INFORMATION ON MEMBERSHIP

Boulder Monthly Meeting

of the Religious Society of Friends

(Quakers)

March 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Clerk's letter
2. Applying for Membership
3. Queries for Clearness Committees for Membership
4. A Quaker Glossary
5. Three Quakerspeak videos on Quaker membership and Faith & Practice
6. Three Essays on Quaker membership and Faith & Practice
7. Further resources

Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand. Isaac Penington, 1667

Dear Friend,

If you are reading this, you may be exploring membership in Boulder Friends Meeting. Although membership is in no way required to be an engaged and deeply valued Friend among us, if you are so led, we welcome your interest in this process and hope this packet may guide your seeking.

Not unlike a marriage, membership in Boulder Friends Meeting is not a commitment between only two entities. In joining the Religious Society of Friends, you become an integral part of a larger family with a rich story of faith, community and good works. That story began in the mid-17th Century with George Fox and other Seekers, who believed in the centrality of the direct experience of God, the value of an inward personal encounter with the Spirit without an intermediary (priest or pastor). Thus, holding the spiritual equality of Light accessible to all, we're called to *"answer to that of God in everyone."*

With everyone's voice heard and valued, there is a wide variety of beliefs among Friends. We have no formulas or creeds to which we must adhere. But we have specific "practices" for engaging one another and the world. We seek unity rather than voting on decisions and support all victims of injustice and violence by working and witnessing for peace and social justice.

Monthly Meetings are organized under a Yearly Meeting. Boulder is the second largest member of Intermountain Yearly Meeting, which gathers annually to nurture attendees in Spirit, Community, and business matters. Regional Meetings gather twice a year as a more local group.

But the basic unit of worship, support, and love in action—the "Beloved Community"—a member joins is their Monthly Meeting. Friends emphasize the daily living of our faith, but we gather in silent worship every Sunday for the fellowship, discipline, and practice of "waiting and listening" for the Spirit together. A meeting can be totally silent, or a Friend might be moved by an inner leading to offer a ministry that has arisen to be shared. Business is conducted in the manner of worship at monthly Meetings of Worship with a Concern for Business. The work required to maintain our building, manage our budget, and care for one another and the world happens in committees, special teams or working groups. It is here that the process of discernment for a specific response to needs, actions, or leadings is seasoned. But while a tremendous amount of essential and faith-filled work is accomplished by individuals and committees, decisions are made by the whole Meeting upon reaching unity.

The materials assembled here on the beliefs, structure, and organization of our Boulder Meeting provide interesting and important information, should you decide to pursue the journey toward membership. We encourage and welcome you warmly on the Way, whether you choose to remain an attender or consider joining us in seeking Truth and Light in our world as a member of the Religious Society of Friends.

APPLYING FOR MEMBERSHIP

One does not need to be a formal member of the Religious Society of Friends to participate fully in the life of a Meeting. For Quakers, all spiritual seekers are "Friends of the Truth," regardless of formal status. True, unless one is a member, they cannot be the Clerk of the Meeting or serve as convenor of certain committees, or participate on the committee tasked with supporting the Meeting's corporate spiritual mission and health: Spiritual Life & Membership. But Quaker community reaches far beyond formal membership to embrace everyone who lives and worships in our midst.

Still, membership—like marriage—does express deeper commitment to Quaker Faith and Practice, and a deeper sense of responsibility both to the Meeting and to the Society as a whole. After attending Meeting for Worship for some time and acquainting yourself with Friends' ways by participating in the life of the Meeting, you may come to feel ready to take this further step.

In deciding whether the Meeting is indeed their spiritual home, most people will have engaged in several of the following activities:

- Attending Meeting for Worship regularly
- Reading in the Intermountain Yearly Meeting *Faith & Practice*
- Learning about the history and philosophy of the Society of Friends through private reading or by participating in a Quaker Studies course
- Participating in committee work
- Attending Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business

Membership in the Religious Society of Friends is held within a Monthly Meeting. The members of any Monthly Meeting welcome inquiries about membership and other matters concerning the Society. Friends encourage informal conversations as one step toward applying for membership. It is important that the Meeting help newcomers understand the membership process and how it differs from that of other denominations.

The membership process in Boulder Meeting is outlined below. Be aware that the process usually takes several months to complete. Though the process may seem long and cumbersome at first glance, Friends have found that the seasoning it allows is ultimately helpful to everyone.

1. You initiate the process by writing a letter requesting membership, addressed to the Clerk of the Meeting. Your letter may be a plain request for membership, simply communicating your wish to join. Alternatively, applicants may choose to say something more about why they seek membership and anything else they would like Friends to know about their background and spiritual journeys. If you wish, you may suggest the names of Friends whom you would especially like to serve on your Clearness Committee.
2. The Clerk reads the letter at the following Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business and refers it to the convener of Spiritual Life & Membership.
3. Spiritual Life & Membership forms a Clearness Committee and brings the names to a subsequent Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business for approval. Care is taken to appoint discerning Friends who have open hearts as well as a strong understanding of the meaning and implications of membership. Although Spiritual Life & Membership

will consider any names you have suggested in your application letter, the choice is ultimately made by the Meeting as a whole during business meeting. The Clearness Committee will include at least one member of Spiritual Life & Membership, who will serve as convener and find a time and place convenient for you and the committee to meet.

4. The purpose of this committee is to explore the applicant's commitment to the Faith and Practice of Friends and to discern together the readiness of both the applicant and the Meeting. All visits take place in the spirit of a common, worshipful seeking for God's will and guidance. The goal is to help you reach clarity and for your Clearness Committee to reach clarity on behalf of the Meeting.
5. The Clearness Committee will meet with you one or (less commonly) more times until clarity is reached. It will also meet once on its own. The committee has three options: (1) recommend membership; (2) recommend that a decision be deferred to allow further seasoning; or (3) recommend against membership at this time. When recommending deferral, a time will be set for a follow-up meeting, when the committee will suggest a specific course of action, such as further worship, reading, participation in Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business, service on a committee, or longer exposure to Quaker practices.
6. The Clearness Committee will report its recommendation to Spiritual Life & Membership, which will decide on a recommendation to bring to Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business for approval. The decision is recorded in the Meeting minutes, and you will receive a letter documenting the membership minute.
7. In celebration of your membership, you will receive either a copy of the *Intermountain Yearly Meeting Faith & Practice*, or a one-year subscription to Western Friend Magazine. Spiritual Life & Membership periodically hosts a welcoming party to introduce all new members.

CLEARNESS COMMITTEE FOR MEMBERSHIP:
SUGGESTED QUERIES AND TOPICS

The following questions are intended primarily to provoke thought and discussion. There are no right answers to them. Nor are they addressed only to those who contemplate requesting formal membership in the Religious Society of Friends. On the contrary, like the Advices and Queries set forth in the *Intermountain Yearly Meeting Faith & Practice*, they are questions all members of the community, whether formal members or not, may wish to ask themselves as seekers, and so as Friends of the Truth.

The queries and topics listed below often arise naturally in the course of a Clearness Committee meeting with an applicant for membership. They are intended to assist you in gaining clarity on the meaning and implications of membership in the Society of Friends, and to help committee members get to know you at a deeper level and to enable them to share their own spiritual experience with you. All Clearness Committee meetings are conducted in a worshipful manner of openness and caring. It may be appropriate to hold several meetings before both the applicant and the committee reach clarity.

- What are some important milestones in your spiritual journey?
- How have you come to feel that Boulder Meeting may be your spiritual home?
- How do you expect membership to contribute to your spiritual journey?
- How have you experienced and come to understand the Light?
- How does the Religious Society of Friends meet your needs for worship and fellowship?
- What has attracted you to Friends' articulated faith and practices? Are there some that you find puzzling or disturbing?
- Which of the Testimonies of Friends speak most strongly to you? Which Testimonies most confront your present life?
- Though Quakerism is historically rooted in Christianity, the Society of Friends has no creed to which members are asked to subscribe, and no formal hierarchy or priesthood to guide us to doctrinal unity. Friends' beliefs accordingly range widely. Do you have strong beliefs of your own? If so, how do you respond to the diversity of others' beliefs?
- Friends have always held that their faith is more than a set of beliefs; it is a way of life. How do you find that your own beliefs affect your daily life in the family, with friends, in the wider society, or at work?
- How do you anticipate that you can contribute to the life of the Meeting in matters of business as well as spirituality?
- Do you have questions for the committee?
- Are there any special moral or spiritual concerns you would like to discuss with us?

A GLOSSARY OF FRIENDS' TERMS

Newcomers to a Meeting of Friends will notice that Quakers have a language of their own. The trouble with private or semi-private usage is that users feel no need to explain it to other people. This can be confusing. But it can also be off-putting. Though Friends don't at all mean to exclude anyone, unexplained Quakerisms do easily form an insider code that can leave not only newcomers but some longtime attenders feeling left out.

It may be helpful to point out that Quaker usage arises from the history and traditions of the Religious Society of Friends from its beginnings in 17th-century England. Moreover, the fact that Friends have a collective history and traditions is itself a core element of Quaker Faith and Practice. The initially unfamiliar terms Friends use are thus one way in which they express both who they are now (or aspire to be) and where they came from. It is hoped that the following glossary will shed light as well as make people feel more welcome.

Advices and Queries: Advices are calls to mindfulness—reminders intended to draw attention to the fundamental spiritual questions all people face and to the spiritual content of everyday life in the family, at work, and in the wider society. Queries are pointed questions that remind both individuals and the Meeting of the standards of conduct they have set for themselves and of areas of spiritual reflection they might attend to more closely.

After the Manner of Friends: Describes the way in which Quakers conduct events outside of regular Worship like a marriage, memorial service, or business meeting. When a memorial service, for example, is conducted "in the Manner of Friends," the gathering begins with a silent "centering down" in the Spirit (see below). Those in attendance may subsequently rise to speak in order to share such memories and insights as occur to them. Especially given the personal character and tone of a Meeting for marriage or a memorial service, Friends loosen the reins by suspending the normal call for Discernment (see below).

Attenders: Attenders are people who regularly attend Meeting for Worship without applying for formal Membership (see Members below). Though there are a few Meeting offices (the Clerkship, for example) that Attenders can't occupy, they're embraced as full participants in the Meeting community.

Birthright Friends/Convinced Friends: Birthright Friends are Friends who were the children of a Quaker parent or parents. Convinced Friends (see Convincement below) are those who came to Quakerism on their own. There is in practice no difference of any kind between Birthright and Convinced Friends.

Calling: A powerful call to take up some cause or pursue some course of action, often one that will disrupt someone's normal way of life. A famous example is the 18th-century Friend John Woolman's calling to leave family and business in order to visit slaveholding Quakers around the nation. This example further illustrates the notion of a Query (see Advices and Queries) in that Woolman didn't visit slaveholding Friends to *tell them* what they should think or how they

should act and feel. Rather, he asked them about their "condition" or state of mind as "owners" of enslaved persons, leaving it to That of God in them to work its will.

Centering Down: In the traditional silent Worship of Friends, people seek to still body and mind in order to let the tasks and concerns of daily life fall away, leaving them alone in the presence of God as they wait on the Light of the Spirit.

Clearness Committee: A small, intimate gathering, usually but not necessarily convened by a member of the Spiritual Life & Membership. The committee aims to help someone reach clarity when confronted with some important or difficult situation, action, or decision. A formal Clearness Committee is convened as part of the process of applying for Membership (see below). However, members of the community, whether formal Members or not (see below), may at any time request the convening of an informal Clearness Committee.

Clerk: A Member of the Meeting who "convenes" or chairs Monthly Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business (see below) and generally oversees the Meeting's corporate affairs. The Clerk is approved by the Meeting as a whole. Though Clerks often perform a pastoral role in collaboration with the committees on Care, Spiritual Life & Membership, and Service, they aren't pastors in the traditional sense. In an unprogrammed meeting like ours, they don't officiate or deliver sermons during Meeting for Worship.

Community: One of the major Testimonies (see below). Quakers value each person in the worship community as well as the health of the community as a whole—believing indeed that these are interdependent. In making decisions as well as in worship, Quakers believe that the community of individual worshipers, valued *as* individuals each of whom waits on the Light, is the true vehicle of that Light. And what is true of the Meeting is expressed in the Meeting's place in the wider world we share with all beings.

Convincement: The Quaker equivalent of what other faiths call "conversion." A Convinced Friend is one who has freely embraced Quakerism through a true Motion of the Spirit (see below). The term reflects a key difference between Quakerism and other faiths by its acknowledgement of personal autonomy. One is not converted from one thing to another, or from one identity to another, but is rather convinced of Quaker truth in oneself as an independent person who is also a faithful member of the Quaker community.

Covered Meeting: A Meeting in which all those gathered in Worship feel literally covered by the Spirit. Worship on such occasions is experienced as truly deep and truly shared, the achievement of true spiritual community.

Concern: Generally reserved for weighty matters that concern someone or some group deeply. A Concern may be a significant matter of conscience and may lead to action, and responding to one may demand Seeking and Discernment (see below).

Consensus: See Unity below.

Discernment: A work of seeking in which either an individual or the Meeting as a whole tries to determine the presence of That of God (see below) in what appear to be the deliverances of the Spirit but may in fact be an expression of personal emotions, interests, inclinations, or prejudices.

Early Friends: The immediate followers of George Fox and, more generally, the first generations of Quakers in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Elders/Eldering: Eldering was traditionally the purview of Elders, i.e., Weighty Friends (see below) on whose experience and spiritual insight the community had come to trust and value. Current usage allows greater latitude in that anyone who feels called to elder someone's words or behavior as harmful to other members of the community or to the community itself as a whole may do so. However, Eldering must be conducted in a generous, non-accusatory, open-hearted, and worshipful spirit, and therefore demands great Discernment (see above). Because Quakers do not a have hierarchy and or formal disciplinary structure, they depend on each other to supply the informal norms needed to support a healthy, spirit-led, and growth-enhancing community.

Equality: One of the major Testimonies (see below). Following George Fox's call to "walk cheerfully over the earth, answering to That of God in everyone" (see That of God below), Quakers believe that all people—indeed, all beings—are children of the Spirit and deserve respect, compassion, and freedom from discrimination of any kind.

Faith and Practice: These terms almost invariably go together. In one use, they form the title of a book published by the Yearly Meeting to which a given Monthly Meeting belongs. (See Monthly Meeting below. Boulder Monthly Meeting belongs to the Intermountain Yearly Meeting of Friends, which published the version of Faith and Practice it uses.) As a book, Faith and Practice outlines the essentials of Friends' guiding principles and procedures as agreed upon by all members of the Yearly Meeting. However, at a deeper level, the expression "Faith and Practice" is a reminder that Friends see themselves as "practical mystics," that is, as people whose spiritual insights are meant to express themselves in their daily lives.

First Day: Sunday. Whence **First Day School:** Sunday school for children.

Friends: The formal term for Quakers. Early followers of the Society's founders, George Fox and Margaret Fell, referred to themselves as "Friends of the Truth," or "Friends" for short. Whence the full official title, the Religious Society of Friends (of the Truth). But Quakers also use Friend to speak to or about anyone. Friends follow Fox and Fell in honoring That of God in everyone (see below), in the belief that all people are, consciously or not, Friends of the Truth.

Holding in the Light: A Quaker form of prayer. However, for many Friends, it is unlike prayer in that it is connected with Waiting on the Light (see below). As normally practiced, prayer is addressed *to* God *for* something. By contrast, Holding someone or something in the Light acknowledges that we may not know, or should not always *presume* to know, what should be prayed for. Sometimes the answer seems clear—for instance, most Friends would surely pray for peace. But often it isn't, and the notion of Holding in the Light captures the difference.

Inner Light (or Inward Light, or the Light Within): The Inner Light is the guiding principle of Quaker Faith and Practice (see above). Friends believe that, as children of God, all beings carry the Light of the Spirit within them. All beings are thus open to divine guidance and love.

Integrity: One of the major Testimonies (see below). A guiding principle of Quaker Faith and Practice (see above) is that Friends should be honest in all of their actions and affairs, dealing openly and fairly with everyone in the family, at work, and in political life as well as the Meeting community.

Leading: Often "a leading of the Spirit." Awareness of being drawn or guided by a divine call.

Meeting for Worship: An hour-long gathering for unprogrammed silent worship.

Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business (or Monthly Meeting, or Meeting for Business): Once a month, the Meeting takes care of its corporate business. Friends' manner of conducting business expresses their basic faith that the Light that is in all, when heeded, draws all into agreement or Unity (see below) in their common affairs. Boulder Meeting holds Meeting for Business on the second Sunday of each month (except June), after Meeting for Worship. Occasionally, when an urgent matter can't wait for the next regular Business Meeting, the Clerk announces a special "Called Meeting" to deal with it.

Meeting House: The building where Friends gather in Worship. Early Friends chose the term in order to distinguish their form of worship from those conducted in the churches and temples of other faiths.

Members: Members are Friends who have taken the step of applying for, and have received, formal (or "recorded") membership in the Meeting.

Mind the Light/Walk in the Light: Minding the Light and Walking in the Light refer above all to the conduct of everyday life. Friends strive to attend to and be guided by the Spirit at all times and in all of their doings, however lowly, casual, or routine.

Ministry: The important thing about Ministry in a Quaker context is that, in the absence of a priest or pastor, anyone may be led to offer it. Most Ministry is oral. But Friends also value the "silent" Ministry of worshipers who continue to wait and listen in worshipful silence. However, in offering Ministry, people should try to discern whether their messages truly come from the Spirit and speak to the condition of the Meeting as a whole. (See Discernment above and Speak to One's Condition below.)

Monthly Meeting: This is the fundamental organizing unit of the Religious Society of Friends. Membership and decision-making responsibilities all reside in the Monthly Meeting, which consists of a group of Friends who meet together at regular intervals to wait upon God in Meeting for Worship and Meeting for Business. Monthly Meetings belong to wider organizations: the Regional or Quarterly Meeting, the Yearly Meeting, Friends' General Conference, and Friends' World Committee for Consultation.

Motions of the Spirit: The experience of being powerfully moved by God, the Spirit, or the Light, usually (though not always) in a clear direction toward a specific act of Ministry or course of action in the world.

Opening: A revelation; a clearing of the way; a path forward pointed out by the Spirit.

Overseers: A term historically used to refer to those in the meeting responsible for physical care or "oversight" of individuals in the meeting. The Overseers in a meeting made sure Friends had food, shelter, children had schooling, and imprisoned or ill Friends were visited. Our Spiritual Life & Membership Committee evolved from a combination of the previous 2 committees of Ministry & Worship (or Counsel) and Oversight and Membership. The term overseer started

being phased out in the 1960's due to the connotations related to slavery and the often punitive "overseers" on plantations.

Pacifism and the Peace Testimony: One of the major Testimonies (see below). The aim is not only to avoid doing violence but, as George Fox put it, to "take away the occasion for all war."

Plain Speaking: "My yea is my yea, and my nay is my nay." The aim here is to speak with accuracy and sincerity—to say what you mean, as clearly and in as straightforward and upright a way as you can. It relates to the traditional (but now rare) use of "thee" and "thou," i.e., the now obsolete informal "you" of early English. However, it is more deeply grounded in the demand for honesty and truth in all our words and deeds.

Quakers: A pejorative name given to Early Friends by their adversaries in established churches. The term originates in the observation that many Friends, when moved to give Ministry (see above) or to commit exemplary (and sometimes risky and defiant) acts of Witness (see below), would literally quake owing to the powerful Motions of the Spirit (see above) they experienced. Friends embraced the term as a means of turning the intended irony back on their detractors.

Queries: See Advices and Queries.

Seasoning: A culinary metaphor that describes the process by which Friends postpone taking a difficult decision in order to allow more time for Discernment (see above).

Seekers and Seeking: Quakers regard all people as Friends in that all of us have That of God in us, and so are (consciously or not) Friends of the Truth. However, some Friends in this broad sense are also Seekers: that is, people who actively seek God, the Light, the Way, the Truth. It's important, though, that Quakers themselves are and remain Seekers. They believe that Early Friends bequeathed, not a fixed creed, doctrine, or system of beliefs, but rather a "continuing revelation" that, in principle, has no end. Thus formal, "recorded" Membership in the Society is not an endpoint, for there is none. Membership is instead commitment to a fellowship of Seekers, a community oriented by a corporate as well as personal Waiting on the Light (see below).

Sense of the Meeting: During Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business (see above), the Clerk will seek to determine the community's emerging Consensus or Unity (see Unity below) and then put it in words in the form of a satisfactory minute. An important role Clerks perform, especially during thorny discussions, is to guide the community toward Unity by articulating what the Sense of the Meeting appears to be and then asking those present if they have got it right.

Simplicity: One of the major Testimonies (see below). It calls for the avoidance of extravagance, luxury, and waste. But it also encourages the avoidance of needless complexity of all sorts and, in this sense, is connected to Plain Speaking (see above).

Speak to One's Condition: A word or action that strikes one as particularly appropriate, that helps clarify a situation or one's own thoughts and feelings. Friends also use the phrase as a reminder to be mindful of other people's circumstances, characters, and states of mind so that what they say and do may be genuinely helpful and on target.

SPICE: A handy acronym used to remember the major Testimonies (see below): Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, and Equality. Some Friends add Direct Access to God (SPICED), and others, moved by environmental concerns, add Stewardship (SPICES).

Stand in the Way/Stand Aside: During Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business, someone may conscientiously differ from decisions that the community as a whole embraces. Such a person may decide to Stand in the Way, preventing Unity to form because they are convinced, in conscience, that Unity has not in fact been achieved. However, someone may choose to Stand Aside, registering their disagreement while nonetheless allowing a decision to be made.

Testimony: Testimonies are closely related to Witness (see below). However, a Testimony differs in that it usually reflects a longstanding, historical or traditional feature of Quaker Faith and Practice. Friends thus speak of the Testimonies of Simplicity, Equality, or Peace: goals Quakers have always sought and whose pursuit has consistently been exhibited in their words and deeds.

That of God: The Light within; the presence of the divine in everyone; the "still, small voice" of the Truth that speaks in every heart.

Threshing Session: A Called Meeting (see Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business above) to enable Friends to share insights on some especially difficult issue. An important feature of threshing sessions is that it is agreed from the start that no decision is to be taken. The aim is rather to help Friends hear and understand each other's views and feelings without judgment.

Unity: In Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business, Quakers don't decide matters by vote. Instead, they aim to reach Unity—a corporate condition often slightly misleadingly called "consensus" since consensus doesn't necessarily involve the unanimity Friends seek. The guiding idea is that the Meeting as a whole decides, under the guidance of the Spirit.

Waiting on the Light: "Don't just do something; sit there!" When gathered in Worship, but also when facing the difficulties and emergencies of daily life, Friends Wait on the Light. This is one reason why, at least in unprogrammed Meetings like Boulder's, Quakers have neither a creed, an officiant priest or pastor, or a liturgy or order of service. Friends don't presume to know in advance what God wills, what the Light will reveal, where the Spirit will lead. So, they wait, offering themselves up in attentive and worshipful silence.

(As/The) Way Opens: The experience of being shown the way through some difficulty or conflict. Such experiences can occur anywhere and at any time, but a particularly telling example is what sometimes happens in Meeting for Business (see above) when, in worshipful discussion of an issue around which strikingly conflicting views have emerged, the Meeting as a whole suddenly reaches Unity in a decision no one person in attendance had previously thought of. The Opening of the Way testifies to the presence of the divine in our midst.

Weighty Friend: A Weighty Friend is a Friend recognized for acting and speaking in ways that clearly reflect the leading of the Spirit. Such a Friend is often looked to as a model and guide. (Also see Elders/Eldering above.)

Witness: Where a Testimony (see above) has an historical or traditional character, Witness usually denotes a specific act. It is a personal or corporate *bearing* of Testimony, something done in Witness to the Light.

Worship Sharing: A more informal gathering in Worship in which participants are invited to express themselves without the kind of Seasoning or Discernment (see above) expected of Ministry in a regular Meeting for Worship. The aim of worship sharing is to deepen interpersonal relations in the community while enriching the spiritual lives of individual members.

OTHER MEMBERSHIP RESOURCES

Friends interested in applying for membership in the Boulder Meeting may wish to consult the following three sets of resources as well as those provided above.

The first set includes links three *Quakerspeak* videos available on the Internet in which weighty Friends from other Meetings discuss membership and Quaker Faith & Practice.

The second set presents three essays on the same topics, two from members of the Religious Society of Friends and one from the point of view of someone who, at the time of writing, remained unsure. We felt inclusion of an essay by someone still on the fence might speak to the condition of others who are still trying the make up their minds.

The third set is a list of further resources on Quaker history and Quaker Faith & Practice that those thinking about applying for membership might also like to consult.

THREE VIDEOS ON Quakerspeak.org

[5 min Video]: How to Become a Member of a Quaker Meeting.
https://quakerspeak.com/video/how-to-become-a-member-of-a-quaker-meeting/

[19 minute Video] What do Quakers Believe?
https://quakerspeak.com/video/what-do-quakers-believe/[

[6 min Video]: Arthur Larabee, 9 Core Quaker Beliefs, https://quakerspeak.com/video/9-core-quaker-beliefs/

THREE ESSAYS ON MEMBERSHIP AND QUAKER FAITH & PRACTICE

On Membership in the Religious Society of Friends by Lloyd B. Swift, Bethesda Meeting
Reprinted from *Friends Journal* 1.15 (July, 1986), pp. 11-13

There are a great many different ideas concerning the meaning of membership in the Society of Friends. There are those who feel that formal membership should be dispensed with so that Quaker meetings, like the gatherings of early Friends, would be essentially self-selected groups of people who feel comfortable worshiping and working together without any formal rite of group acceptance. Others, while acknowledging the pragmatic value of recording members for various statistical and other purposes, see no need for insistence upon formal membership as a prerequisite to serving the meeting as an officer or committee clerk. Still others feel strongly that our meetings are best served by a careful and formal system of taking into membership those who have demonstrated an understanding of our history and our testimonies and by carefully reserving the leadership roles in the Society for those so selected.

It is difficult to know when in the history of the Society of Friends the recording of membership started. Early on, of course, it was necessary to know who was associated with Friends so that those who suffered for Truth could be assisted and their sufferings recorded. But there is little evidence that a high degree of uniformity or formality was early attained in the keeping of such records.

At a considerably later date when formal membership had become well established, meetings seem to have spent a greater amount of their time and energy in determining who should be removed from the membership rolls for any one of a number of sins against good order than in seeking out and winning those who should become members. Indeed during the so-called period of quietism there were probably fewer members taken in as a result of convincement than were raised up within the Society as "birthright members."

A birthright member posed, of course, few of the problems to the meeting which attended upon the convincement of a non-Friend. Typically brought up in the bosom of a tightly knit Quaker extended family and given a "guarded" education at a Friends school, a birthright Friend, unless she or he elected to marry out of meting or otherwise fell victim to the temptations of the world, moved directly and easily into the life of the meeting. It was, rather, the convinced Friend who, because of an alien background and lack of the benefits of Quaker upbringing and education, was a potential threat to the continued good order of the Society and whose convincement needed to be sounded to the depths to assure its sincerity.

When I was a child growing up in a Philadelphia orthodox unprogrammed meeting, it was often said that the Society of Friends seemed to discourage people from membership by the seriousness with which the step was viewed and the complexity of the procedure followed. The committee appointed to examine the candidate's clearness for membership took its responsibilities very seriously. The process appeared to be one of requiring the candidates to prove the sincerity of their call to membership.

In those days the relatively rare occurrence of a non-Friend being sufficiently drawn to the Society to request membership was the occasion for a serious, formal, and frankly rather

intimidating procedure to assure that the prospective Friend was in tune with Friends' testimonies and ready to enter into the responsibilities of membership. And even after acceptance into membership the convinced Friend may sometimes have felt possessed, like the naturalized citizen, of a second-class passport.

All that has, thank God, changed a great deal. With the decline in the Quaker as in the general birthrate, the Society has fallen in numbers of those coming from established Quaker families. The general secularization of society has offered Quaker young people a wide field of alternatives to continuing in the traditions of the family. And an increasing number of persons of all ages have felt drawn to the Society of Friends from a variety of religious backgrounds or from none at all. As a result, we have in the second half of the 20th century, perhaps for the first time since the 17th century, the phenomenon of lively and vigorous Friends meetings composed almost exclusively of persons who have come to Quakerism as adults. In addition, the activity of a vigorous missionary movement in some branches of Quakerism has resulted in the establishment of large yearly meetings in East Africa and Bolivia and of smaller Friends groups in many other places around the world, groups which are composed almost exclusively of first- or second-generation Friends.

Our procedures for membership still carry some of the baggage from the earlier period. The process of the clearness committee for membership and the procedure that the application, once recommended by overseers, is held over from one meeting for business to the next, smack a little of the earlier view that it is necessary somehow for seasoned Friends – mostly birthright – to be generally assured of the suitability of this newcomer before she or he can be accepted into the tribe.

I think we need to strike a happy medium between the blithe and rapid acceptance into membership of anybody who chooses to apply and that historic Quaker method of making such a big thing of the formalities of commitment and of the responsibilities of membership that some who should have joined were discouraged from doing so. I think that most of our meetings are, in practice, anxious to have congenial people join our fellowship as active attenders and then, in due course, as members – and that we generally give less attention to the "clearness" of the prospective member than was formerly done. I *fear* that in this process, however, we have had a tendency to preserve our (somewhat cumbersome and possibly demeaning) procedure while glossing over the *substance* – which relates to the prospect's understanding of what it is she or he is getting in for.

We all need to be clearer about what it is that we are seeking to have people join. A Quaker meeting, to be clearer about the meaning of membership, needs to be clearer about the kind of organization it is.

We use a number of phrases to describe our meetings: *group of seekers, fellowship, community of faith, beloved community*. The word which seems most commonly to come to mind is *community*. Baltimore Yearly Meeting's provisional *Faith and Practice* contains these headings: "The Meeting as Spiritual Community," "The Meeting as Caring Community," and "Fellowship and Community: Within the Local Meeting."

In the introduction to his Pendle Hill pamphlet *A Place Called Community*, Parker J. Palmer poses some hard queries concerning the nature of community:

> How can I participate in a fairer distribution of resources unless I live in a community which makes it possible to consume less? How can I learn accountability unless I live in a community where my acts and their consequences are visible to all? How can I learn to share power unless I live in a community where hierarchy is unnatural? How can I take the risks which right action demands unless I belong to a community which gives support? How can I learn the sanctity of each life unless I live in a community where we can be persons, not roles, to one another?

Later in the pamphlet, Parker Palmer specifically considers the Quaker meeting as a community:

> The core of the Quaker tradition is a way of inward seeking which leads to outward acts of integrity and service. Friends are most in the Spirit when they stand at the crossing point of the inward and the outward life. And that is the intersection at which we find community. Community is a place where the connections felt in the heart make themselves known in bonds between people, and where the tuggings and pullings of those bonds keep opening up our hearts.
>
> The Society of Friends can make its greatest contribution to community by continuing to be a *religious* society – I mean, by centering on the practice of a corporate worship which opens itself to continuing revelation. ... Community is simply too difficult to be sustained by our social impulses. It can be sustained only as we return time and again to the religious experience of the unity of all life. ... Community happens as that of God in you responds to that of God in me. And the affirmation that there is that of God in every person must mean more than "I'm OK, you're OK."
>
> *Community* – the word shares a root with *common*. To have community, I believe, we must have a shared element of commonality.

When I was considerably younger, Gladys and I worked as missionary teachers for the Congregational Christian Church, now the United Church of Christ. I was not a member of that church – I have been a Quaker all my life – but I worked in their Near East Mission and took an active part in the corporate life of that mission. The Near East Mission had a very special problem in that it was working in Turkey, a secular state, and in the Muslim world, a situation in which there were two firm prohibitions against proselytizing – that of the secular state, and that of the Muslim faith. As a result the Near East Mission, like some Quaker institutions, adopted the principle of "let your lives speak" and worked through educational, medical, and publication work to exemplify Christianity. It is not surprising that I was not the only Quaker who found work in that mission attractive!

What is perhaps surprising is that I, one of the Quakers in the Congregational midst, at one point got so fed up with the constant discussion of what it really was that we believed and what it really was that we were trying to do, that I suggested, half seriously, that we write down a statement of beliefs and goals and let those who could not subscribe to it leave the mission for other fields! Was I advocating a creed? In no absolute and ritualistic sense. But I was advocating that the group attempt to record their common characteristics which might serve as the basis for community.

And I guess that's about where I come out on this matter of Quaker membership. The Society of Friends has historically stood and now stands for certain testimonies which are the common

heritage of the Society and the common ground of our community. We must admit of differences in the interpretation and the application of these testimonies, but we must also have a fairly clear conception of what they are. To be a member of the Society of Friends means, I believe, to subscribe in sincerity to the concept that there is a loving God who is the founder and the ruler of the universe and that there is that of God in each human being; that we are called to seek this element of God in all, even our enemies; that this belief leads us to renounce war and violence as acceptable means of attaining ends, however good; and that it also leads us to work for the material and spiritual welfare of all humankind. For most Quakers the kind of life that complete obedience to the inward Light of God would bring has been illustrated most perfectly in the life of Jesus, and we look to him for our example of perfect humanity combined with perfect godliness.

For me, membership in the Society requires that the prospective member understand and subscribe to these central realities of Quaker belief. I accept that there are branches of the Society where most of the members can subscribed to a much more orthodox evangelical statement of Christian theology and can accord to the Scriptures a level of authority with which I am uncomfortable. If this Christian orthodoxy or fundamentalist approach to the Bible should lead them to conduct actions that deny that of God in fellow human beings or negate the continuity of revelation, then they would not meet my criterion for membership in our Society. If it does not so lead them, then I am glad to call them fellow Quakers. I accept also that there are Universalist Friends who would have our Society accept those who do not find their primary religious inspiration in the Bible and the life of Jesus. If such persons attest to the indwelling God in all persons and the reality of continuing revelation, then I feel they also are Friends.

And what of the process of preparing persons for membership? Perhaps when someone has indicated a desire to be on the mailing list, we should give that person a year's membership in the Wider Quaker Fellowship and to one of the Quaker journals, so that selected Quaker literature will regularly come into the home. Religious education, including an introduction to Quakerism, should be available on a reasonably regular basis for attenders. And when an attender has been with a meeting for a year or two, I see nothing wrong with an invitation to membership, perhaps including a special educational opportunity, more directly aimed at preparation for understanding the joys and responsibilities of membership. Then when a Friend has applied, been recommended by overseers, and accepted by the meeting, I believe there should be something more than a bare minute to celebrate the full acceptance of another soul into our community of faith.

It has been said that Quakers do not have sacraments or, to put it another way, do not celebrate the ordinances of the church. In respect to baptism, communion, and the other sacraments recognized in their various numbers by various churches, this is true. But if one accepts the definition of a sacrament from the catechism as "the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace," then we do have such ordinances and among these certainly is membership. My own monthly meeting's paper on membership states that "membership is an outward sign of a person's inward commitment." I think that fits pretty well with the classic definition of a sacrament. And why not? We Quakers are much given to stating – sometimes perhaps without enough thought of what it means – that "all life is sacramental." As we have not abolished the clergy but rather abolished the laity, so perhaps ideally we have not abolished the sacred but rather the profane. Acceptance into membership thus becomes a substitute for baptism into the faith and, as such, necessarily has an element of sacred ritual about it. I would hope that we

could, in our treatment of membership, even while following a careful procedure, emphasize this positive, sacramental element.

Belonging: Quakers, Membership, and the Need to be Known, by Emily Higgs, Friends Journal, April 2012

https://www.friendsjournal.org/belonging-quakers-membership-and-the-need-to-be-known/

What role does monthly meeting membership play in our understanding of faith and belonging? Can someone be a Quaker without being a member or attender at a monthly meeting? Religions world-wide face the challenge of navigating the relationship between core theological tenets, the power of faith, and the structures that contain and provide organization for the institution. Quakerism has historically struck a positive and organic balance among these dynamics, but it is not immune from the struggle to blend spiritual Mystery and organizational architecture. The Quaker practice of monthly meeting membership offers us a concrete example of this tension regarding how we define our belonging to God, to Quakerism, and to one another in blessed community.

I was raised Episcopalian, and while I was a member of a church and felt deep connections to that community, rarely did someone ask me to which congregation I belonged, and never to which diocese. With that as my context for the social etiquette of introducing one's religious affiliation, I have yet to become accustomed to the common practice within the Religious Society of Friends of becoming acquainted with other self-identified Quakers by asking them to which monthly meeting or yearly meeting they belong. Why do we do this? At best, do we ask in order to establish a geographical or even broadly theological context for this new person? Or, at worst, are we asking to distinguish between those who are members and those who simply want to identify with something? Are we trying to prove that we are well-versed in the Quakerspeak that so immediately establishes us as a unique and sometimes exclusive community?

Before going any further, I would like to note that for the sake of simplicity in this article, I am largely ignoring long-time attenders who have ingrained themselves in a particular monthly meeting but who have chosen for intentional reasons not to seek membership. While I have been liberal with my application of the word membership, there still are elements of this article which apply solely to official membership as an institution. The important element here is affiliation with a monthly or yearly meeting, and the ways in which we separate people with a meeting from those without a meeting.

I came to Quakerism at age nine and fell in love with it at age 12 by way of Catoctin Quaker Camp in the Baltimore Yearly Meeting camping program. It took me those three years to realize that silence every morning was part of a faith tradition and not a quirky part of the morning camp ritual. I began spiritually considering myself a Quaker when I was in high school, and then attended Haverford College because of its Quaker character, hoping to continue to surround myself with Quaker community.

My time at Haverford opened many doors for me. I found myself traveling among Quaker communities in Africa and becoming deeply engaged with multiple Quaker organizations and service agencies, including American Friends Service Committee, African Great Lakes Initiative, Alternatives to Violence Project, and others. While at Haverford I worked with several other Friends to build up a new Quaker student community, which blossomed, grew, and continues to be one of the strongest Quaker elements of the college today, thanks to the hard work of its current students. These efforts to build Quaker community not only fed me spiritually but

deepened my commitment to the Religious Society of Friends and to nurturing the leadership and spiritual foundations of Young Adult Friends (YAFs). At the same time, while I was becoming invested in the Religious Society of Friends in a rich and generative way that fit my needs and phase of life, I still was not connected to any monthly meeting.

My experience of college, post-college, and transient communities of Young Adult Friends is that our spiritual needs aren't always best met within the monthly meeting structure. This is a common sentiment within YAF communities, and the reasons for that pattern do not necessarily reflect poorly on the vibrancy or quality of monthly meetings. Rather, YAFs often do not live near their home meeting, and knowing that they might live somewhere for only a brief period, they may hesitate to spend a great deal of time putting down roots in a new community. In keeping with this general tendency, I attended monthly meetings around the world and worshiped actively as a Quaker for years but avoided membership—early on because I was so committed to our student community at Haverford and later because I did not stay in one place for more than a year at a time.

After a year working at the Quaker United Nations Office in New York, the way opened for me to come back to Haverford and continue the work I had begun as a student by serving as the Director of Quaker Affairs for Haverford College. Still, I resisted membership. During those years, I had several interactions with Friends that made me feel "less than" for not being a member. I was once told that I was, in fact, not a Quaker because I had no regular meeting. In another instance, at a 150-person Quaker gathering at which I was the only person without a meeting on my name tag, someone actually said that he was glad I was there, even though I was not "one of them." I felt shocked, alienated, and embarrassed by these experiences and came away feeling that I was left out of the in-club of my own faith.

While these comments may have been more callous than your everyday membership conversation, I felt that they illustrated the dominant assumption that card-carrying membership is the most necessary essential of Friendliness. The centrality of membership to the structure of the Religious Society of Friends can be alienating to those for whom membership or having a regular worship community is not feasible. Since the group most often left out of this equation is Young Adult Friends, I find this pattern to be incongruent with our Testimonies of Community and Equality.

And yet slowly, in spite of holding my non-membership flag high, things began to change. Two things came into my life, almost simultaneously in that startlingly synchronistic way that reveals God has something planned for you, despite your convictions or stubborn woundedness.

First, my parents moved to Lancaster, Pa., and I occasionally attended Lancaster Meeting when I was home on Sundays and then more frequently, about two years ago, due to a family illness. Over several months, I learned that the meeting community had been holding my family in the Light in our time of greatest need. I was so moved that a meeting at which I was a new attender would reach out with such love. I felt lucky to be able to come to worship when I could, and I was touched when the meeting offered me a laminated name tag—I felt more included in an established meeting community than I ever had before.

During this time, when I was marveling at how much the simple gesture of offering a name tag mattered to me, I attended a YAF Dessert & Discussion Night about the question of membership with Arthur Larrabee, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting General Secretary. The evening was

organized by Sadie Forsythe, the yearly meeting YAF Coordinator (a position that no longer exists), to follow-up the YAF epistle that had been written at annual sessions in 2008, which questioned the requirement for meeting membership to serve on yearly meeting standing committees. While I went into the conversation that night prepared to share the grievances of feeling "less than" for not having a Quaker home to speak of, I was incredibly moved by the way some talked lovingly about membership, not as a stamp on your name tag but as a beautiful symbol of mutual accountability, commitment, and community.

I began to feel a rising and powerful need to be a recognized part of a meeting, to be spiritually grounded somewhere, and to be held accountable by a faith community. While my concerns still remained about the way membership is seen as the single most important way Friends identify one another, my understanding of what membership means began to broaden and to let a little Light in.

I found that I deeply craved the mutual responsibility and accountability of a monthly meeting; moving forward to become a recognized member of the Religious Society of Friends felt like plugging a hole in my life where Spirit had been leaking out. A long road led me to the place where I sought membership, and I am honored to have become a member of Lancaster Meeting. My request for membership was unorthodox: I was a transient young adult who did not live in Lancaster and was still relatively new to the community. Yet the meeting met me with open arms and received my request because they saw the deep desire for belonging and my commitment to Quakerism.

I am sure many Friends understand the delight I felt when I first put my name and meeting on my Quaker name tag. No one would ask me why it did not have the name of a meeting! I have been a member of Lancaster Meeting for almost two years now, and though I cannot worship there often, I feel loved and respected by my meeting. They understood and accepted me where I was, and they put my needs above the norms to which we often default. So while I cannot give as much time and service as I would like to Lancaster Friends, my understanding of how transformative membership can be has deepened.

Despite my joy in finally finding a spiritual home in Quakerism, I still firmly believe that membership as it is commonly structured is unfortunately inaccessible to the majority of transient young adults. I find myself surprised, time and time again, when I hear older Friends speak with urgency about the future vitality of the Religious Society of Friends and express dismay at the lack of young adults in their meetings. If Friends are committed to addressing these concerns and not simply wringing their hands, perhaps it is time to explore new approaches to membership with the needs of the younger generations in mind. If the monthly meeting structure is frequently less relevant to the "next generation" of Friends, then is it wise to use monthly meeting membership as the primary measuring stick by which we gauge the health and vitality of our faith community? Quakerism is vibrant and thriving in many worship groups and Quaker colleges, to name two examples, yet our declining membership statistics fail to take these groups into account and thus paint a rather grim picture of our future. Perhaps we can envision a more optimistic landscape if we let go of our historical attachment to monthly meeting membership as the locus of all meaningful Quaker community?

Understanding that membership does not and cannot independently characterize a relationship with God, with the Earth, and with community, the YAFs present at the Dessert & Discussion

night developed a number of important queries that speak to these concerns, hoping that they would reach monthly meetings:

1. What does membership mean to you, personally and as a monthly meeting?
2. What is the relationship between membership as a form and as an expression of stewardship, commitment, conviction, and service?
3. How do you welcome individuals fully into your community and recognize their gifts?
4. What is the essential function, intention, and reason for membership?
5. Is there a difference between being a Quaker and being a member of a monthly meeting?
6. How can we re-pattern the way we talk about our spirituality?
7. Quakerism is in its essence about one's relationship with the Divine; what role does membership play in that?
8. How can we examine and question the way we talk about membership and not challenge membership's importance in the life of the meeting?
9. How does the meeting community nurture and meet the needs of its members and attenders at various stages in life?
10. How can we value, connect with, and support community for young adults and others who do not fit neatly into meeting membership or other established patterns of belonging?

While many Quakers have different and varied experiences of membership within a monthly meeting, I hope that the story of my journey toward membership in the Religious Society of Friends will encourage some deeper reflection for us all on the way we welcome individuals into our communities by being inclusive, not exclusive, with the questions we ask and the comments we make. I pray that we might also find ways to confirm and hold up the importance of membership and the monthly meeting as a cornerstone of Quakerism, while also cherishing those who have not yet found a Quaker community but are unwavering in their commitment and love for the faith and practice of Friends.

I believe we are capable of valuing meeting membership as an institution and of affirming daily that we are so much more than what is written on our name tags.

With Just the Door Ajar, by Caroline Morris, Friends Journal, June/July 2020, pp. 25-27
https://www.friendsjournal.org/with-just-the-door-ajar/

Whenever I choose to identify as a Quaker, I feel a need to hedge. "I'm sort of Quaker," or I say, "I identify as Quaker—depending on the day." Most often, it's something like, "Well, I'm a Quaker in my heart." What I really mean when I do this is that I wanted to be a Quaker—quite a lot at one point—and some days I still do, but I'm not convinced.

During my first semester of seminary, I wrote and presented a paper that I titled "Hallway Discipleship." I referred to the preface to *Mere Christianity* where C. S. Lewis describes the subject as a hallway that opens up to several rooms. He says that his aim in writing the book was to get people into the hallway. "But," he adds, "it is in the rooms, not in the hall, that there are fires and chairs and meals." I took this metaphor and made it my own. For me, the hallway was not his version of the essentials of Christianity but that sacred space between belief and non-belief, and the rooms that lined this metaphoric hallway included other religions and frameworks.

The idea that sooner or later I would have to choose a room, a community united around a common narrative or framework, nagged me for years. I wanted to sit down, eat, and rest, but I just couldn't get myself to walk into—or remain in—any of the rooms I passed. Then one day in my early 20s, I woke up suddenly, before my alarm clock, and thought, "There can be fires and chairs and meals in the hallway too!" I realized I didn't have to agree with the idea that time in the hallway should be seen as "waiting," rather than "camping." That is not to say it is never a time of transition, for sometimes we do "return to God after God." Sometimes agnosticism and atheism can serve as a necessary purification before discovering a new framework (or rediscovering an old one) and thus, finding a new home. But there is no reason why community cannot be built in the hallway, too.

The thing that continues to draw me to Quakerism is the way it feels to me both like a room and a hallway. It is a room in the sense that it is its own proudly unique thing, with its own culture, history, and organization. Yet from what I can tell as an inside-outsider, or as a hallway-dweller, it seems to make room for the unconvinced. At one point during my recent unit of clinical pastoral education, my supervisor said something like, "I'm trying to figure out if you like Quakers, or if you just like that they let you do whatever you want." Doing whatever I want in this case entails listening to my inner voice, reading and exploring ideas freely, and being honest and authentic with others about where I am spiritually or otherwise. And I remember thinking, *Of course that's why I like Quakers; isn't that why most people are drawn to Quakerism?*

Perhaps I don't know why most people are drawn to Quakerism, but surely it isn't only the quirky sayings and the occasional, inevitable cliquishness. Instead, it is the testimonies, the clear commitment to the things we know in our bones are important; the emphasis on universal ministry; and the acknowledgement of how each and every person has something to say and to offer. At least, those are some of the things I get excited about. Upon my initial perusal seven or eight years ago, I was attracted especially to Quakerism's in-theory non-creedal stance—for many reasons, though right now I am reminded of Simone Weil's assertion that "Christianity speaks too much about holy things." And the thing is, Quakers generally don't. There is an orientation toward waiting, listening, and silence that allows me to honor what I discovered as a

child and what I have been reminded of periodically since: that everything Real is outside of our structures.

There are a few things that keep me from committing still after all these years of watching and considering. One is that I have convincement issues. I am wary of it just as I am wary of all my past conversions and "violently mystical" experiences. Some of these events were powerful, but I found that the meaning I made of them could be gone in an instant. So I am not looking to be convinced of Christianity or of Quakerism. The only kind of convincement I could trust at this point is that described by Father Zosima in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*: Early in the story, a woman comes to Zosima wanting to know how she can be sure of her salvation, and he tells her that her task is to love her neighbor "actively and indefatigably." For if she is able to remain oriented to that goal, to act on it over and over each day, then there will come a time when she is sure. "This has been tested," he says. "This is certain."

What I am interested in is a community where values and actions are lifted up above beliefs, or where beliefs are only useful if they reinforce and encourage the values that are demonstrably important. I judge religious communities primarily based on their care for others and the earth, and on their commitment to justice, equity, and inclusiveness. I am looking for other things as well, but most of all, I am looking for something a weighty Friend named for me not long ago: spaciousness. I thought for a long time that Quaker meeting was the place I had been envisioning: a community of seekers who are working together and separately through what I will forever term, thanks to Jacques Lacan, "trauma of the Real"; a group of people who respect the process without demanding particular outcomes or theological structures. This was my hope, my assumption, and I have yet to figure out whether or not this assumption holds. I am waiting at the door—for what, I don't know exactly.

There are other ways in which I am a hallway person. When I was five, my mother and I spent a day visiting the kindergarten classroom and then the first grade classroom at my new school in Seoul, South Korea. I was nearly too old for the former and nearly too young for the latter, so I was to experience both and then choose. The kindergarten classroom was "fun" and active; the teacher coddled me and sat by me, leaned over and tried to help me do my worksheet. I walked into the first grade classroom with my mother, and that teacher coolly looked up from the book she was reading and motioned for us to sit outside of the circle she had gathered. I can remember it perfectly: how soothed and safe I felt, how precious it was to be invited to be present in my preferred role.

I think what I want in addition to spaciousness is freedom—freedom to go in and out, to hang out just outside the open door if I need to. And perhaps that is what makes Quakerism unique: I think I'm allowed to do that. As with any other group, Friends are diverse, and so this permission really depends on who you ask. But I've asked around in my circles, and the consensus is that to some degree, "Quakers do whatever they want." That sense of empowerment my mother gifted me when she let me choose classrooms based on my comfort and my needs is what I am asking for, and that is what I want to have found.

I quoted Emily Dickinson in my head as I was seeking to wrap this up, and I think it fits, however strangely:

So We must meet apart—
You there—I—here—
With just the Door ajar

They are apart, yet meeting; separated, yet the door is open—expansively open, as she explains in the next line, “That Oceans are.” My love affair with Quakerism is not nearly as complicated (or dramatic) as the connection Dickinson describes in the poem, but similarly, “I cannot live with you,” at least not yet.

FURTHER RESOURCES

See link from our BFM website Resource Materials section to Quaker Internet Resources

Journals and Pamphlets*:*
Friends Journal on Quaker Membership, June/July 2020 also available online at friendsjournal.org

Members one of Another: The Dynamics of Membership in Quaker Meeting, by Thomas Gates, Pendle Hill Pamphlet, #371, 2004

Spiritual Hospitality: A Quaker's Understanding of Outreach, by Harvey Gilman, Pendle Hill Pamphlet # 314, 1994

Abbot, Margery Post and Carl Abbot, ***Quakerism: The Basics***, 2021

Ambler, Rex, ***The Quaker Way: A Rediscovery***, 2013

Brinton, Howard, ***Friends for 350 Years***,

Dandelion, Pink, ***The Quakers: A Very Short Introduction***, 2008

Durham, Geoffrey, ***Being a Quaker: A Guide for Newcomers***, 2011

Durham, Geoffrey, ***What Do Quakers Believe?*** 2019

Chase, Steve, ***Letters to a Fellow Seeker: A Short Introduction to the Quaker Way***, 2012

Gorman, George H. ***The Amazing Fact of Quaker Worship***, 1973, 2008.

Intermountain Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice, The Religious Society of Friends, 2009

Jones, Rufus, **Faith and Practice** of the Quakers, 2007 (original, 1927)

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Pamphlet: ***The Meaning of Membership***

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Brochure: ***A Quaker Path—A Spiritual Journey from Visitor to Attender to Member***

Kelly, Thomas, ***A Testament of Devotion***, 1996 (original, 1941)

Martin, Marcelle***, Our Life is Love***, 2016