

**Membership
in the
Ann Arbor
Friends
Meeting**

Membership in the Ann Arbor Friends Meeting:

A Guide for Those Inquiring into Membership
in the
Religious Society of Friends
within the Ann Arbor Friends Meeting

*Membership has its elements of commitment and responsibility
but it is also about joy and celebration.*

Britain Yearly Meeting

Membership establishes a commitment. It means that for each member the Religious Society of Friends provides the most promising home for spiritual enlightenment and growth. It commits a person to the daily pursuit of truth after the manner of Friends and commits the Meeting to support the member in that pursuit. Membership includes a willingness to live in spiritual unity with other members of the Religious Society of Friends.

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Introduction

This handbook makes information on membership within the Ann Arbor Friends Meeting readily available to all. We hope to dispel any mystery and impediments in the process, and to make it open and clear. Much of the text below comes directly from the Meeting's Handbook (3rd ed., 1995). Since Lake Erie Yearly Meeting has no *Faith and Practice* book of its own, we have borrowed many ideas and quotations from *Quaker Faith & Practice*, Britain Yearly Meeting, 1999 and *Faith & Practice*, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1997.

The Ann Arbor Friends Meeting is a monthly meeting affiliated with Green Pastures Quarterly Meeting, Lake Erie Yearly Meeting, and the Friends General Conference. It is an unprogrammed meeting within the Religious Society of Friends. When one joins a local monthly meeting, membership in the Religious Society of Friends at large is obtained.

When is the right time to become a member?

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.

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The decision to ask for membership in a Friends Meeting is a very personal one. It arises from a feeling of oneness with the community of Friends, and with a desire to aspire to live life in the way that Quakers hold up as their ideal.

Comfort with making the decision to join may also depend on feeling assured that the application will be welcomed. Some longtime attenders at Friends Meeting have wondered whether they should wait to be invited to join. Others have wondered whether membership is important at all. A few comments on these questions may be helpful.

Ann Arbor Friends Meeting welcomes newcomers. It accepts into its fellowship and community all who wish to partake of it, whether they are members or not. With the exception of a few key committees and offices, the Meeting accepts all attenders along with members into full participation.

The Quakers of the Ann Arbor Meeting come from a tradition that refrains from evangelism and avoids proselytizing. In the absence of proselytizing and with the door open to participation for all who attend, membership may seem an ephemeral and unimportant option. The truth is quite to the contrary. Ann Arbor Friends consider membership an important step not just for the member, but also for the Meeting.

Membership is a mutual commitment, of the member to take responsibility in and for the Meeting, and of the Meeting to take its members under its care, for nurturing and fellowship. It is a mutual declaration of serious and permanent attachment, not to be taken lightly on either side. In membership, we take each other under our care, and we join with the meeting community to put our beliefs into practice. Without the commitment that membership implies, this is difficult.

It is right for a person to consider membership when he/she feels a willingness to make a commitment, with the intention of forming a long-term association. Sometimes membership is felt as an outward sign of a commitment the person has already made to the life of the Meeting. Of course, the willingness to commit and the expectation of a long-term association cannot meaningfully exist except against a background of knowledge and experience of what Friends are and what they do.

Am I in tune with Quaker practices and principles?

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. Britain Yearly Meeting

A person considering membership should feel comfortable with our form of worship, which is based not on a programmed service but on a living silence so filled with the divine presence that those who worship become conscious of it and are drawn together in unity under the power of God's love. One who has attended our Meeting for some time will have encountered its weaknesses as well as its strengths.

Although Friends have no creed, the experience of the Inner Light has always been central to us. This implies the recognition of the principle of love as fundamental to our lives and action and the commitment to strive for it in our daily behavior and in our larger ideals of living. Friends have come to feel the importance of that "seed of God" in every person by virtue of which we are all united as children of God in one divine family, and through which each one can come into direct communion with something greater than oneself.

What normally defines a religious denomination is what its members believe. Friends have difficulty with set creeds that all must affirm. Even life-long Friends regard their religious beliefs as growing and evolving, and are loath to prescribe for a new member a list of articles of faith that define a Quaker. And yet, Quakers have a great deal in common that makes them a religious community. By attending meeting for worship, partaking of the business and activity of the Meeting, and reading Quaker writings, one develops a sense of what makes Quakers what they are.

One who wishes to join the Meeting should understand, be drawn to, and have experience with the methods used in our meetings for business, particularly the principle of acting only

when the Meeting is in unity. She/he should be ready to share in the responsibilities for the ongoing life of the Meeting including, to the extent possible, contributions of time, energy, and money.

One should also be in substantial accord with Friends' testimonies concerning our way of life. Friends have always stressed the value of personal sincerity, truthfulness, and honesty. We have sought a simplicity of living that allows time, energy, and resources for the expression of love and goodwill in daily life. We affirm the sacredness of marriage and other committed relationships, and the importance of strong and rich ties to family, friends, and community.

Friends have long been concerned with the injustices and failures of our social order, and have striven to promote a society that realizes the vision and message of Jesus. Friends' reverence for the good in every person emphasizes the basic worth and integrity of the individual regardless of race, station in life, or other characteristics. The historic testimony of Friends against war arises from this same belief in that of God in everyone. The peace testimony is a positive testimony, calling us to live in such a way that the roots of war will wither.

Instead of an immutable creed to which one must assent, Friends have a series of queries, which change from time to time, that invite us to examine ourselves in the light of testimonies stated in question form. These queries are read monthly, in turn, in meeting for worship.

The Quaker way of life more often results from gradual growth than from a sudden conversion. Though we all fall short of living up to its ideals, we gather strength and courage in the fellowship of a group that is aspiring toward the same ends. With membership comes the sense of going forward together.

A person considering membership may wish to discuss his/her spiritual path, goals, and concerns with more experienced Friends. The Membership and Outreach Committee can arrange for such a mentor, if desired.

How do I apply for membership?

To apply for membership in the Ann Arbor Friends Meeting, write a letter to the Clerk, who customarily reads the letter aloud at the next meeting for worship for business. This letter provides an opportunity to describe or reflect on your spiritual journey. The Clerk refers the letter to the Membership and Outreach Committee, who contacts the applicant and arranges for a clearness committee. The applicant may suggest potential members of this committee; the Membership and Outreach Committee is responsible for appointing the committee and a convener, who then arranges a meeting with the applicant.

Full membership is open to any applicant who has reached at least high school age. Younger friends may request junior membership. Affiliate membership is an option for those who wish to retain membership in another religious body. All applications are handled identically, whether or not the applicant has previously held a junior membership.

The Meeting may approve transfer of a member to another Friends Meeting or a Friends Church; likewise, the Meeting may receive a minute or letter of transfer for a person who has been a member of another Friends Meeting or Friends Church. In each case, the responsibility for informing the home Meeting of the wish to transfer lies with the individual, who communicates this wish, in writing, to the Clerk. Records of both Meetings should reflect the transfer of membership.

Applications for membership from persons whose residence is remote from Ann Arbor may be acted upon in a similar manner to those from individuals living close to Ann Arbor. The Meeting may wish to delegate the responsibility of forming and convening a clearness committee to Friends who reside nearer the applicant regardless of the place of membership of the interviewing Friends, since a new member is welcomed not only into Ann Arbor Meeting but into the Religious Society of Friends in its entirety.

What is the role of the Clearness Committee for membership?

The clearness committee explores with the applicant the religious principles and practices of Friends. This should be the occasion for considering the meaning of Quakerism in the lives of the committee members as well as in the life of the applicant.

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A clearness committee consists of several seasoned Friends who meet one or more times with the applicant to discuss membership. The clearness committee strives to create an atmosphere of worshipful openness and caring so that both the committee members and the applicant feel comfortable in exploring fundamental questions of religious belief and practice and the responsibilities of membership in the society.

The clearness committee needs to be prepared to respond faithfully to a wide range of questions that the applicant may ask. The applicant should be encouraged to share expectations concerning the Meeting and the significance of membership.

A clearness committee and the applicant may discuss questions such as:

What role do you think membership in the Meeting will play in your spiritual path?

What has been your experience with other religious traditions?

Which Friends' beliefs and practices specifically attract you and which are puzzling to you?

How do you perceive you'll respond to the diversity of beliefs within Meeting?

How closely are you in harmony with Friends' testimonies? With Friends' work for social justice?

What is your understanding of the process of Quaker decision making and "sense of the meeting" as practiced in Friends meeting for business?

In what ways do you think you can share your time and talents with the Meeting?

How can the Meeting support and help you?

The committee meets separately to reach unity on the recommendation they will make to the Meeting on the clearness of an applicant for membership, and then discusses this recommendation with the applicant. After a first meeting with the applicant, the committee may reach clearness or may feel that there is more work to be done and so further meeting(s) may be arranged.

How does the Clearness Committee report back to the Meeting?

The clearness committee reports its unity back to the Membership & Outreach Committee. A recommendation for membership will be presented to a subsequent meeting for worship for business by the Membership & Outreach Committee. Final action is taken by the Meeting.

The Clerk sends appropriate notification, in writing, to the new member who is then added to the Meeting's records. New members who are terminating their affiliation with another religious body are asked to notify that organization of their intent.

It is the current practice of the Ann Arbor Friends Meeting to welcome those newly received into membership with public recognition at the rise of a meeting for worship, and to give them a book on Quakerism as a token of our congratulations.

What special categories of membership does Ann Arbor Meeting have?

Junior Membership

The Meeting welcomes as junior members children of members, at their parents' request, as well as children on their own request. The Meeting looks upon membership as a

commitment following a thoughtful and autonomous decision, and therefore does not confer birthright membership.

Upon graduating from high school (or at about the age of 18), junior members are invited to consider their adult relationship with the Meeting. They may: a) apply for full membership; b) continue as junior members for another few years; or c) continue their association with the Meeting as an attender.

Affiliate Membership

In certain cases where the applicant has special reasons for wanting to retain membership in another religious organization while entering an active relationship with Friends, the Meeting allows this. Such a member is called an Affiliate member. The application process is the same as that for full members.

Sojourning Membership

Members of Friends Meetings or Friends Churches elsewhere who are temporarily in Ann Arbor may request that their home Meeting recommend sojourning membership with the Ann Arbor Meeting. In this case the actual membership remains with the home Meeting, but we welcome the commitment of such Friends to full participation while they are here.

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.

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Suggested Reading for Further Study

Most of these books are available in the Newcomers' Library in the Meeting lobby or the Meeting Library in Quaker House. They can be purchased by ordering through a local bookstore or online at QuakerBooks of Friends General Conference Bookstore (www.quakerbooks.org) or Pendle Hill (www.pendlehill.org). The Ann Arbor Meeting *Handbook* is available for purchase in the Meeting office and lobby.

Friends' Beliefs and Practices

Handbook, Ann Arbor Friends Meeting, 4th ed., 2007
Quaker Faith and Practice: The Book of Christian Discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, 2nd edition, 1999
Faith & Practice, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1997
Faith & Practice, New England Yearly Meeting, 1985
Quaker Process for Friends on the Benches, by Mathilda Navias, 2012

Introductions to Quakerism

A Living Faith: A Historical Study of Quaker Beliefs, by Wilmer A. Cooper, 2001
The Quaker Way, by Signe Wilkinson, 1998

Spiritual Autobiographies

The Journal of George Fox, John L. Nickalls, editor, 1997
Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman, Phillips Moulton, editor, 1989

Worship

A Testament of Devotion, by Thomas R. Kelly, 1996 edn.
Encounter with Silence: Reflections from the Quaker Tradition, by John Punshon, 1987
Four Doors to Meeting for Worship, by William Taber, 1992

Collections

Quaker Reader, Jessamyn West, editor, 1962, reprinted 1992

Other Resources

Membership & Outreach Committee, Ann Arbor Friends Meeting (see list of members in the Meeting Directory)
Quaker website: www.quaker.org

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