

A Consolidated History of Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) and a Detailed Plan for Mutual Aid Practices

Executive Summary

This report provides a comprehensive historical analysis of the Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) (IYM(C)), examining its past social welfare activities through the specific conceptual framework of mutual aid versus traditional charity. The primary objective is to discern the prevailing patterns of support historically practiced by IYM(C) and to identify instances that exemplify either charity or mutual aid. This historical understanding then serves as the foundation for devising a strategic plan to reorient Iowa Quakers towards a more explicit mutual aid community.

The historical review of IYM(C)'s social welfare initiatives reveals a long-standing commitment to compassion and service, with many activities predominantly aligning with charitable models. Examples include the establishment of institutions like White's Iowa Manual Labor Institute for orphaned children and aid to freedmen through education.¹ However, the analysis also identifies significant historical instances that embody mutual aid principles, notably the IYM(C)'s active involvement in the Underground Railroad and the operation of the Scattergood Hostel for European refugees during World War II. Both of these initiatives demonstrated reciprocal participation and collective responsibility.¹

A central finding is that while IYM(C) possesses a commendable history of benevolent action, a deliberate reorientation towards mutual aid would more fully actualize its foundational Quaker principles of equality, community, and direct participation.¹ This reorientation is presented not as a departure from IYM(C)'s heritage but as an evolution that aligns its spiritual convictions with contemporary social justice imperatives. Such a shift moves beyond merely alleviating symptoms of societal problems to fostering collective empowerment and holistic flourishing.¹ The strategic plan proposed focuses on deepening theological understanding, fostering grassroots community engagement, establishing robust resource-sharing networks, and actively addressing systemic inequities.¹ This approach is designed to resonate with the community by framing the proposed changes as a natural progression of their deeply held beliefs, thereby reducing potential internal resistance to the shifts.

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1. Introduction: Reclaiming Quaker Witness through Mutual Aid

1.1 Purpose and Scope of the Report

This report undertakes a comprehensive historical analysis of the Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) (IYM(C)), examining its past social welfare activities through the specific conceptual framework of mutual aid versus charity. The primary objective is to discern the prevailing patterns of support historically practiced by IYM(C) and to identify instances that exemplify either charity or mutual aid. This historical understanding will then serve as the foundation for devising a strategic plan to reorient Iowa Quakers towards a more explicit mutual aid community.¹

The analysis is strictly confined to the Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) and explicitly excludes any examination of the Iowa Yearly Meeting (Friends United Meeting).¹ By providing this historical context and forward-looking plan, the report aims to serve as a tool for IYM(C) to deepen its historical witness for justice and actively build a more equitable and compassionate world, rooted in solidarity and collective liberation.¹

1.2 Conceptual Framework: Mutual Aid vs. Charity – A Foundational Distinction

A clear conceptual framework is essential for accurately analyzing historical practices. The terms "mutual aid" and "charity," while often conflated, represent distinct approaches to supporting individuals and communities.¹ The fundamental difference between these two lies in how power is conceived and distributed within the support dynamic.

Defining Mutual Aid

Mutual aid is defined as a grassroots, reciprocal, and horizontal approach where individuals and communities collaboratively share resources to meet shared needs.¹ This model operates on the principle that everyone possesses needs that should be

met, and simultaneously, everyone has something valuable to offer to help meet the needs of others, thereby activating all participants as part of the solution.¹ Resources are shared unconditionally, a key differentiator from charity, which often imposes conditions such as means testing or grant stipulations.¹

Core principles underpinning mutual aid include collective responsibility, cooperation, and a deliberate focus on addressing systemic issues to build long-term community resilience.¹ Unlike many traditional philanthropic organizations, mutual aid groups are typically not tax-exempt under Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3), which means they are not eligible for grants from donor-advised funds. This structural difference underscores their independence from conventional charitable frameworks.¹

The historical origins of mutual aid are deeply rooted in the work of 19th-century anarchist theorists such as Peter Kropotkin, who argued that mutual aid was as, if not more, influential than competition in guiding the evolution of biological species and human societies.¹ For Kropotkin, mutual aid is both an explanatory mechanism for existing social changes and an aspiration for ethical living in solidarity, aiming for holistic flourishing rather than individual advantage, pushing back against the ingrained historical violence of capitalism and authoritarian governance.¹ This connection to anti-authoritarian thought and its role in marginalized communities' survival against oppression establishes mutual aid's transformative, systemic-change orientation, aligning it more deeply with Quaker prophetic witness than simple charity. This is not merely a temporary response to crises but a foundational aspect of human interaction, moving beyond competitive paradigms and dependency on external authorities to cultivate collective agency.¹ It aims to build a future characterized by justice, equality, equity, and freedom in the immediate present.¹

Furthermore, mutual aid has a profound and long history within marginalized communities, particularly the African American community, who historically pooled their resources to form mutual aid clubs due to pervasive racism and segregation.¹ In contemporary understanding, Dean Spade identifies three key facets: 1) it addresses survival needs while simultaneously building an understanding of the root causes of inequity; 2) it functions as a mobilization tactic for building solidarity around movements for political and social transformation; and 3) it is organized through direct participation and collective action. This framework highlights mutual aid as "survival work" practiced in conjunction with broader social change movements.¹

Defining Charity

In contrast, charity is typically characterized as a top-down and unidirectional approach where assistance, resources, or services are provided by individuals or organizations to those deemed "in need".¹ This model often involves conditions for accessing help, such as means testing or specific grant stipulations. Recipients are generally seen as beneficiaries of generosity, and the relationship tends to be hierarchical, with donors or institutions providing to recipients.¹

The principles guiding charity are often philanthropy, compassion, and the alleviation of immediate needs. The focus is on one-way giving, which, while providing temporary relief, may not necessarily address underlying structural issues or empower communities to build long-term resilience.¹ Historically, the rise of the centralized State actively suppressed community-based mutual support structures, promoting individualism and positioning charity as a means to "soften" the harsh effects of competition.¹ Charity typically establishes a hierarchical divide between those who provide assistance and those who receive it, often with implicit conditions, thereby fostering a sense of dependency and paternalism. It frequently operates within, and by extension, reinforces existing power structures, often acting as a stopgap measure that addresses symptoms without challenging root causes.¹ **This distinction highlights that adopting mutual aid by IYM(C) is not merely a shift in *what* they do, but a profound shift in *how* they relate to and empower others, moving from being a benevolent provider to a co-participant and facilitator.**

"Principle of Charity" (Philosophical Context)

It is crucial to differentiate the social welfare concept of charity from the philosophical "principle of charity." The latter is a methodological principle in philosophy and rhetoric that requires interpreting a speaker's statements in the most rational and strongest possible way. Its goal is to avoid attributing irrationality, logical fallacies, or falsehoods to others' statements when a coherent, rational interpretation is available.¹ This philosophical principle, while promoting understanding and fair discourse, does not endorse or critique the practice of top-down benevolent giving in a social welfare context.¹

The following table provides a concise summary of the fundamental distinctions between mutual aid and charity:

Table 1: Mutual Aid vs. Charity

Criterion	Mutual Aid	Charity
Source of Help	Community-led, Grassroots	Institutional, Top-down
Relationship Dynamic	Horizontal, Equal, Reciprocal	Giver/Receiver, Hierarchical
Goal	Liberation, Collective Systemic Change, Meeting Needs	Symptom Alleviation, Temporary Relief, Alleviating Suffering
Underlying Philosophy	Solidarity, Shared Responsibility, Collective Agency	Benevolence, Pity, Individual Goodness
Power Structure	Decentralized, Autonomous	Centralized, Hierarchical
Outcome	Self-Reliance, Empowerment, New Social Relations	Dependency, Reinforces Status Quo

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2. Historical Trajectory of Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative): A Lens on Aid Practices

2.1 Origins and Core Tenets of IYM(C)

The Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) (IYM(C)) has a rich history rooted in the mid-17th century Christian movement of the Religious Society of Friends in England.¹ Its presence in Iowa dates back to 1835, with the first Monthly Meeting established in Salem in 1838.¹ The term "Conservative" in its name signifies its commitment to conserving the Friends tradition as it was believed and practiced in the mid-19th century, aligning with the Wilburite branch of Quakers.¹ The IYM(C) was formally established as a distinct entity in 1877, following a "conservative separation" from the broader Iowa Yearly Meeting, primarily due to differing views on evangelistic methods and a desire to uphold the "old order" of Quaker practices.¹

The core mission and guiding principles of IYM(C) are deeply rooted in its faith tradition. A foundational belief is the concept of "That of God" in all persons, experienced as the Inner Light, the Holy Spirit, or the Divine Center within every individual. This presence enables intimate communion with God without intermediaries, guiding and inspiring Friends through prayer.¹ This belief in the inherent divine spark within each person lays a theological groundwork for both charitable action and mutual aid, as it underscores the worth and potential of every human being. This implies that IYM(C)'s historical actions, whether charitable or mutual aid, were not contradictory to Quaker theology but rather different manifestations of it. The current imperative is to argue that mutual aid more fully actualizes the radical implications of this core belief, particularly regarding equality and agency.

Friends also emphasize discerning Truth through the Inner Light, acknowledging that complete Truth is beyond any single person's grasp and human frailties can limit understanding. A greater understanding of Truth is sought through sharing discernments with humility and openness to being mistaken or, by divine grace, revealing Truth.¹ This collective discernment process, applied to both personal and corporate decision-making, aims to follow God's will and fosters a worshipful

approach to uncovering Truth.¹ The "Meeting for Worship" is considered the "heart" of the Religious Society of Friends, where Friends gather in "active, Expectant Silence" to experience communion with the Divine. This fellowship is a corporate experience, with each participant aiding and strengthening others in their spiritual seeking.¹ Furthermore, intimacy with the Divine transforms Friends, calling them to a distinct way of life referred to as their "testimony," which guides their care for each other, corporate practices, and witness to humanity.¹ These tenets suggest an inherent inclination towards community support, whether through direct, reciprocal care or through benevolent outreach.

A key mechanism for internal reflection and community accountability within Conservative Friends is the use of "Queries".¹ These are questions read at the local monthly meeting level, with higher levels summarizing the answers. Traditionally, queries inquired into the status and needs of persecuted Friends, later evolving to include matters of faith and discipline. This practice inherently fosters a degree of internal self-assessment regarding community well-being and adherence to principles of care.¹ The emphasis on "collective discernment" and "corporate experience" in "Meeting for Worship," along with the use of "Queries" for internal accountability, suggests that IYM(C) already possesses inherent structural and spiritual predispositions towards the horizontal, participatory nature of mutual aid.¹ This indicates that the barrier to adopting external mutual aid might be less about fundamental philosophical incompatibility and more about extending existing internal practices outward, as IYM(C) already has the foundational practices for mutual aid within its spiritual and governance structures.

2.2 Early Forms of Community Support (Pre-1877 Separation): Charity and Nascent Mutual Aid

Prior to the 1877 separation, the broader Iowa Yearly Meeting engaged in various forms of community support, some of which clearly align with charity, while others exhibit strong elements of mutual aid.¹

Internal Support Mechanisms

The concept of "Mutual Care" is explicitly articulated in the IYM(C)'s "Advices and Queries," emphasizing that Friends consider the meeting to be a family where the welfare of each individual is of utmost concern.¹ This advice highlights listening to one

another with openness of heart, sharing pain as well as joy, and making it easier to ask for and accept help. The statement, "Each of us is both giver and receiver, ready to help and to accept help," directly reflects a core principle of mutual aid: reciprocity and collective responsibility within the community.¹ This internal dynamic, rooted in spiritual conviction, fosters a horizontal relationship where all members are seen as having needs and contributions.

Historically, the "Meeting for Sufferings" in British Yearly Meeting, established around 1675, served as an executive committee to provide relief for Friends and their families suffering from persecution.¹ While this specific body's direct activities within early Iowa Quakerism are not detailed, the underlying principle of collective support for those facing hardship is a clear precursor to internal mutual aid practices. The early queries, which ascertained the status and needs of persecuted Friends, further underscore this internal focus on collective well-being and shared vulnerability.¹

External Social Welfare Initiatives

The Iowa Yearly Meeting, before the conservative separation, engaged in several significant external initiatives, demonstrating a commitment to broader social welfare.

- **White's Iowa Manual Labor Institute (1856):** This institution was founded by Josiah White, a member of the Society of Friends, through a \$20,000 bequest to establish a "Manual Labor School" near Salem, Iowa, for the benefit of "poor children, white, colored and Indian".¹ The will stipulated the purchase and improvement of a 1,440-acre tract of land.¹ Initially managed by the Indiana Yearly Meeting, the trust was transferred to the Iowa Yearly Meeting in 1864.¹ The institute aimed to be a "Nursery for the poor children of our State without regard to sect or color," specifically for those "such as have not the means to procure schooling, board and clothing themselves".¹ It focused on providing "industrious business habits, and high moral principles".¹ While driven by compassionate motives, White's Institute largely operated as a charitable endeavor. It was a top-down provision of services for "poor children," funded by a bequest and managed by the Yearly Meeting, later even leased to the state as a reform school.¹ The emphasis was on "rescuing" and "fitting" children for life, implying a benefactor-beneficiary relationship rather than a reciprocal exchange of resources or collective decision-making with the recipients.¹ The institution's reliance on legislative aid further highlights its integration into a more traditional, institutionalized welfare model.¹
- **Underground Railroad Involvement:** Iowa Friends played an active and significant role in the Underground Railroad, helping enslaved people escape

from Southern states to freedom in the North or Canada.¹ This involvement was driven by a deep religious conviction that slavery was morally wrong, leading Friends to act against the institution "even in the face of danger and persecution".¹ Quakers served as "conductors" who guided freedom seekers and "station agents" who provided "safe houses".¹ This engagement strongly exemplifies mutual aid. The relationship between Quakers and freedom seekers was inherently reciprocal, built on solidarity and shared risk. Freedom seekers provided the impetus and courage of their escape, while Quakers offered shelter, guidance, and resources, often at great personal legal risk due to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.¹ The "Grandfather" story from Dallas County, where a Quaker family hid two young women and defied a slave catcher, illustrates the direct, participatory, and high-stakes nature of this collective action.¹ This was not a one-way provision of charity but a collaborative effort to dismantle a systemic injustice, aligning with Dean Spade's facets of mutual aid: addressing survival needs, building solidarity for social transformation, and organizing through direct participation.¹

- **Aid to Freedmen (Post-Emancipation):** Following the Emancipation Proclamation, Iowa Yearly Meeting Friends demonstrated a concern for the freedmen, aiding in the education of Black people in the South over a period of 34 years.¹ This assistance involved "giving freely of money, possessions and services as teachers".¹ Other Quaker groups, such as the Hicksite Quakers' Friends Association for the Aid and Elevation of the Freedmen and the Orthodox Quaker group Friends' Freedmen's Association, also provided charitable assistance to recently freed slaves.¹ While this effort was undoubtedly compassionate and vital, it largely fits the definition of charity. It involved the provision of resources (money, possessions) and services (teachers) from a benevolent group to a recipient group, primarily focused on alleviating immediate needs for education and social integration.¹ Although the intent was to empower, the structure appears to have been more unidirectional, with the Quakers acting as providers of aid rather than engaging in a reciprocal, horizontal exchange of resources or co-creation of solutions with the freedmen themselves.
- **Indian Affairs:** Iowa Friends were involved in Indian affairs, helping to organize the Associated Executive Committee of Friends on Indian Affairs.¹ Iowa Yearly Meeting was even given Central Superintendency of Kansas and the Indian Territory by President Grant, with Enoch Hoag as its first superintendent.¹ Friends supplied workers and material aid to the Oklahoma Indian Missions through the years.¹ This involvement, while framed as a "sense of justice" and a desire to "not countenance the trend of government to exterminate the Indian race" ¹, was deeply problematic and largely charitable in its underlying philosophy, often

veering into paternalism. Quakers, as individuals and yearly meetings, were instrumental in conceptualizing and carrying out the cultural assimilation and Indian education policies of the U.S. government, including the Grant administration's "Peace Policy".¹ The goals were to replace corrupt Indian agents with religious men who would educate children in Christian doctrine, the Three R's, and practical skills, turning them away from Native cultures and towards European American lifestyles.¹ This included involvement in Indian boarding schools, where children were forcibly removed from their families, punished for speaking Native languages, and banned from traditional practices, leading to lasting damage.¹ This approach, despite its stated benevolent intentions, was inherently top-down, imposed conditions, and aimed at transforming the recipients to fit a dominant cultural norm, clearly distinguishing it from mutual aid's principles of solidarity and self-determination.

2.3 Post-1877 Separation and Evolving Practices

The 1877 "Conservative Separation" marked a significant point in the IYM(C)'s history, driven by a desire to preserve traditional Quaker practices against the rise of evangelistic methods.¹ This emphasis on preserving a distinct identity influenced its subsequent social engagements.

- **Scattergood Friends School and Farm:** Established in 1890 by the Hickory Grove Quarterly Meeting (which became part of the IYM(C) in 1917), Scattergood Friends School was initially conceived to provide a "guarded education" for Quaker children, shielding them from "the evils of the world".¹ This initial purpose was largely a form of internal community support, providing a specific educational environment for its members' children. A pivotal period in Scattergood's history, however, strongly illustrates mutual aid. Due to the Great Depression, the school closed in 1931 but reopened in 1938.¹ From 1939 to 1943, it operated as the "Scattergood Hostel" for 186 European refugees fleeing the Nazis.¹ During this time, refugees and volunteers worked communally to operate the facility, including its farm. Guests were expected to take part in work crews and help grow and prepare their food, in addition to taking English classes and receiving job training.¹ This communal effort, where refugees were not merely passive recipients but active contributors of labor and skills, exemplifies reciprocal mutual aid. It was a shared struggle for survival and resettlement, where resources and efforts were pooled, and participants were both givers and receivers, embodying collective responsibility and direct participation in addressing a severe survival need.¹
- **Ongoing Concerns and Activities:** IYM(C) Friends have consistently maintained a consciousness of their heritage and responsibility in matters of peace and a concern for serving those in need.¹ Contemporary activities reflect this, with IYM(C) members involved in organizations such as the Alternatives to Violence Project Iowa (AVP), the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), and the Iowa Peace Network.¹ These organizations engage in a range of activities from conflict resolution training to lobbying for peace and justice legislation.¹ Recent examples of IYM(C) members' involvement include supporting "Healing Our Borders," a group attempting to reduce migrant deaths at borders and change immigration policies, through weekly vigils and distributing blankets to migrants.¹ Members have also co-facilitated "Alternative to Violence Project" workshops at correctional facilities.¹ While some of these activities, particularly lobbying and advocacy, lean

towards traditional philanthropy or social justice work (which can be distinct from direct mutual aid), the direct provision of blankets and participation in prison workshops, especially when involving reciprocal engagement with the affected populations, demonstrate elements of mutual aid. The "championing for the downtrodden" and "avid protestor" stance of some members ¹ also aligns with the mutual aid principle of addressing systemic inequities and mobilizing for social transformation.

3. Analysis: Charity vs. Mutual Aid in IYM(C) History

The historical trajectory of the Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) reveals a complex interplay between charitable impulses and instances of mutual aid. While a deep-seated commitment to compassion and service has consistently driven its actions, the mode of delivery has varied, often reflecting the prevailing societal norms and the specific needs addressed.¹

3.1 Predominant Charitable Tendencies

Many of IYM(C)'s historical social welfare initiatives predominantly exhibit characteristics of charity. These activities were often structured as top-down provisions, where resources or services flowed from the Yearly Meeting or its affiliated bodies to those identified as needing assistance.¹

- **Top-down Provision:** White's Iowa Manual Labor Institute serves as a prime example. Funded by a specific bequest and managed by Quaker trustees, it was designed as a "nursery for the poor children".¹ The institution provided care, education, and moral guidance to children who "have not the means to procure schooling, board and clothing themselves".¹ This structure established a clear benefactor-beneficiary relationship, with the Quakers acting as benevolent providers for a vulnerable population. Similarly, the aid to freedmen, involving the "giving freely of money, possessions and services as teachers" ¹, while profoundly impactful, also operated on a model of provision from the Quakers to the freed population.
- **Focus on Alleviating Immediate Needs or Moral Improvement:** The design of White's Institute explicitly aimed at instilling "industrious business habits, and high moral principles".¹ This focus on moral and vocational uplift, while well-intentioned, suggests an emphasis on transforming the individual recipients to fit societal norms rather than addressing the systemic conditions that created their poverty or lack of opportunity. The aid to freedmen, primarily through education, also focused on immediate needs for literacy and skills in a post-slavery society.¹
- **Hierarchical Structures:** The management of institutions like White's Institute, with appointed trustees and superintendents ¹, and the IYM(C)'s role in the

"Central Superintendency of Kansas and the Indian Territory" ¹, demonstrate hierarchical organizational structures. These structures, while efficient for large-scale operations, inherently create a power dynamic where decisions and resources are controlled by those at the top, rather than being collectively determined by all participants, including the recipients of aid.

The most stark example of a charitable approach with problematic implications is the IYM(C)'s historical involvement in Indian Affairs. Despite a stated "sense of justice" ¹, Quaker participation in the U.S. government's assimilation policies, including the operation of Indian boarding schools, was a top-down effort to replace Native cultures with European American lifestyles.¹ Children were punished for speaking their Native languages and banned from traditional practices.¹ This approach, while perhaps seen as "aid" by its proponents at the time, lacked reciprocity and was deeply harmful, representing a form of imposed charity rather than solidarity.

3.2 Instances and Elements of Mutual Aid

Despite the prevalence of charitable models, the history of IYM(C) also contains compelling examples and inherent principles that align strongly with mutual aid. These instances demonstrate reciprocal relationships, collective action, and a focus on solidarity.¹

- **Internal Community Care:** The IYM(C)'s "Advices and Queries" explicitly articulate a principle of "Mutual Care" within the meeting community.¹ The statement, "Each of us is both giver and receiver, ready to help and to accept help," directly embodies the reciprocal nature of mutual aid.¹ This internal dynamic fosters a sense of shared responsibility for the welfare of every individual, recognizing that the meeting functions as a family where pain and joy are shared, and support flows in multiple directions.¹ This is a foundational, ongoing practice of mutual aid within the IYM(C)'s own spiritual and social fabric.
- **Underground Railroad:** The IYM(C)'s active role in the Underground Railroad is a powerful historical example of mutual aid. Quakers served as "conductors" and "station agents," directly collaborating with freedom seekers to facilitate their escape from slavery.¹ This was not a detached act of benevolence but a high-stakes, direct participation in a collective struggle against systemic injustice. The "passengers" (freedom seekers) and "conductors" (Quakers) shared a common goal and faced shared risks, demonstrating solidarity and collective

responsibility. The stories of Quakers defying slave catchers and actively hiding individuals illustrate the horizontal, participatory nature of this work, where the agency of the freedom seekers was paramount, and the Quakers acted as allies and facilitators in their self-liberation.¹

- **Scattergood Hostel:** The operation of the Scattergood Hostel during World War II (1939-1943) provides another clear instance of mutual aid. While the American Friends Service Committee suggested its use, the hostel's daily operation was a communal effort.¹ European refugees were not simply housed and fed; they were "expected to take part in work crews as well as helping to grow and prepare their food".¹ This reciprocal arrangement, where guests contributed their labor and skills alongside volunteers, transformed the hostel into a collective endeavor for survival and resettlement. It was a shared experience of building community and addressing immediate needs through pooled resources and efforts, embodying the principle that everyone has something to offer and something to receive.¹
- **Contemporary Activism:** Recent activities of IYM(C) members, such as supporting "Healing Our Borders" by distributing blankets and holding vigils for migrants, and co-facilitating "Alternative to Violence Project" workshops in prisons, also contain strong elements of mutual aid.¹ These actions involve direct engagement and solidarity with marginalized groups, addressing their immediate survival needs (e.g., protection from cold) while implicitly challenging the systemic issues that create their vulnerability (e.g., immigration policies, incarceration). The direct, hands-on nature and the focus on collective well-being, particularly within the context of systemic struggle, align with the contemporary understanding of mutual aid as "survival work" intertwined with social transformation.¹

3.3 Evolution and Interplay of Concepts

The historical record indicates a dynamic evolution and interplay between charitable and mutual aid approaches within IYM(C).¹ Early Quakerism's emphasis on the "inward light" and the "equality of all people before God"¹ provided a strong theological foundation for both forms of assistance. This belief system naturally fostered compassion (leading to charity) and a sense of shared humanity and collective responsibility (leading to mutual aid).

The shift towards more formalized institutions, such as White's Institute and Scattergood School (in its primary educational function), while driven by benevolent motives, introduced more structured, and often more charitable, top-down elements.¹ These institutions, by their nature, created a professionalized distance between providers and recipients. The "Conservative" separation in 1877, partly a reaction against "evangelistic methods"¹, may have inadvertently reinforced a more traditional charitable model by focusing on internal spiritual purity and conversion, potentially overshadowing broader, more direct social action that might have embodied mutual aid.

However, even within these periods, the underlying Quaker testimonies often manifested in direct, solidarity-based actions when confronted with acute injustices, such as slavery or the refugee crisis.¹ The implicit "needs and offers" exchange, a quintessential contemporary mutual aid institution, has always been present in the "mutual care" practiced within Quaker meetings.¹ This suggests that while external actions might have often adopted charitable forms, the internal ethos of the IYM(C) has consistently held the seeds of mutual aid. The historical analysis reveals that the IYM(C) has always been concerned with "serving those in need"¹, and the current imperative is to consciously reorient how that service is enacted, moving towards approaches that empower and engage all members as active participants in collective flourishing.

4. Plan for Reorienting Iowa Quakers Towards a Mutual Aid Community

Drawing upon the historical analysis, it is evident that while the Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) has a commendable legacy of compassionate service, a conscious reorientation towards mutual aid principles would deepen its impact and more fully align with its core spiritual testimonies.¹ This shift is not a rejection of past benevolence but an evolution towards more empowering, reciprocal, and systemically focused forms of community support.¹

4.1 Re-Embracing Foundational Principles

The reorientation plan begins by reinvigorating IYM(C)'s foundational Quaker principles, interpreting them through the lens of mutual aid.

- **Deepening "That of God in All Persons":** The belief in a living presence within every individual ¹ is a powerful theological basis for mutual aid. Re-emphasizing this principle means moving beyond a "beneficiary" mindset, where some are seen as having needs and others as having resources, to one that recognizes the inherent worth, agency, and potential contribution of every individual.¹ This fosters an environment where all are seen as co-creators and contributors to collective well-being, rather than simply recipients of aid.
- **Strengthening "Mutual Care" within Meetings:** The "Mutual Care" advice, which states that "Each of us is both giver and receiver, ready to help and to accept help" ¹, is a direct articulation of mutual aid. This principle should be actively promoted and formalized within monthly meetings. Practical steps could include establishing visible "needs and offers" boards or digital platforms where members can list what they need (e.g., help with childcare, transportation, a meal during illness) and what they can offer (e.g., a ride, a home-cooked meal, a listening ear, specific skills). This formalization encourages reciprocal exchange and strengthens communal bonds.
- **Discernment as Collective Action:** The Quaker practice of discerning and following God's will in decision-making ¹ can be extended beyond internal governance to inform external community engagement. This involves applying the discernment process not only to identify community needs but also to collectively

determine and implement responses. This approach fosters direct participation from all involved, including those traditionally seen as "recipients," thereby building solidarity and shared ownership of solutions, aligning with Dean Spade's understanding of mutual aid as organized through direct participation and collective action.¹

4.2 Strategic Pillars for Mutual Aid Development

To facilitate this reorientation, IYM(C) should focus on several strategic pillars that translate its spiritual principles into actionable mutual aid practices.

- **Education and Awareness:**
 - **Workshops on Mutual Aid Theory and Practice:** Organize educational sessions covering the theoretical underpinnings of mutual aid, including the work of Peter Kropotkin and contemporary organizers like Dean Spade.¹ These workshops would clarify the distinctions between mutual aid and charity, challenging ingrained philanthropic assumptions.
 - **Study Groups on IYM(C)'s Mutual Aid History:** Facilitate discussions around the IYM(C)'s own historical instances of mutual aid, such as its involvement in the Underground Railroad and the Scattergood Hostel.¹ Analyzing these historical examples can provide inspiration, practical lessons, and a sense of continuity with the Yearly Meeting's heritage.
- **Grassroots Community Engagement:**
 - **Identify Local Community Needs through Direct Engagement:** Move beyond formal surveys or top-down assessments. Encourage monthly meetings to engage directly with their local communities to understand pressing needs and existing community strengths, fostering genuine relationships.
 - **Partner with Existing Grassroots Mutual Aid Networks:** Rather than always creating new programs, seek to identify, support, and amplify existing grassroots mutual aid efforts in Iowa. This could involve partnering with groups addressing food insecurity, housing justice, or harm reduction, learning from their models and contributing resources or volunteer power.¹
 - **Support and Amplify Existing Efforts:** Recognize that mutual aid often thrives at the hyper-local level. IYM(C) can provide logistical support, meeting spaces, or modest financial contributions to community-led initiatives, ensuring that the aid remains horizontal and community-driven.

- **Resource Sharing and Network Building:**
 - **Establish a "Common Treasury" Model:** Explore models for sharing resources (skills, time, material goods) within and beyond the Quaker community, moving beyond traditional financial donations. This could involve creating a centralized inventory of skills and resources offered by members and a mechanism for matching them with needs.
 - **Develop a Skills-Sharing Network:** Formalize a network where members can offer and receive practical support, such as childcare, eldercare, transportation, home repair, or even legal and administrative assistance. This builds resilience and reduces reliance on external, often costly, services.
 - **Facilitate Connections:** Actively foster connections between Quaker meetings and broader community groups working on systemic issues like housing justice, food security, and harm reduction. This strengthens the collective capacity for social transformation.
- **Addressing Systemic Inequities:**
 - **Connect Mutual Aid to Social Transformation:** As Dean Spade emphasizes, mutual aid should be practiced in conjunction with movements for social transformation.¹ IYM(C) should consciously link its mutual aid efforts to broader struggles against root causes of inequity, such as racial capitalism, Indigenous rights, and unjust immigration policies.¹
 - **Critical Engagement with History:** Reflect critically on past Quaker involvement in issues like Indian Affairs, acknowledging where well-intentioned efforts became paternalistic or harmful.¹ This historical understanding can inform a more reciprocal and respectful approach to solidarity today.
 - **Advocate for Policy Changes:** While direct mutual aid addresses immediate needs, IYM(C) should continue its historical commitment to peace and justice by advocating for policy changes that support community autonomy, reduce reliance on charitable models, and dismantle systemic inequalities. This includes supporting organizations like FCNL.¹

4.3 Practical Implementation Steps

Translating these strategic pillars into action requires concrete steps:

- **Pilot Programs:** Initiate small-scale pilot mutual aid projects within one or two monthly meetings. Examples could include a community garden where food is grown and shared, a skill-share program for practical life skills, or a local "needs and offers" board that facilitates direct exchanges among members and immediate neighbors.¹
- **Training and Capacity Building:** Provide training for members in horizontal organizing, consensus-based decision-making, and conflict resolution, potentially leveraging the expertise of the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP).¹ This builds the internal capacity for effective mutual aid work.
- **Documentation and Reflection:** Establish a process for regularly documenting mutual aid efforts, including successes, challenges, and lessons learned. This information should be systematically reviewed and reflected upon through the Queries process, allowing the Yearly Meeting to adapt and improve its approach over time.¹
- **Financial Reorientation:** Explore innovative ways to align financial giving with mutual aid principles. This could involve creating internal funds that operate on mutualist principles (e.g., interest-free loans, grants based on collective need rather than individual means testing) or, where legally permissible and appropriate, directly supporting non-501(c)(3) grassroots mutual aid efforts that align with Quaker values.¹
- **Leveraging Existing Assets:** The Scattergood Friends School and Farm, with its historical precedent as a refugee hostel ¹, could be leveraged as a hub for mutual aid training, community gatherings, or even as a site for specific mutual aid projects (e.g., a community farm, a tool library). Its history provides a tangible example of successful mutual aid within the IYM(C)'s own lineage.

From Benevolence to Solidarity

Visualizing the historical journey of Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) and its path toward a future rooted in Mutual Aid.

The Crossroads of Care

Understanding the fundamental difference between Charity and Mutual Aid is the first step. While both stem from compassion, their approach to power, community, and change are worlds apart.

Charity

- **Structure:**
Top-down, hierarchical.
Resources flow from givers to receivers.
- **Goal:**
Alleviates symptoms and provides temporary relief.
- **Power Dynamic:**
Creates dependency and reinforces the status quo.
- **Philosophy:**
Based on benevolence and pity.

Mutual Aid

- **Structure:**
Grassroots, horizontal, and reciprocal.
- **Goal:**
Addresses root causes and builds collective, long-term power.
- **Power Dynamic:**
Fosters solidarity, shared responsibility, and empowerment.
- **Philosophy:**
Based on solidarity and collective agency.

A Legacy of Service

Since 1835, Iowa Quakers have responded to the needs of their time. This history includes powerful examples of both charitable giving and transformative mutual aid.

CHARITY



White's Iowa Manual Labor Institute (1856)

Founded via a bequest, this institute provided schooling and lodging for "poor children," operating on a top-down model of benevolent care and moral uplift.

MUTUAL AID



Underground Railroad (c. 1840s-1865)

Iowa Friends acted in solidarity with freedom seekers, serving as "conductors" and "station agents" in a high-risk, collaborative effort against systemic injustice. This was a shared struggle, not a one-way handout.

CHARITY



Indian Affairs & Assimilation (Post-1869)

Involvement in President Grant's "Peace Policy" led to managing agencies and schools. While intended to be just, it often became a paternalistic effort to impose cultural assimilation, a stark example of conditional, hierarchical aid.

MUTUAL AID



Scattergood Hostel (1939-1943)

Reopening to house 186 European refugees fleeing Nazism, Scattergood operated communally. Refugees and volunteers worked together on the farm and in classes, exemplifying a reciprocal system of care and shared responsibility.

Analyzing the Approaches

Visualizing the core characteristics of these two models reveals their profoundly different impacts on communities and individuals.

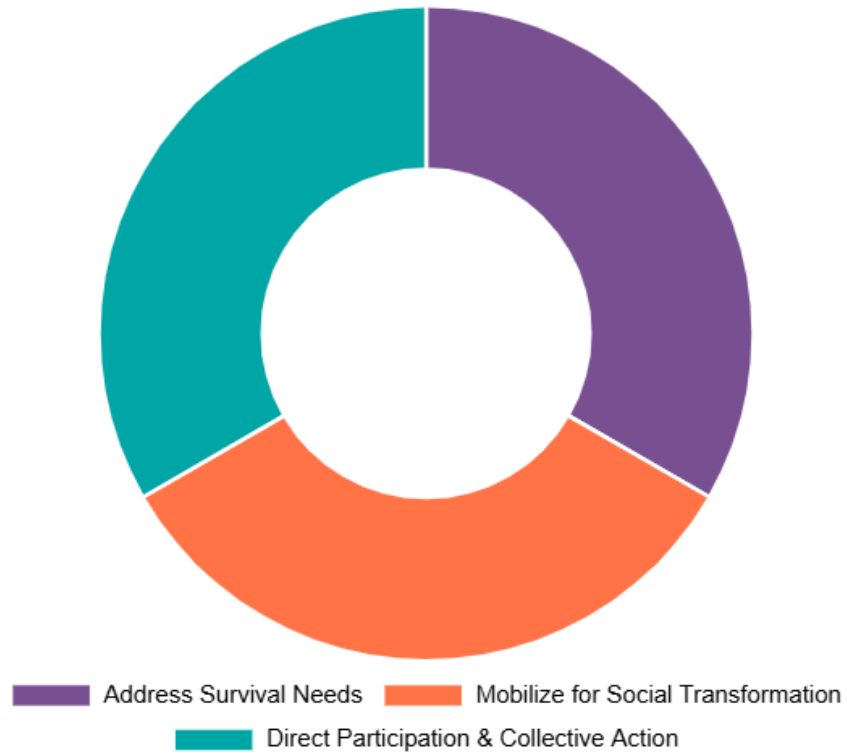
Core Characteristics: Charity vs. Mutual Aid

This chart compares the fundamental goals and outcomes of each approach, showing how mutual aid is structured for empowerment while charity can create dependency.



Focus of Mutual Aid

Mutual aid, as defined by organizer Dean Spade, is not just about meeting needs. It is a multi-faceted strategy for building power and creating systemic change.



The Path Forward: A Blueprint for Mutual Aid

Reorienting towards mutual aid involves a conscious plan rooted in Quaker principles, moving from theory to transformative action.

Foundation: Re-Embrace Core Principles

"That of God in Everyone" & "Mutual Care"



Strategic Pillars



Education & Awareness

Study mutual aid theory and IYM(C)'s own history of solidarity.



Grassroots Engagement

Partner with existing local networks and identify needs through direct relationships.



Resource Sharing Networks

Create "needs and offers" boards and skill-sharing platforms to build resilience.



Address Systemic Inequity

Connect survival work to broader movements for social and racial justice.



Outcome: A Living Testimony

A community actively building a more just, equitable, and liberated world.

Living Our Testimonies Through Action

Mutual aid is a direct expression of the core Quaker testimonies (SPICES), turning faith into tangible action for a better world.

Simplicity

Focusing on genuine needs and direct relationships over complex bureaucracy.

Peace

Actively dismantling systems of structural violence and building cooperative communities.

Integrity

Aligning our actions with our belief in the inherent worth of all people.

Community

Weaving a web of care where everyone is both a giver and a receiver.

Equality

Operating horizontally, challenging hierarchies, and centering marginalized voices.

Stewardship

Responsibly sharing collective resources to ensure everyone's needs are met.

Infographic based on "A Historical Analysis of Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) and the Path to Mutual Aid" and "Embracing Radical Kinship."

You can view this Infographic as one complete page here:
<https://gemini.google.com/share/0e06a6bf3e7f>

5. Conclusion & Recommendations

The comprehensive analysis demonstrates that mutual aid is not merely a supplementary form of social service but a radical alternative for justice work deeply aligned with the core tenets of Quakerism.¹ Distinct from traditional charity, mutual aid operates on principles of direct action, cooperation, and solidarity, fostering horizontal relationships and community autonomy.¹ This approach directly challenges systemic injustices, viewing capitalism as fundamentally unable to meet human needs and actively working towards police and prison abolition, as exemplified by Des Moines Mutual Aid.¹

The historical and philosophical underpinnings of Quakerism—particularly the belief in "that of God in everyone," the practice of Spirit-led action, non-hierarchical structures, and the pursuit of the Beloved Community—find profound resonance in the mutual aid model.¹ This alignment suggests that embracing mutual aid is not a departure from Quaker identity but a powerful return to its revolutionary origins, where early Friends extended their worship into the world to create a new society.¹

While challenges exist, such as overcoming institutional inertia, confronting accumulated privilege, and shifting from incremental change to direct, participatory action, these obstacles present opportunities for spiritual renewal and a more authentic living out of Quaker testimonies.¹ The implicit violence of inaction and complicity in oppressive systems demands that Quaker pacifism evolve to actively dismantle structural violence, making mutual aid a vital form of non-violent resistance.¹

Practical steps for Quaker meetings, such as identifying local needs, initiating participatory projects focused on survival, and fostering solidarity, can be effectively implemented by leveraging existing Quaker strengths like the "Mutual Care" advice and the Quaker business method.¹ The example of Des Moines Mutual Aid provides a concrete blueprint for how a community-led, abolitionist approach can effectively address immediate needs while simultaneously building resilient, self-sustaining communities that embody the vision of the Beloved Community.¹

Ultimately, for contemporary Quakers, embracing mutual aid is a spiritual imperative. It offers a tangible path to embody the testimonies of Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Stewardship (SPICES)¹ in a world grappling with profound injustices. By engaging in direct, transformative action, Quaker communities can

deepen their spiritual practice, revitalize their communal life, and provide a compelling witness to the possibility of a more just and liberated future, here and now.¹

Works cited

This document was created by including these two documents I've previously written about Mutual Aid and Quakerism.

1. [Mutual Aid and Quakerism Analysis including my blog posts.pdf](#)
2. [Iowa Quakers Mutual Aid History and Charity](#)