom be honor, praise, and thanksgiving, now and forever. Amen.

The Lord Jesus Christ

It is with reverence and thanksgiving that we profess our unwavering allegiance to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him (John 1:18). In Him was life (John 1:4), and the life was the light of men (John 1:4). He is the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world (John 1:9), through whom the light of truth in all ages has proceeded from the Father of lights. (James 1:17) He is the eternal Word (John 1:1) who was with God and was God, revealing Himself in infinite wisdom and love, both as man's Creator (Col 1:13-16) and Redeemer (Col 1:14), for by Him were all things created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible. Conceived of the Holy Ghost (Matt 1:20), born of the virgin Mary (Matt 1:23-25; Luke 1:35), the word was made flesh (John 1:14), and dwelt amongst men. He came in the fullness (Gal 4:4) of the appointed time, being verily foreordained before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20) that He might fulfill (Isa 11:1-5, Isa 52:13-15) the eternal counsel of the righteousness and love of God for the redemption of man (Isa 53). In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. (Col 2:9) Though He was rich, yet for our sakes, He became poor, veiling in the form of a servant (Phil 2:7) the brightness of His glory, that, through Him the kindness and love of God (Titus 3:4) toward man might appear in a manner every way suited to our wants and finite capacities. He went about doing good (Acts 10:38); for us He endured (Isa 53:4; Luke 12:50; Luke 19:41; Luke 22:44) sorrow, hunger, thirst, weariness, (John 4:6) pain, unutterable anguish of body and of soul, being in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin (Heb 4:15). Thus humbling himself that we might be exalted, He emphatically recognized the duties and the sufferings of humanity as among the means whereby, through the obedience of faith, we are to be disciplined for heaven, sanctifying them to us, by Himself performing and enduring them, leaving us the one perfect example (1 Peter 2:21) of all righteousness (Matt 3:15) in self-sacrificing love.

But not only in these blessed relations must the Lord Jesus be ever precious to His people. In Him is revealed as true God and Perfect man (Eph 4:13) a Redeemer, at once able to suffer and almighty to save. He became obedient (Phil 2:8) unto death, even the death of the cross, and is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2); in whom we have redemption through His blood (Eph 1:7) the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace. It is our joy to confess that the remission of sins which any partake of is only in and by virtue of His most satisfactory sacrifice and not otherwise. (Barclay's Apology, Prop. 5 and 6 par. 15, p.141). He was buried and rose again the third day (1 Cor 15:4) according to the Scriptures, becoming the first fruits (1 Cor 15:23) of them that sleep, and having shown Himself alive after His passion, by many infallible proofs. (Acts 1:3) He ascended into heaven, and hath sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, now to appear in the presence of God for us. (Heb 1:3, 9:24) With the apostles who beheld His ascension, we rest in the assurance of the angelic messengers, "This same Jesus,

which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11, and see 5:7) With the apostle John, we would desire to unite in the words, "Amen; even so, come, Lord Jesus." (Rev 22:20) And now, whilst thus watching and waiting, we rejoice to believe that He is our King and Savior. He is the one Mediator of the new and everlasting covenant (1 Tim 2:5, Heb 9:15) who makes peace and reconciliation between God offended and man offending; (Letter to the Governor of Barbados) the great High Priest whose priesthood is unchangeable. (Heb 4:14, 7:24) He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them. (Heb 7:25) All power is given unto Him in heaven and in earth. (Matt 28:18) By Him the world shall be judged in righteousness (Acts 17:31); for the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. (John 5:22-23) All that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil until the resurrection of judgment. (John 5:28-29 RV)

We reverently confess and believe that divine honor and worship are due to the Son of God, and that He is in true faith to be prayed unto, and His name to be called upon, as the Primitive Christians did because of the glorious oneness of the Father and the Son; and that we cannot acceptably offer prayers and praises to God, nor receive from Him a gracious answer or blessing, but in and through his dear Son. (Declaration of 1693, in Sewell's Hist., vol. 2, 379)

We would, with humble thanksgiving, bear an especial testimony to our Lord's perpetual dominion and power in His church. Through Him the redeemed in all generations have derived their light, their forgiveness, and their joy. All are members of this church, by whatsoever name they may be called among men, who have been baptized by the one Spirit into the one body; who are builded as living stones upon Christ, the Eternal Foundation, and are united in faith and love in that fellowship which is with the Father and with the Son. Of this church the Lord Jesus Christ is the alone Head. (Eph 1:22) All its true members are made one in Him. They have washed their robes and made them white in His precious blood (Rev 7:14), and He has made them priests unto God and His Father. (Rev 1:6) He dwells in their hearts by faith, and gives them of his peace. His will is their law, and in Him they enjoy the true liberty, a freedom from the bondage of sin.

The Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit is, in the unity of the eternal Godhead, one with the Father and with the Son. (Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14) He is the comforter "Whom," saith Christ, "the Father will send in my name." (John 14:26) He convinces the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. (John 16:8) He testifies of and glorifies Jesus. (John 16:14) It is the Holy Spirit who makes the evil manifest. He quickens them that are dead in trespasses and sins, and opens the inward eye to behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. (Eph 2:1) Coming in the name and with the authority of the risen and ascended Savior, He is the precious pledge of the continued love and care of our exalted King. He takes of the things of Christ and shows them, as a realized possession, to the believing soul. (John 16:14) Dwelling in the hearts of believers (John 16:7), He opens their understandings that they may understand the Scriptures, and becomes, to the humbled and surrendered heart, the Guide, Comforter, Support, and

Sanctifier.

We believe that the essential qualification of the Lord's service is bestowed upon His children through the reception and baptism of the Holy Ghost. This Holy Spirit is the seal of reconciliation to the believer in Jesus (Eph 1:13,14), the witness to his adoption into the family of the redeemed (Rom 8:15,16); the earnest and the foretaste of the full communion and perfect joy which are reserved for them that endure unto the end.

We own no principle of spiritual light, life or holiness, inherent by nature in the mind or heart of man. We believe in no principle of spiritual light, life or holiness, but the influence of the Holy Spirit of God, bestowed on mankind, in various measures and degrees, through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is the capacity to receive this blessed influence, which in an especial manner, gives man pre-eminence above the beasts that perish; which distinguishes him in every nation and in every clime, as an object of the redeeming love of God; as a being not only intelligent but responsible; for whom the message of salvation through our crucified Redeemer is, under all possible circumstances, designed to be a joyful sound. The Holy Spirit must ever be distinguished, both from the conscience which He enlightens, and from the natural faculty of reason, which when unsubjected to His Holy influence, is, in the things of God, very foolishness. As the eye is to the body, so is the conscience to our inner being, the organ by which we see; and as both light and life are essential to the eye, so conscience, as the inward eye, cannot see aright, without the quickening and illumination of the Spirit of God. One with the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit can never disown or dishonor our once crucified and now risen and glorified Redeemer. We disavow all professed illumination or spirituality that is divorced from faith in Jesus Christ of Nazareth, crucified for us without the gates of Jerusalem.

The Holy Scriptures

It has ever been, and still is, the belief of the Society of Friends that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament were given by inspiration of God; that, therefore, there can be no appeal from them to any other authority whatsoever; that they are able to make wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Jesus Christ. "These are written so that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name." (John 20:31) The Scriptures are the only divinely authorized record of the doctrines which we are bound, as Christians, to accept, and of the moral principles which are to regulate our actions. No one can be required to believe, as an article of faith, any doctrine which is not contained in them; and whatsoever anyone says or does, contrary to the Scriptures, though under profession of the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit, must be reckoned and accounted a mere delusion. To the Christian, the Old Testament comes with the solemn and repeated attestation of his Lord. It is to be read in the light and completeness of the New; thus will its meaning be unveiled, and the humble disciple will be taught to discern the unity and mutual adaptation of the whole, and the many-sidedness and harmony of its testimony to Christ. The great Inspirer of Scripture is ever its true Interpreter. He performs this office in condescending love, not by superseding our understandings, but by renewing and enlightening them. Where Christ presides, idle speculation is hushed; His doctrine is learned in the doing of His will, and all knowledge ripens into a deeper and richer experience of His truth and love.

Man's Creation and Fall

It pleased God, in His wisdom and goodness, to create man out of the dust of the earth, and to breathe into his nostrils the breath of life, so that man became a living soul; formed after the image and likeness of God, capable of fulfilling the divine law, and of holding communion with his Maker. (Gen 2:7, 1:26-27) Being free to obey, or to disobey, he fell into transgression, through

unbelief, under the temptation of Satan (Gen 3:1- 7), and thereby lost that spiritual life of righteousness in which he was created; and, so, death passed upon him, as the inevitable consequence of his sin. (Rom 5:12) As the children of fallen Adam, all mankind bear his image. They partake of his nature, and are involved in the consequences of his fall. To every member of every successive generation, the words of the Redeemer are alike applicable, "Ye must be born again." (John 3:7) But while we hold these views of the lost condition of man in the fall, we rejoice to believe that sin is not imputed to any, until they transgress the divine law, after sufficient capacity has been given to understand it; and that infants, though inheriting this fallen nature, are saved in the infinite mercy of God through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

Justification and Sanctification

"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) We believe that justification is of God's free grace, through which, upon repentance and faith, He pardons our sins, and imparts to us a new life. It is received, not for any works of righteousness that we have done (Titus 3:5), but in the unmerited mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Through faith in Him, and the shedding of His precious blood, the guilt of sin is taken away, and we stand reconciled to God. The offering up of Christ as the propitiation for the sins of the whole world is the appointed manifestation both of the righteousness and of the love of God. In this propitiation the pardon of sin involves no abrogation or relaxation of the law of holiness. It is the vindication and establishment of that law (Rom 3:31), in virtue of the free and righteous submission of the Son of God himself to all its requirements. He, the unchangeably just, proclaims Himself the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. (Rom 3:26) From age to age, the sufferings and death of Christ have been a hidden mystery, and a rock of offense to the unbelief and pride of man's fallen nature; yet, to the humble penitent whose heart is broken under the convicting power of the Spirit, life is revealed in that death. As he looks upon Him who was wounded for our transgressions (Isa 53:5), and upon whom the Lord was pleased to lay the iniquity of us all (Isa 53:6), his eye is more and more opened to see, and his heart to understand, the exceeding sinfulness of sin for which the Savior died; whilst, in the sense of pardoning grace, he will have joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. (Rom 5:11)

We believe that in connection with Justification is Regeneration: that they who come to this experience know that they are not their own (1 Cor 6:19) that being reconciled to God by the death of His Son, we are saved by His life (Rom 5:10); a new heart is given and new desires; old things are passed away, and we become new creatures (2 Cor 5:17), through faith in Christ Jesus; our wills being surrendered to His holy will, grace reigns through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom 5:21)

Sanctification is experienced in the acceptance of Christ in living faith for justification, in so far as the pardoned sinner, through faith in Christ, is clothed with a measure of His righteousness and receives the Spirit of promise; for, as saith the Apostle, "Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor 6:11) We rejoice to believe that the provisions of God's grace are sufficient to deliver from the power, as well as from the guilt, of sin, and to enable His believing children always to triumph in Christ. (2 Cor 2:14)

How full of encouragement is the declaration, "According to your faith be it unto you." (Matt 9:29) Whosoever submits himself wholly to God, believing and appropriating His promises, and exercising faith in Christ Jesus, will have his heart continually cleansed from all sin, by His precious blood, and, through the renewing, refining power of the Holy Spirit, be kept in conformity to the will of God, will love Him with all his heart, mind, soul and strength, and be able to say, with the Apostle Paul, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." (Rom 8:2) Thus, in its full experience, Sanctification is deliverance from the pollution, nature, and love of sin. To this we are every one called, that we may serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life. (Luke

1:74-75) It was the prayer of the apostle for the believers, "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you who also will do it." (1 Thess 5:23, 24) Yet the most holy Christian is still liable to temptation, is exposed to the subtle assaults of Satan, and can only continue to follow holiness as he humbly watches unto prayer, and is kept in constant dependence upon his Savior, walking in the light (1 John 1:7) in the loving obedience of faith.

The Resurrection and Final Judgment

We believe, according to the Scriptures, that there shall be a resurrection from the dead, both of the just and of the unjust (Acts 24:15), and that God hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness, by Jesus Christ whom He hath ordained. (Acts 17:31) For, as saith the apostle, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." (2 Cor 5:10)

We sincerely believe, not only a resurrection in Christ from the fallen and sinful state here, but a rising and ascending into glory with Him hereafter; that when He at last appears we may appear with Him in glory. But that all the wicked, who live in rebellion against the light of grace, and die finally impenitent, shall come forth to the resurrection of condemnation. And that the soul of every man and woman shall be reserved, in its own distinct and proper being, and shall have its proper body as God is pleased to give it. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body (1 Cor 15:44); that being first which is natural and afterward that which is spiritual. And though it is said, "this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality" (1 Cor 15:53), the change shall be such as will accord with the declaration, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." (1 Cor 15:50) We shall be raised out of all corruption and corruptibility, out of all mortality, and shall be the children of God, being the children of resurrection. (Luke 20:36) (See also Declaration of 1696, Sewell's History, vol. II, 383-384)

"Our citizenship is in heaven" (RV), from whence also we look for the Savior the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself. (Phil 3:20-21)

We believe that the punishment of the wicked and the blessedness of the righteous shall be everlasting, according to the declaration of our compassionate Redeemer, to whom the judgment is committed, "These shall go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Matt 25:46 RV)

Baptism

We would express our continued conviction that our Lord appointed no outward rite or ceremony for observance in His church. We accept every command of our Lord in what we believe to be its genuine import, as absolutely conclusive. The question of the use of outward ordinances is with us a question, not as to the authority of Christ, but as to His real meaning. We reverently believe that, as there is one Lord and one faith, so there is, under the Christian dispensation, but one baptism (Eph 4:4-5), even that whereby all believers are baptized in the one Spirit into the one body. (1 Cor 12:13 RV)

This is not an outward baptism with water, but a spiritual experience; not the putting away of the filth of the flesh (1 Pet 3:21), but that inward work which, by transforming the heart and settling the soul upon Christ, brings forth the answer of a good conscience towards God, but the resurrection of Jesus Christ, in the experience of His love and power, as the

risen and ascended Savior. No baptism in outward water can satisfy the description of the apostle, of being buried with Christ by baptism unto death. (Rom 6:4) It is with the Spirit alone that any can thus be baptized. In this experience the announcement of the Forerunner of our Lord is fulfilled, "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." (Matt 3:11) In this view we accept the commission of our blessed Lord as given in Matthew 28:18, 19 and 20th verses: "And Jesus came to them and spake unto them saying, All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you, and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (RV) This commission, as we believe, was not designed to set up a new ritual under the new covenant, or to connect the initiation into a membership, in its nature essentially spiritual, with a mere ceremony of a typical character. Otherwise it was not possible for the Apostle Paul, who was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostle (2 Cor 11:5), to have disclaimed that which would, in that case, have been of the essence of his commission when he wrote, "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel." (1 Cor 1:17) Whenever an external ceremony is commanded, the particulars, the mode and incidents of that ceremony, become of its essence. There is an utter absence of these particulars in the text before us. Which confirms our persuasion that the commission must be construed in connection with the spiritual power which the risen Lord promised should attend the witness of his apostles and of the church to Him, and which, after Pentecost, so mightily accompanied their ministry of the word and prayer, that those to whom they were sent were introduced into an experience wherein they had a saving knowledge of, and living fellowship with, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The Supper of the Lord

Intimately connected with the conviction already expressed is the view that we have ever maintained as to the true supper of the Lord. We are well aware that our Lord was pleased to make use of a variety of symbolical utterances, but he often gently upbraided His disciples for accepting literally what He had intended only in its spiritual meaning. His teaching, as in His parables or in the command to wash one another's feet, was often in symbols, and ought ever to be received in the light of His own emphatic declaration, "The words that I speak unto you they are spirit and they are life." (John 6:63) The old covenant was full of ceremonial symbols; the new covenant, to which our Savior alluded at the last supper, is expressly declared by the prophet to be "not according to the old." (Jer 31:32, Heb 8:9) We cannot believe that in setting up this new covenant the Lord Jesus intended an institution out of harmony with the spirit of this prophecy. The eating of His body and the drinking of His blood cannot be an outward act. They truly partake of them who habitually rest upon the sufferings and death of their Lord as their only hope, and to whom the indwelling Spirit gives to drink of the fullness that is in Christ. It is this inward and spiritual partaking that is the true supper of the Lord.

The presence of Christ with His church is not designed to be by symbol or representation, but in the real communication of His own Spirit. "I will pray the Father and He shall give you another Comforter, who shall abide with you forever" (John 14:16), convincing of sin, testifying of Jesus, taking of the things of Christ, this blessed Comforter communicates to the believer and to the church, in a gracious, abiding manifestation, the REAL PRESENCE of the Lord. As the Great Remembrancer, through whom the promise is fulfilled, He needs no ritual or priestly intervention in bringing the experience of the true commemoration and communion. "Behold," saith the risen Redeemer, "I stand at the door and knock. If any man hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and sup with him and he with me." (Rev

3:20) In an especial manner, when assembled for congregational worship, are believers invited to the festival of the Savior's peace, and in a united act of faith and love, unfettered by any outward rite or ceremonial, to partake together of the body that was broken and of the blood that was shed for them, without the gates of Jerusalem.

In such a worship they are enabled to understand the words of the apostle as expressive of a sweet and most real experience: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread." (1 Cor 10:16-17)

Public Worship

Worship is the adoring response of the heart and mind to the influence of the Spirit of God. It stands neither in forms nor in the formal disuse of forms: it may be without words as well as with them, but it must be in spirit and in truth. (John 4:24) We recognize the value of silence, not as an end, but as a means toward the attainment of an end; a silence, not of listlessness or of vacant musing, but of holy expectation before the Lord. Having become His adopted children through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is our privilege to meet together and unite in the worship of Almighty God, to wait upon Him for the renewal of our strength, for communion one with another, for the edification of believers in the exercise of various spiritual gifts, and for the declaration of the glad tidings of salvation to the unconverted who may gather with us. This worship depends not upon numbers. Where two or three are gathered together in the name of Christ there is a church, and Christ, the living Head, in the midst of them. Through His mediation without the necessity for any inferior instrumentality, is the Father to be approached and reverently worshiped. The Lord Jesus has forever fulfilled and ended the typical and sacrificial worship under the law, by the offering up of Himself upon the cross for us, once for all. He has opened the door of access into the inner sanctuary, and graciously provided spiritual offerings of the service of his temple, suited to the several conditions of all who worship in spirit and in truth. The broken and the contrite heart, the confession of the soul prostrate before God, the prayer of the afflicted when he is overwhelmed, the earnest wrestling of the spirit, the outpouring of humble thanksgiving, the spiritual song and melody of the heart (Eph 5:19), the simple exercise of faith, the self-denying service of love, these are among the sacrifices which He, our merciful and faithful High Priest, is pleased to prepare, by His Spirit, in the hearts of them that receive Him, and to present with acceptance unto God.

By the immediate operations of the Holy Spirit, He as the Head of the church, alone selects and qualifies those who are to present His messages or engage in other services for Him; and, hence, we cannot commit any formal arrangement to any one in our regular meetings for worship. We are well aware that the Lord has provided a diversity of gifts (1 Cor 12:4-6) for the needs both of the church and of the world, and we desire that the church may feel her responsibility, under the government of her Great Head, in doing her part to foster these gifts, and in making arrangements for their proper exercise.

It is not for individual exaltation, but for mutual profit, that the gifts are bestowed (1 Cor 12:7); and every living church, abiding under the government of Christ, is humbly and thankfully to receive and exercise them, in subjection to her Holy Head. The church that quenches the Spirit and lives to itself alone must die.

We believe the preaching of the Gospel to be one of the chief means, divinely appointed, for the spreading of the glad tidings of life and salvation through our crucified Redeemer, for the awakening and conversion of sinners, and for the comfort and edification of believers. As it is the prerogative of the Great Head of the church alone to select and call the ministers of His Gospel, so we believe that both the gift and the qualification to exercise it must be derived immediately from Him; and that, as in the primitive church, so now also, He confers spiritual gifts upon women as well as upon men, agreeably to the prophecy recited by the apostle Peter, "It shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17), respecting which the apostle declares, "the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." (Acts 2:39) As the gift is freely received so it is to be freely exercised, (Matt 10:8 See Also Acts 20:33- 35) in simple obedience to the will of God.

Spiritual gifts, precious as they are, must not be mistaken for grace; they add to our responsibility, but do not raise the minister above his brethren or sisters. They must be exercised in continued dependence upon our Lord and blessed is that ministry in which man is humbled, and Christ and His grace exalted. "He that is greatest among you," said our Lord and Master, "let him be as the younger; and he that is chief as he that doth serve. I am among you as he that serveth." (Luke 22:26-27)

While the church cannot confer spiritual gifts, it is its duty to recognize and foster them, and to promote their efficiency by all the means in its power. And while, on the one hand, the Gospel should never be preached for money (Acts 8:20, 20:33-35), on the other, it is the duty of the church to make such provision that it shall never be hindered for want of it.

The church, if true to her allegiance, cannot forget her part in the command, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15) Knowing that it is the Spirit of God that can alone prepare and qualify the instruments who fulfill this command, the true disciple will be found still sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening that he may learn, and learning that he may obey. He humbly places himself at his Lord's disposal, and when he hears the call, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" is prepared to respond, in childlike reverence and love, "Here am I, send me." (Isa 6:8)

Prayer and Praise

Prayer is the outcome of our sense of need, and of our continual dependence upon God. He who uttered the invitation, "Ask and it shall be given you," (Matt 7:7) is himself the Mediator and High Priest who, by His Spirit, prompts the petition, and who presents it with the acceptance before God. With such an invitation, prayer becomes the duty and the privilege of all who are called by His name. Prayer is, in the awakened soul, the utterance of the cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13), and, at every stage of the believer's course, prayer is essential to his spiritual life. A life without prayer is a life practically without God. The Christian's life is a continual asking. The thirst that prompts the petition produces, as it is satisfied, still deeper longings, which prepare for yet more bounteous supplies, from Him who delights to bless. Prayer is not confined to the closet. When uttered in response to the prompts of the Holy Spirit, it becomes an important part of public worship, and, whenever the Lord's people meet together in His name, it is their privilege to wait upon Him for the spirit of grace and supplications.

(Zech. 12:10) A life of prayer cannot be other than a life of praise. As the peace of Christ reigns in the church, her living members accept all that they receive, as from His pure bounty, and each day brings them fresh pledges of their Father's love. Satisfied with the goodness of His house, whether as individuals, in families, or in congregations, they will be still praising Him (Ps 84:4), heart answering to heart, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name." (Ps 103:1)

Liberty of Conscience in Relation to the Civil Government

That conscience should be free, and that in matters of religious doctrine and worship man is accountable only to God, are truths which are plainly declared in the New Testament; and which are confirmed by the whole scope of the Gospel, and by the example of our Lord and His disciples. To rule over the conscience, and to command the spiritual allegiance of his creature man, is the high and sacred prerogative of God alone. In religion every act ought to be free. A forced worship is plainly a contradiction in terms, under that dispensation in which the worship of the Father must be in spirit and in truth. (John 4:24)

We have ever maintained that it is the duty of Christians to obey the enactments of civil government, except those which interfere with our allegiance to God. We owe much to its blessings. Through it we enjoy liberty and protection, in connection with law and order. Civil government is a divine ordinance (Rom 13:1, 1 Pet 2:13-16), instituted to promote the best welfare of man, hence magistrates are to be regarded as God's ministers who should be a terror to evildoers and a praise to them that do well. Therefore, it is with us a matter of conscience to render them respect and obedience in the exercise of their proper functions.

Marriage

Marriage is an institution graciously ordained by the Creator Himself, for the help and continuance of the human family. It is not a mere civil contract, and ought never to be entered upon without a reference to the sanction and blessing of Him who ordained it. It is a solemn engagement for the term of life (Matt 19:5-6), designed for the mutual assistance and comfort of both sexes, that they may be helpmeets to each other in things temporal and spiritual. To this end it should imply concurrence in spiritual as well as temporal concerns, and should be entered upon discreetly, soberly, and in the fear of the Lord.

Peace

We feel bound explicitly to avow our unshaken persuasion that all war is utterly incompatible with the plain precepts of our divine Lord and Law-giver, and the whole spirit of His Gospel, and that no plea of necessity or policy, however urgent or peculiar, can avail to release either individuals or nations from the paramount allegiance which they owe to Him who hath said, "Love your enemies." (Matt 5:44, Luke 6:27) In enjoining this love, and the forgiveness of injuries, He who has brought us to Himself has not prescribed for man precepts which are incapable of being carried into practice, or of which the practice is to be postponed until all shall be persuaded to act upon them. We cannot doubt that they are incumbent now, and that we have in the prophetic Scriptures the distinct intimation of their direct application not only to individuals, but to nations also. (Isa 2:4, Micah 4:1) When nations conform their laws to this divine teaching, wars must necessarily cease.

We would, in humility, but in faithfulness to our Lord, express our firm persuasion that all the exigencies of civil government and social order may be met under the banner of the Prince of Peace, in strict conformity with His commands.

Oaths

We hold it to be the inalienable privilege of the disciple of the Lord Jesus that his statements concerning matters of fact within his knowledge should be accepted, under all circumstances, as expressing his belief as to the fact asserted. We rest upon the plain command of our Lord and Master, "Swear not at all" (Matt 5:34); and we believe any departure from this standard to be prejudicial to the cause of truth and to that confidence between man and man, the maintenance of which is indispensable to our mutual well being. This command, in our persuasion, applies not to profane swearing only, but to judicial oaths also. It abrogates any previous permission to the contrary, and is, for the Christian, absolutely conclusive.

The First Day Of The Week

Whilst the remembrance of our Creator ought to be at all times present with the Christian, we would express our thankfulness to our Heavenly Father that He has been pleased to honor the setting apart of one day in seven for the purposes of holy rest, religious duties, and public worship; and we desire that all under our name may avail themselves of this great privilege as those who are called to be risen with Christ, and to seek those things that are above where He sitteth at the right hand of God. (Col 3:1) May the release thus granted from other occupations be diligently improved. On this day of the week especially ought the households of Friends to be assembled for the reading of the Scriptures and for waiting upon the Lord; and we trust that, in a Christianly wise economy of our time and strength, the engagements of the day may be so ordered as not to frustrate the gracious provision thus made for us by our Heavenly Father, or to shut out the opportunity either for public worship or for private retirement and devotional reading.

In presenting this declaration of our Christian faith, we desire that all our members may be afresh encouraged, in humility and devotedness, to renewed faithfulness in fulfilling their part in the great mission of the Church, and through the Church to the world around us, in the name of our Crucified Redeemer. Life *from* Christ, life *in* Christ, must ever be the basis of life *for* Christ. For this we have been created and redeemed, and, by this alone, can the longings of our immortal souls be satisfied.

Friends Southwest Elements Statement

On Friday, January 28, 1994, Friends Southwest adopted an Elements Statement proposed by its Board of Spiritual Life. This statement was the result of over five years of discussion, with wide participation from across the Yearly Meeting. All of those involved sought to honor our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and to find the best way to serve His purposes in defining our Yearly Meeting's operating policy regarding the elements. This statement was the result of that recent, but historic effort - allowing freedom to use the elements with spiritual oversight, guidelines and limits for their use.

The time has come to state our biblical convictions about baptism and communion. Although each local church seems content about its own use or non-use of the elements, we do not all agree with each other about our individual church practices. We do agree in substantial measure about our Friends faith as taught in the Scriptures. Therefore the Board of Spiritual Life recommends to the Representatives that all of our churches teach the following truths.

The All-Sufficient Christ

We affirm that the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself is all sufficient in providing for us everything we need for salvation, worship, life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him. [2 Pet 1:3; Eph 1:3; Phil 3:3]

Baptism

We affirm that the essential baptism is with the Holy Spirit. [Matt 3: 11; 1 Cor 12: 13]

We affirm that the one baptism of Ephesians 4:5 is the same as being baptized into Christ, baptized into His name, baptized into His death, baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. [Matt 28:19; Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27]

We affirm that the one baptism does not necessitate the use of water. [1 Cor 1:13-17 and references above) We affirm that the water, in water baptism, has no cleansing quality upon the inner spirit. [1 Cor 1:13-17 (and references above); 1 Pet 3:21]

We affirm that we are saved only by grace through faith. No outward rite or ritual is necessary for salvation or mandated in scripture. [Eph 2:8-9; 2 Tim 1:9]

We affirm that those who are baptized into Christ by the Holy Spirit, without the use of water, are biblically baptized and need nothing more. We recognize that the use of water baptism has been genuinely meaningful to some. We also recognize that it has hindered some from seeing the true nature of salvation through Jesus Christ.

*See references above.

Communion

We affirm that the experience of living communion with the Lord Jesus Christ involves our entire person and life, and cannot be restricted to a particular ritual or physical observance. [John 6:47-69, (emphasis vs. 63)]

We affirm that in our Lord's last Passover meal with His disciples, He poured new meaning into the annual Jewish observance, namely that they must do it in remembrance of Him. [Matt 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-20, (emphasis vs.19)]

We affirm that living communion with Christ does not necessitate the use of the

physical breaking of bread and drinking of the wine. [1 Cor 12:13; Phil. 2:1; Rev 3:20]

We affirm that any meal that we share with other Christians can serve to proclaim our Lord's death until He comes, and reminds us of our dependence on Christ for spiritual life. We do not find this mandated for Christian worship. [Acts 2:42, 46; 1 Cor 10:14-22, 11:17-34, (emphasis vs. 26)]

We affirm that we are saved by grace through faith and we continue in Christ in the same way. No rite or ritual is necessary for discipleship or Christian maturity, nor is mandated in Scripture. [Eph 2:8-10; Col 2:6; 2 Tim 1:9]

We affirm that those who enjoy living in communion with Christ, without the use of the elements of bread and wine, need nothing more. We recognize that the use of the elements in observing the Lord's Supper has been genuinely meaningful to some. We also recognize that it has hindered some from seeing the true nature of communion with Jesus Christ. [Rom 14:17-18; Col 2:16-17 and references above]

We affirm the truths that the living Christ has revealed to Friends by the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures, but we deny any sense of spiritual superiority that would claim to make us better than other members of Christ's universal church.

Guidelines for Use of Water Baptism and Communion

Guidelines for the use of water baptism and communion with the elements by Friends Churches in Southwest Yearly Meeting.

Friends Church Southwest Yearly Meeting permits the provision of water baptism and communion with the elements by our churches. This permission does not require any of our churches to provide them nor does it constitute a recommendation to do so. We believe the best policy will be one that strongly upholds the truth that these ceremonies form no essential part of Christian worship, and that the reality to which they point is immeasurably more satisfying.

The adoption or continued use of water baptism and communion with the elements should occur after approval and discussion by the pastoral leadership and the local body of elders. Pastors and elders should take care to preserve unity in the local church. The decision to practice water baptism and communion with the elements should be made in accordance with the Criteria and Queries on the Elements. The Yearly Meeting Elders shall be informed of the local church's decision and any further changes in practice.

The Yearly Meeting Superintendent, elders or approved representatives may counsel any pastor, teacher, group or local church whose teaching appears to not be in accordance with this document and the approved Elements Statement. Further action will be determined by the elders.

When teaching on baptism or communion in a Friends church or other group associated with Friends, pastors and teachers may not deviate from the intent of the approved Elements Statement. Written documents or statements of faith may not deviate from the intent of the approved Elements Statement.

In public announcements and written advertisements for the use of the elements, care

should be taken that these are not presented as required activities for church attendees, and that participation or nonparticipation is completely voluntary.

Each participant shall receive adequate explanation of the Friends belief that neither water baptism nor communion with the elements is necessary or sufficient for salvation, worship, discipleship or the Christian life, in accord with the approved Elements Statement and *Faith and Practice*.

Since such a wide diversity of practices for the use of the elements exists among Bible believing Christians, no single format or method may be adopted by any local Friends church as the “best” or “most correct.”

Any use of the elements shall be done in a way to provide non-use in the same service. The service is to be conducted in a way that makes neither those who use the elements, nor those who do not use them, feel out of place.

Criteria and Queries on the Elements

To evaluate any proposed or ongoing use of water baptism or communion with the elements in our churches, we offer the following criteria and queries as our standard.

Criteria

1. Neither water baptism nor communion with the elements should be practiced because other Christian churches or denominations use them.
2. Neither water baptism nor communion with the elements should be practiced because some present attendees or members of a congregation may choose to leave the church if they are not used.
3. Neither water baptism nor communion with the elements should be practiced to quiet the criticism of those Christians who claim that those who do not practice them are spiritually immature, disobedient to Christ or unsaved.
4. Neither water baptism nor communion with the elements should be practiced as a rite or ceremony in the church that distracts from the spiritual nature of our worship or from our spiritual relationship with the living Christ.
5. Neither water baptism nor communion with the elements should establish two classes of Christians in the church - those who use them and those who do not. Neither the use nor non-use may be a requirement for membership or leadership

Queries

1. Is any proposed use of water baptism or communion with the elements due to the moving of the Holy Spirit among members of the congregation? Is any provision for water baptism or communion with the elements under the ongoing leadership of Christ?
2. Will the practice of water baptism or communion with the elements build the unity of the congregation? Will ample opportunity for participation in worship be

provided without the use of the elements?

3. Will the Friends' testimony on the spiritual nature of baptism in Christ, and communion with Christ, be clearly evident in the life, teaching and worship of the congregation?
4. Is the practice of water baptism, or communion with the elements, in response to a felt need of the local congregation rather than a continuation of a familiar form or habit?
5. Will the practice of water baptism, or communion with the elements, strengthen the living relationship of those in the congregation with Christ?

Tools for Individual and Church Accountability

Friends have a tradition of reading "Queries." These probing questions stimulate individuals, leaders, or people in church business meetings to ask themselves how well they are doing. The goal is to stimulate one another to love, good works and Christ-like living. A modern term for "Queries" is accountability questions.

Leaders Accountability Questions

1. Have we prayerfully listened for the voice of the good shepherd, discerned what God was doing and guided our church body where its head, our Lord Jesus Christ, led us?
2. Have we served others by doing good? Have we proclaimed the gospel, fulfilling the Great Commission in the spirit of the Great Commandment?
3. Have we obeyed the Scriptures, by giving correction to those who have gone astray?
4. Have we built unity for important steps of faith, asking for church-wide prayer and congregational feedback?
5. Have we tried to squelch gossip, and instead encouraged the disgruntled to talk to the right person in the right spirit?
6. Have we dealt fairly with conflict and tried to bring about biblical reconciliation?
7. Have we stayed active, personally and corporately, in sharing our faith, making disciples and developing leaders? Have we encouraged all of our people to use their unique spiritual gifts?
8. Have we faithfully taught the word and truth of God, including those testimonies which we as Friends have been called to uphold?

Individual Accountability Questions

These questions are designed primarily for groups of two or three who meet weekly for

accountability, Bible study and prayer. Some were taken from questions used by Neil Cole who in turn adapted them from Charles Swindoll and Howard Hendricks. Others were adapted from "queries" used by Friends for many years. Please note that some emphasize what we should do, while others emphasize what we should not do.

1. Have you verbally shared your faith in Christ this week?
2. Have you found joy in the Lord through prayer, Bible reading, public worship, and a lifestyle of giving thanks in all circumstances? Were you in worship last Sunday and faithful in ministry to your church this week?
3. Have you given Christ control of all your activities, entertainment and imagination?
4. Have you forgiven everyone who hurt you or disappointed you, seeking to resolve any conflict with love and understanding?
5. Have you damaged another person by your words, either behind their back or face to face? Have you kept away from racist jokes and comments?
6. Have you avoided emotional or sexual intimacy outside of marriage this week? Have you engaged in lustful attitudes, pornography or sexually explicit communication?
7. Have you actively nourished your marriage, family and friends in Christ, making your home a pleasant, peaceful place? Have you kept marriage and family in balance with work and career?
8. Have you given to Christ all you own and all you influence? Have you been completely above reproach in your financial dealings, prompt in paying your debts, careful to live within your income, honoring Christ with tithes and offerings?
9. Have you succumbed to a bad habit, personal addiction or kept any kind of idol in your heart, such as greed for money? Have you abstained from the use of harmful substances such as alcohol, tobacco, illegal drugs and from the abuse of good things, such as food and medications?
10. Have you deceived anyone, told half-truths or outright lies this week?
11. Have you taken a day of rest and restoration this week?

Congregation Accountability Questions

1. Have we witnessed effectively for Christ through our church's events, programs, retreats, camps, and organized evangelistic efforts? Have we assimilated new believers into our fellowship and helped them grow in the faith and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ?
2. Have we built loyalty for placing weekly worship as a higher priority than

- pleasure, youth sports, business or recreation? Have we encouraged our people to worship and serve in one congregation rather than becoming consumers of programs offered by different churches?
3. Has our congregational life together revealed an intense desire to obey the written and living word of God?
 4. Have we spent time in silent listening to the Holy Spirit in both personal corporate worship?
 5. Have we prayed publicly and often for God to send out workers from among us into his harvest fields?
 6. Have we honored and protected those neglected by society – the unborn, poor, prisoners, orphans, widows, abandoned, disabled, disadvantaged, addicted, institutionalized, homeless, and/or hungry? Since we cannot do everything, have we done something?
 7. Have we taught and practiced spiritual disciplines – Bible reading, prayer, fasting, witnessing, service, worship, silence, solitude?
 8. Have we honored our pastors and staff with love and appreciation, making their ministry a joy, not a drudgery?
 9. Have we honored the counsel of our elders and pastors? When we were not in unity, did we find the mind of Christ through discussion and prayer rather than through politicking and voting?
 10. Have we encouraged and built each other up, speaking only what is helpful? Have we resolved conflict effectively by avoiding gossip and encouraging critics to talk with the right person in the right spirit?
 11. Have we encouraged people in the church to use their spiritual gifts and to work together in teams for the cause of Christ?
 12. Have we called for dedication to God of our time, talent and treasure, offering control of our money and our resources to Christ?
 13. Have we prayed for those in authority? Have we encouraged people to vote and to carry out civic responsibilities in the name of Christ?
 14. Have we taught and practiced non-violence? Have we placed the kingdom of God above the kingdom of this world, honoring the convictions of those who are conscientious objectors to war? Have we made every effort to live in peace with everyone, including those who have hurt us or with whom we disagree?

Healthy Church Values and Behaviors

Created 2015 by EFC-SW Elders

Centrality of Christ, the Living Word and Authority of Written Word

[Jn 5:39-40, 2 Tim. 3:16]

- We **order our lives** and ministries around the belief that the Bible is our **final authority** in all matters of faith and practice.
- Our **preaching and teaching** in all settings reflects, relevantly and creatively, the centrality of Christ to all of life.
- We equip people to grow in their ability to **study and apply** biblical truth in ways that lead to biblically **integrated** lives.
- We **live out the reality of Jesus' presence** right here, right now, teaching us to live out and usher in the Kingdom of God, right here, right now.

Observation and Discussion Questions

List practical and biblical ways this is vital for a healthy church.

1. How would your church look and behave differently if this value were completely true in your setting?
2. What are you currently doing that demonstrates this value within your church and or people?
3. Where are you weaker than you should be in this area?
4. What have you tried to help strengthen this value in your church that did not work?
5. What are some things you can measure that will help you determine if you are growing healthier in this area?

Life transforming walk with Jesus by the Holy Spirit

[John 3:3,30; Phil 2:1-11, Phil. 1:6]

- We **teach** our people how to be **attentive** to Christ in all circumstances.
(listening disposition, insight)
- We **live out** the radical nature of the message and mission of Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

- We equip people to grow in the use of the **spiritual disciplines** of prayer and fasting, silence and solitude, study and meditation, and service, sacrifice and stewardship.
- We order our lives and ministries around the belief **transformation occurs only within community** – a place of encouragement, confession and accountability.

Observation and Discussion Questions

List practical and biblical ways this is vital for a healthy church.

1. How would your church look and behave differently if this value were completely true in your setting?
2. What are you currently doing that demonstrates this value within your church and or people?
3. Where are you weaker than you should be in this area?
4. What have you tried to help strengthen this value in your church that did not work?
5. What are some things you can measure that will help you determine if you are growing healthier in this area?

Intentional Disciple-making

[Matthew 28:18-20]

- We **care** about people who do not yet know Christ and therefore serve and love them as a priority.
- We have identifiable **pathways** for evangelism, assimilation discipleship and leadership development to take place in our ministries and offer public **opportunities for new levels of commitment.**
- We equip people to grow in their ability to **share their faith** confidently as God-birthed opportunities arise.
- Disciple-making is evangelism and discipleship. Disciple-making is a process of proclamation and demonstration of the gospel that leads to people to understand and embrace the kingdom of God and to grow leadership and multiplication.

Observation and Discussion Questions

List practical and biblical ways this is vital for a healthy church.

1. How would your church look and behave differently if this value were completely true in your setting?
2. What are you currently doing that demonstrates this value within your church and or people?
3. Where are you weaker than you should be in this area?
4. What have you tried to help strengthen this value in your church that did not work?
5. What are some things you can measure that will help you determine if you are growing healthier in this area?

Transforming communities through active compassion, mercy and justice ministries

[Micah 6:8]

- We are burdened for hurting people in our community and beyond.
- We have identifiable pathways for compassion, mercy and justice ministries to take place.
- We equip people to grow in their ability to see and address the hurts and the causes of hurt in our communities

Observation and Discussion Questions

List practical and biblical ways this is vital for a healthy church.

1. How would your church look and behave differently if this value were completely true in your setting?
2. What are you currently doing that demonstrates this value within your church and or people?
3. Where are you weaker than you should be in this area?
4. What have you tried to help strengthen this value in your church that did not work?
5. What are some things you can measure that will help you determine if you are growing healthier in this area?

Globally and Regionally minded and engaged

[Acts 1:8]

- We believe local churches must have vision for reproduction beyond merely their own growth.
- We raise the sights of (or **cast vision** to) our members beyond our congregation and community by developing a Biblical worldview and often pray for and reference global matters and new church development.
- We have **identifiable pathways** to support the cause of Christ globally through missions and locally/regionally through church planting.
- We equip people to grow in their ability **to participate** in missions and church planting personally, spiritually and financially.

Observation and Discussion Questions

List practical and biblical ways this is vital for a healthy church.

1. How would your church look and behave differently if this value were completely true in your setting?
2. What are you currently doing that demonstrates this value within your church and or people?
3. Where are you weaker than you should be in this area?
4. What have you tried to help strengthen this value in your church that did not work?
5. What are some things you can measure that will help you determine if you are growing healthier in this area?

Embraces community and connectedness on all levels

[Acts 2:42-47]

- We are **better together** than we are by ourselves and therefore are **connected intentionally** on individual, leadership and church levels in community.
- We understand that our love for one another is a powerful testimony to the deity of Jesus.
- We love each other as we are, not as we should be. (environment for confession, acceptance, and accountability)
- We share life together beyond the worship service.
- We **equip people** to lead and multiply **small groups** for community, growth, and service.

Observation and Discussion Questions

List practical and biblical ways this is vital for a healthy church.

1. How would your church look and behave differently if this value were completely true in your setting?
2. What are you currently doing that demonstrates this value within your church and or people?
3. Where are you weaker than you should be in this area?
4. What have you tried to help strengthen this value in your church that did not work?
5. What are some things you can measure that will help you determine if you are growing healthier in this area?

Heartfelt worship

[Psalm 138:1a; John 4:23]

- Everything we do **flows out of worship** (e.g. business meetings, decision making, and service etc.)
- Our corporate worship is more about participation and engagement with God rather than merely quality performance.
- Our corporate Worship reflects **careful preparation and relevancy in eliciting responses to God** such as adoration, praise, humility, silence, service and commitment. (we value simple excellence)
- People leave worship having **encountered God's heart** and are changed, challenged and motivated to extend worship and the message **beyond the walls** of the church building.

Observation and Discussion Questions

List practical and biblical ways this is vital for a healthy church.

1. How would your church look and behave differently if this value were completely true in your setting?
2. What are you currently doing that demonstrates this value within your church and or people?
3. Where are you weaker than you should be in this area?
4. What have you tried to help strengthen this value in your church that did not work?
5. What are some things you can measure that will help you determine if you are growing healthier in this area?

Simple, Sacrificial and generous living and giving

[Romans 12:1-8]

- We believe in simplicity.
- We help people discover, **develop and deploy** their spiritual gifts.
- We regularly, graciously, and unapologetically teach on the importance of financial **stewardship** in spiritual maturity
- We have many examples of **lifestyle choices** being made on the basis of stewardship and the priority God plays in the lives of our members.

Observation and Discussion Questions

List practical and biblical ways this is vital for a healthy church.

1. How would your church look and behave differently if this value were completely true in your setting?
2. What are you currently doing that demonstrates this value within your church and or people?
3. Where are you weaker than you should be in this area?
4. What have you tried to help strengthen this value in your church that did not work?
5. What are some things you can measure that will help you determine if you are growing healthier in this area?

Fosters godly, growing and learning culture for leaders

[Hebrews 13:7]

- All of our leaders serve with **character, competence, and conviction.**
- Interaction between leaders and congregation is one of unity, humility, trust and **interdependence.** This is the disposition between leaders in sister churches, as well. That is, people trust leaders and leaders trust those they serve.
- We **identify and train godly leaders** for all dimensions of our ministry.
- Pastoral leaders focus on equipping people and healthy churches.
Congregations release those who serve them to lead out of their giftedness.
- We live out a **learning culture** that enables people to grow in their giftedness and ministry roles.

Observation and Discussion Questions

List practical and biblical ways this is vital for a healthy church.

1. How would your church look and behave differently if this value were completely true in your setting?
2. What are you currently doing that demonstrates this value within your church and or people?
3. Where are you weaker than you should be in this area?
4. What have you tried to help strengthen this value in your church that did not work?
5. What are some things you can measure that will help you determine if you are growing healthier in this area?

Functional and fruitful systems and structures

[Exodus 18:13-26, Acts 6:1-7]

- We articulate a compelling, Christ-honoring **vision** for our church.
- We **embrace evaluation** as normal and natural and work through conflict constructively.
- Our relational structures include **corporate discernment**, releasing **strong leadership**, and **active participation** by all. Our structures and systems are intended to mobilize people and ministry and not merely control and manage them.
- We live according to the principle that church health and effectiveness rises and falls on the quality of interpersonal relationships, understanding that these relationships rise and fall on the quality of communication.
- We conduct human resource, volunteer, legal and financial **systems** with **excellence and integrity**.
- Our organizational structures recognize that we are a relational people. We employ appropriate group discernment, conflict resolution, and organization around spiritual giftedness that will catapult us toward biblical unity.

Observation and Discussion Questions

List practical and biblical ways this is vital for a healthy church.

1. How would your church look and behave differently if this value were completely true in your setting?

2. What are you currently doing that demonstrates this value within your church and or people?
3. Where are you weaker than you should be in this area?
4. What have you tried to help strengthen this value in your church that did not work?
5. What are some things you can measure that will help you determine if you are growing healthier in this area?

Final Thoughts

1. Which Values do you feel are strongest?
2. Which Values do you see as needing help most?
3. After thinking through this list, Would you classify your church as
 - a. In crisis,
 - b. In need,
 - c. Plateaued
 - d. Healthy but need some support
 - e. Healthy and reproducing
4. What are two action steps you think would help you get healthier?

Basic Best Fiduciary Practices for Ministry

While running a ministry is different from running a for-profit business there are some basic concepts that will help protect our organizations, our ministries, and our people.

1. No single person alone should have the control or knowledge of the finances. Financials should be shared no less than quarterly with the Elder board or Trustee board, if available.
2. A working finance team that reviews income and expenses on a monthly basis is helpful and provides wisdom. This should include reviewing the bank statement.
3. Pastors and/or any of their family members should not be signers on the church's bank accounts.
4. Large checks should require two (2) signatures whenever possible – while this may be difficult in smaller churches, it is worth the effort.

