

Concerns, Leadings & Testimonies: <http://www.pym.org/faith-and-practice/application-of-friends-testimonies/concerns-leadings-testimonies/>

Friends are sometimes called “practical mystics” because Quaker worship has been the wellspring for service in the community and world. An old story relates the whispered question asked by someone attending meeting for worship for the first time and puzzled by the absence of overt activity: “When does the service begin?” The response: “When the meeting for worship ends.”

Concerns and Leadings

The impetus for service is often a concern, which, as Friends use the word, is a quickening sense of the need to do something or to demonstrate sympathetic interest in an individual or group, as a result of what is felt to be a direct intimation of God’s will. A concern as an impetus to action arises out of Friends’ belief that the realm of God can be realized here and now, not just in another place or time. A concern may emerge as an unexpected insight from prayerful study of a problem or situation, such as a concern to support national policies which promote international peace. It may also grow from an anxious interest in the welfare of a person or group that may result in inquiries or practical support.

When it initially arises, a concern may not yet be linked to a proposed course of action, but may simply be a troubled sense that something is awry. Action, when it follows, is often the result of a leading, a sense of being drawn or called by God in a particular direction or toward a particular course of action. Friends speak of “feeling led” or “being called.” The leading may be short-term and specific in its fulfillment, or it may involve transformation of one’s life and the life of the Meeting.

Friends have long believed it important that leadings be tested before action is taken. The process of testing is a form of spiritual discipline for Friends. A Friend’s concern and consequent leading may be an individual matter—something which one person is called to attend to without requiring assistance. In many cases, however, a Friend may receive guidance, aid, and encouragement from other members of the Meeting. Therefore it has long been the practice of Friends to inform their Meeting when they feel major concerns laid upon them.