

Baltimore Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice Revision Committee Proposed Advices, Queries and Voices

Membership: Advices

Just as Friends have “affirmed the priesthood of all believers” so we also affirm that each Friend, not just the clerk, has a direct responsibility for the meeting. As we are all ministers of the Word, so we all are ministers to each other and to the community as a whole. As members of a community we look not to our rights, liberties and privileges, but to our obligations, responsibilities, and our duties.

Membership in the Religious Society of Friends is a spiritual commitment. To become a member, an applicant should have come experientially into general agreement with the Society’s principles of belief and testimonies.

Membership carries with it spiritual obligations. Each member is called to participate in the Meeting’s spiritual life and to attend worship regularly. Members need to nurture each other’s God-given gifts and talents. They seek guidance from one another and the Meeting in discerning God’s will for themselves. They pray for one another.

The basic spiritual commitment creates practical obligations. The vitality of each Monthly Meeting depends on its members’ investments of time, energy and financial support. Friends put practical meaning into their spiritual commitment through regular participation in meetings for business, service on committees or as officers, regular financial giving, taking part in service projects under the care of the Meeting, assisting in maintenance of Meeting property, and representing the Meeting in community and wider Friends’ organizations.

Membership: Queries

How do I actively support the meeting community?

How do I support the Clerk of Meeting and clerks of committees?

How am I maturing into the fullness of membership in this spiritual community?

How does meeting nurture my spiritual growth and transformation?

Membership: Voices

For as in one body we have many members, and not all members have the same function, so we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

Romans 12:4-5 (NRSV)

So the measuring line of righteousness is in this known; . . . So wait to know every particular of yourselves, to be heirs of this; and know your portion, the power of God, the gospel fellowship, then are ye members one of another, and living stones, that build up the spiritual household.

Fox, Epistle 239

When early Friends affirmed the priesthood of all believers it was seen as an abolition of the clergy; in fact it is an abolition of the laity. All members are part of the clergy and have the clergy’s responsibility for the maintenance of the meeting as a community. This means helping to contribute, in whatever ways are most suitable, to the maintenance of an atmosphere in which spiritual growth and exploration are possible for all.

Britain Yearly Meeting 11.01

Like all discipleships, membership has its elements of commitment and responsibility but it is also about joy and celebration. Membership is a way of saying to the meeting that you feel at home, and in the right place. Membership is also a way of saying to the meeting, and to the world, that you accept at least the fundamental elements of being a Quaker: the understanding of divine guidance, the manner of corporate worship and the ordering of the meeting’s business, the practical expression of inward convictions and the equality of all before God. In asking to be admitted into the community of the meeting you are affirming what the meeting stands for and declaring your willingness to contribute to its life.

Britain Yearly Meeting 11.01

BYM Proposed Advices, Queries & Voices

Membership is costly ... It is not just about belonging, feeling accepted, feeling at home. It has also to do with being stretched, being challenged, being discomforted ... We can never be entirely sure of where the venture will lead us ... [but] the one thing we can be sure of is that the process, taken seriously, will call us to change.

Helen Rowlands, 1952

Membership does not require great moral or spiritual achievement, but it does require a sincerity of purpose and a commitment to Quaker values and practices. Membership is a spiritual discipline, a commitment to the well-being of one's spiritual home and not simply appearance on a membership roll.

Britain Yearly Meeting 11.01

Entry into membership of the Religious Society of Friends is a public acknowledgement of a growing unity with a community of people whose worship and service reflect, however imperfectly, their perception of discipleship and their recognition of the work of the Holy Spirit in the world. This unity is grounded in the experience of being 'gathered' in the love of God in the silent expectancy of our meetings for worship and in a willingness to surrender ourselves to a corporate seeking for the will of God in such measure as we can comprehend it.

Britain Yearly Meeting 11.04

Membership in a Quaker meeting is a spirit-led journey of coming to know ourselves as individual-in-community, a journey on which we experience meeting as a place of acceptance, a place of shared values, a place of transformation, and a place of obedience.

Thomas Gates, 2004

Worthiness has nothing to do with membership. God has already accepted us in our imperfection and is loving us forward toward a more perfect image of God's self. The real issue in membership is commitment on the part of both the meeting and the applicant to remain faithful to the development and requirements of the process within Quaker tradition.

Patricia Loring, 1997

As Quakers, we have no creed to recite, no confession to confess, no rituals to undergo that will reliably bring us into the fullness of membership. But we do have a rich and inspiring tradition; we have each other; and we have the Spirit of God which, we are promised, will "lead us into all things."

Thomas Gates, 2004

The servant-leader can be effective only where the principle of leading by serving is knit into the whole fabric of the institution. Everyone who is part of the community must accept the principle in his or her own life; it must be the basis for the novitiate-period of anyone coming into the institution.

Paul A. Lacey, 1982

The Inward Light is a universal light given to all men, religious consciousness itself being basically the same wherever it is found. Our difficulties come when we try to express it. We cannot express; we can only experience God. Therefore we must always remember tolerance, humility, and tenderness with others whose ways and views may differ from ours.

Pacific Yearly Meeting, 1953

And oh, how sweet and pleasant it is to the truly spiritual eye to see several sorts of believers, several forms of Christians in the school of Christ, every one learning their own lesson, performing their own peculiar service, and knowing, owning, and loving one another in their several places and different performances to their Master, to whom they are to give an account, and not quarrel with one another about their different practices.

Isaac Pennington, 1659