

# **The Interim Discipline - 7/15/2016**

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## **ORGANIZATION AND PROCEDURES**

Our Quaker faith is grounded in the direct, immediate and perceptible guidance of the Holy Spirit in all things. We believe that God is always available to us through the presence of the Spirit. We believe and know by experience that the Spirit can show us things we have not seen before and can give us clear direction as to the course of action we should take in our daily lives.

The experience of Friends since the very early days has been that this guidance is available corporately as well as individually. When we are gathered as a body, we find our ability both to perceive and to follow God's guidance greatly strengthened. Our organization and procedures are accordingly arranged to provide regular opportunity for the Spirit of Christ, the Inward Teacher, to become manifest in the activities and actions of our gathered community life.

The use of the term "meeting" may not always be clear in describing our organization and procedures because it is used in a variety of ways and contexts. "Meeting" may refer to both the actual places and times when we gather together for worship and business, and also to our organization as a gathered community in a continuing body.

The Yearly Meeting as an organization is composed of monthly meetings as organizations. Yearly Meeting and monthly meetings as organizations hold various "meetings" at set times and places for individuals to gather for worship and business. The individual members of the monthly meetings are, by virtue of their monthly meeting membership, also members of the Yearly Meeting. Individual members participate in the meetings of both their monthly meeting and the Yearly Meeting. Those who are not members of a monthly meeting, but who also participate in our meetings, are referred to as "attenders."

### **I. Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business**

At the heart of our organization and procedures lies the "meeting for worship with attention to business", or "meeting for business", as it has been called historically. Meeting for business is the opportunity for the meeting community to gather at a regularly appointed time and place to do its formal business. Meeting for business is an experience of our ever available relationship with God. Its procedures are grounded in this relationship.

Like all the corporate practices of our Yearly Meeting, the meeting for business is designed to guide and support members and attenders to grow in their relationship with God. Each individual practices listening for the Spirit, so that they can authentically offer their unique perspectives and judgments to the rest of the meeting during times of corporate decision-making. At the same time, individuals are challenged to release their unique contributions and trust the community to receive all these individual contributions within the wider process of yielding to the fresh reality of the Holy Spirit.

Meeting for business is just as much a way of worship and spiritual practice as meeting for

worship or times of daily retirement or outward acts of discipleship. The exercise that is meeting for business enables us to carry an expansive experience of the Spirit into all of our activities in our meeting community as well as into our secular commitments.

Our faith requires us to be equally committed to contemplation and action. Meeting for business provides the ground to bring the insights of meeting for worship to bear on the circumstances of the world, acting to bring God's desires for all of creation into greater reality.

### ***Importance of Participation***

Members are reminded of their responsibility to attend business meetings. Spiritual nurture, fellowship, and sense of community may best be maintained by common efforts through the business meeting and the loving concern expressed through whatever action may be taken. Attenders also are welcome at business meetings.

### ***Decisions***

Decisions are based on the understanding that the gathered group may receive a shared sense of divine guidance, known as a "sense of the meeting," sometimes described as Friends "being in unity". Decisions are based on a shared spiritual sense of the rightly led action for the meeting at that particular time. This is different from the concepts of consensus and unanimity, often used in secular meetings. Voting is not used to reach decisions.

It is the responsibility of all present to discern carefully if they are led to speak on the matter at hand. It is the responsibility of the clerk to call on individuals to speak, attending to pacing and order so as to sustain the sense of worship. The final discernment, or "sense of the meeting," is recorded as a "minute" expressing the unity that has been reached.

If a sense of the meeting does not become evident, no decision is made. The matter may be "laid over" for further seasoning to be considered at a subsequent meeting for business. Often when disagreements arise, if all present are open to the leading of the Holy Spirit and to one another, a way forward may be found better than any course originally proposed. In this way, the meetings for business will more nearly follow the will of God.

### **Record of Proceedings**

Permanent records shall be kept of the proceedings of all meetings for business. When such records are no longer needed by the respective meeting for current use, they shall be deposited in some suitable and safe place designated by the Yearly Meeting. The Yearly Meeting has designated the Friends Historical Collection at Guilford College as a suitable depository.

## **Monthly, Quarterly, and Yearly Meetings**

The local Quaker congregation is called “the monthly meeting” since it holds a meeting for business each month. The monthly meeting appoints regular meetings for worship for its community. It may also “allow” or sanction other meetings for worship that are under its care at times and places it feels appropriate. These may include worship groups and/or preparative meetings. Worship groups typically gather only for meeting for worship, while preparative meetings often also gather for meeting for business. In either case, individual membership resides with the monthly meeting.

Two or more monthly meetings in a region may form a “quarterly meeting,” so called because appointed representatives and other members of each of these monthly meetings assemble during the year at designated times for spiritual fellowship, to conduct necessary business and other matters of concern.

North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) is made up of its member monthly meetings in a covenantal relationship. If a monthly meeting feels led to also consider a similar membership in or affiliation with another body of Friends, it is essential that time and attention be given for seasoned consideration through a Spirit-led discernment process that involves both the monthly meeting and Yearly Meeting. A monthly meeting may maintain full membership in Yearly Meeting if, in accountability to this unfolding mutual process of open and transparent seeking after Truth, the monthly meeting and the yearly meeting are in unity that it can remain in good relationship with both Yearly Meeting and the other body.

The Yearly Meeting gathers annually to conduct business, at a time and place approved the previous year. All members of the Yearly Meeting are encouraged to attend the annual sessions. Each monthly meeting appoints specific individual Friends to represent it at the annual sessions.

### ***New Meetings***

If a monthly meeting applies for membership in the Yearly Meeting, a committee shall be appointed by the Yearly Meeting to meet with the members of the monthly meeting to determine if said meeting and the Yearly Meeting are in accord concerning membership. If after hearing the report of the committee, the Yearly Meeting in session is in unity with the application, the monthly meeting shall be accepted as a member of the Yearly Meeting.

A group desiring to start a new meeting for worship within the Yearly Meeting may first be established as a preparative meeting by application to a neighboring monthly meeting. After a suitable time of careful consideration, if a preparative meeting wishes to become an independent

monthly meeting, it may do so by applying to the monthly meeting of which it is a part. After receiving that approval, the new monthly meeting will become a member of the Yearly Meeting upon expressing its desire for membership to the Yearly Meeting in session. Participants in the new group have membership in the Yearly Meeting according to the procedure set forth elsewhere in this book.

### ***Meetings Discontinued***

No member meeting may be laid down except by mutual consent of that meeting and the Yearly Meeting. If a meeting is to be laid down, disposal of its assets shall be left under the care of the meeting's members.

### ***Officials***

The Yearly Meeting annually appoints from its membership Friends to serve as Clerk, Assistant Clerk, Recording Clerk, Treasurer, and Trustees. The Yearly Meeting also appoints Friends to serve on various committees. All these may be reappointed at the discretion of the Yearly Meeting. In some cases where specific representation from each monthly meeting is desirable the Yearly Meeting may ask that each monthly meeting nominate a Friend to serve as its representative on the yearly meeting committee.

Clerks and convenors of Yearly Meeting committees, and representatives to outside organizations, must be members of a monthly meeting in the Yearly Meeting. Non-members may be appointed as members of a committee with the approval of the Yearly Meeting. The committee may co-opt other persons with relevant gifts for service on that committee. Monthly Meetings are encouraged to follow a similar policy in their own appointments whenever possible.

Monthly meetings should at a minimum name a clerk and a treasurer. These may be reappointed at the discretion of the monthly meeting. Additional appointments, such as recording clerk, trustee(s), and committees, may be made as the monthly meeting feels is appropriate.

### ***Duties of Monthly Meeting Clerks***

A clerk for meeting for business should be appointed by each monthly meeting for a specific term of office. An assistant or recording clerk may be similarly appointed where it is felt that this will assist in attending to and finishing all business with care and dispatch, so that nothing may suffer through delay. The clerks should prepare an agenda, preside at all meetings for business, keep and preserve accurate records of the proceedings, and handle all correspondence of the meeting. The clerks may delegate these tasks when appropriate. It is the clerks' responsibility to weigh and judge the import of each issue and to present a minute to the meeting

for consideration. The clerks should give attention to the Advices and Queries and to any directives from the Yearly and Quarterly Meetings.

### ***Representatives to Annual Sessions***

Each year preceding annual sessions all monthly meetings should appoint Friends to serve as representatives at the sessions of the Yearly Meeting and to report back to the monthly meeting.

## **The Interim Body of Yearly Meeting**

The Interim Body of Yearly Meeting is empowered to carry on any yearly meeting business, new or continuing, that may arise during the time when Yearly Meeting is not in session. The Yearly Meeting clerks serve as clerks of the Interim Body and are *members ex officio*.

Each monthly meeting shall appoint from one to five of its members to serve on the Interim Body. The term of service of Friends appointed shall be at the discretion of each monthly meeting. Changes in the membership of the Interim Body shall take effect at the meeting at which they are reported by the monthly meeting to Interim Body or to the Yearly Meeting in session.

Interim Body shall convene at least twice annually to consider any business which may arise. If felt necessary, the Yearly Meeting clerk may call a special meeting at any time.

All members of the Yearly Meeting are encouraged to participate in meetings of the Interim Body. Attenders and visitors are welcome to participate.

The specific responsibilities of the Interim Body are:

- In general to represent the Yearly Meeting and act on its behalf in cases where a delay until next annual sessions would be inadvisable.
- To have the oversight and inspection of manuscripts prepared to be printed relating to NCYM(C) Friends faith or testimonies, and to encourage or discourage the publication of such at their discretion.
- To receive from monthly or quarterly meetings proposed memorials concerning deceased Friends as shall be forwarded, so that after consideration and any needed revision, they may be presented to the annual sessions for a decision concerning publication.
- To undertake needed planning and preparations for the upcoming annual sessions of the yearly meeting.
- To correspond with individual Friends and meetings as deemed appropriate.

- To report all its actions to the Yearly Meeting in session.

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# Membership

## *Membership as an Intentional, Living Relationship*

It is our experience as a Yearly Meeting that membership in the Religious Society of Friends signifies an intentional, living relationship between the individual, the monthly meeting, and God, rather than a status granted to the individual. Membership is an indication of this relationship rather than of correct beliefs or a correct lifestyle.

The membership relationship arises from the continuing experience of God's love gathering us as a community during regular times of collective worship, business, and our life together. It is a covenant for mutual nurture, support and guidance as we seek a more perfect harmony with the desires and intent of God. The individuals and meeting who have made this commitment are members one of another.

Our desire in matters of membership is to be inclusive of all who are drawn to this relationship and who are willing to make the personal commitments that are inherent in this relationship. Members are people who go beyond regular active participation in that they feel called to commit to the long-term care of and responsibility for the meeting by entering into this formal relationship.

As a practice of hospitality, the Yearly Meeting welcomes all persons who are nurtured by participation in the activities of monthly meetings at any level of involvement. Many long-term attenders have become valued parts of our common life without ever seeking membership.

When an attender decides to seek membership will vary. Some individuals do relatively early because they know they are ready for this kind of relationship. They may still be in the process of learning the faith and practices of Friends. Others may seek membership only after years of active and committed service to the meeting. What is most important is the deeper and inward forming of relationship that occurs naturally. Some Friends only see afterward that they became inward members long before seeking membership.

After years of service to the meeting, many members have come to trust in an unfolding and transforming corporate life of the Spirit that has included all those who have come before as well as all those who will come after.

## *Participating as a Member of the Meeting*

Members are both invited and expected to participate fully in the life of the meeting including meetings for worship, meetings for business, and other activities and events of the monthly



meeting. It is important to attend meeting for worship, where we are comforted and taught as a corporate body by the Holy Spirit. The insights of meeting for worship find outward expression in our attendance at the meeting for business, where the meeting seeks to discern what work God intends for it and how that work should be accomplished.

The life blood of the meeting is the loving intent of its members offered in activities such as committee work, care of the building and grounds, and mutual religious education. Each member is encouraged to discern an appropriate way to serve the meeting. Friends should take care so to live that a portion of their time, talents and possessions may be dedicated to the work of the Meeting. Friends are expected to support their Monthly Meeting financially as they are able by direct giving through the treasurer since the taking of a collection during meeting for worship is not practiced.

Membership nearly always involves disappointments and frustrations from time to time, as we rub our rough edges up against the rough edges of others. These challenges are opportunities to learn more about ourselves and to grow in our ability to forgive the imperfections that are part of life in community. When differences arise, it is important to address them promptly in a spirit of love, honesty, and humility. The commitment of membership involves a willingness to stay in the community and seek the guidance of the Spirit in these difficulties, as well as in times of blessing.

### ***Discernment of Readiness for Membership***

Persons may be accepted into membership who are willing to listen for and give expression in their lives to the promptings of the Inner Spirit in all areas of personal discipline and service to others. Some individuals may not claim all Friends teachings and testimonies as their own at the time they become members. What is vital is a readiness and commitment to wait upon God and seek Divine Guidance in all areas of life and to remain open and teachable to the understandings and witness of one's Quaker community both past and present.

We live in a culture that is very individualistic and constantly undermines our desire to follow God's will. Therefore members of the Meeting should work diligently against dilution of the Quaker message. All members are encouraged to strive to live by the principles set forth in this book, and to work toward attainment of the truths implicit in the Queries and Advices for individuals and Meetings.

### ***Becoming a Member***

Each monthly meeting develops its own policies and procedures for membership decisions. The following practices are recommended for consideration by monthly meetings.

### ***By Request***

Individuals wishing to become members by request make their desire known to the clerk of the monthly meeting, so that an announcement can be made at a meeting for business and a committee can be named by the monthly meeting to visit with the individual. This *clearness committee* and the individual explore together the individual's desire for membership and the mutual responsibilities and expectations of the membership relationship. If after hearing the report of the clearness committee the monthly meeting is satisfied that there is full realization of the implications of membership and wishes to approve the request, the individual should be welcomed without delay. A decision on membership may be deferred if either the individual or the meeting feel any hesitation as to the rightness of the step.

### ***Transfer of Membership***

When a person desires to transfer to a monthly meeting in this Yearly Meeting from another meeting in the Religious Society of Friends, a letter approving the transfer and stating that the individual is a member of the Society in good standing is forwarded from the other meeting. Upon the receipt of this letter, the monthly meeting appoints a clearness committee to explore the nature of the mutual responsibilities and expectations of membership in that meeting and the distinctive characteristics of this Yearly Meeting. On hearing the report of the clearness committee, the monthly meeting may take final action on the transfer request without delay. The individual should then be welcomed appropriately.

### ***Non-resident members***

Monthly meetings should communicate with their non-resident members at least once a year. In turn, non-resident members should keep the Monthly Meeting advised of their address and of such vital statistics as births, marriages, and deaths. Non-resident members are encouraged to transfer to a Monthly Meeting in the area of their residence, if their move is relatively permanent, and if a suitable Meeting is located near the new home.

### ***Sojourning members***

Friends participating in the life of a monthly meeting who wish to retain their membership in another meeting may request sojourning membership during their stay in the community. Sojourning membership is often the choice of a Friend who is moving into the area for an extended but temporary period of time, such as a university student entering a graduate program in a distant city or an adult child "coming home" for an indefinite period to be the caregiver for an aging parent.

A person may be accepted as a sojourning member when a letter is received from the home meeting verifying that the person is a member of the Religious Society of Friends in good standing. The monthly meeting may appoint a clearness committee in this situation. A

sojourning member shall have the privileges and obligations of other members of the Meeting where they are sojourning, including the right to join in decisions of the monthly meeting, to head committees or serve on such, and to serve in any capacity on monthly, quarterly, or yearly meeting levels as a representative of the monthly meeting.

### ***Membership for Children and Young Friends***

We acknowledge the children and Young Friends of our meetings as a precious part of their monthly meeting and of our yearly meeting. We seek to nurture their spiritual growth in the ways we can, and we encourage the monthly meetings to take seriously the spiritual nurture and involvement of their young people.

We stress that monthly meetings should welcome all children and Young Friends as an indispensable part of their community, regardless of whether their parents have chosen to seek membership. In a special way, all children who participate in the life of the meeting belong to the meeting.

We understand children's and Young Friends' sense of belonging to the meeting as an evolving experience. This experience is shaped by their spiritual, psychological, and social development as well as by the various shifting commitments they make as they are exploring their expanding world. We recognize that families and meetings, trying to find how best to extend a sense of belonging to the children and Young Friends of the meeting, have different experiences and understandings about membership for children and youth.

Some monthly meetings feel that no distinction is needed between child members and adult members. The experience of these meetings is that sense of belonging is best maintained through continuity of membership through various stages of life and relationship. These meetings have birthright membership for children born of parents who are members of the meeting. When parents are not members when their children are born, children may become members by request of their parents. All members remain members except as provided under *Termination of Membership* (below).

Some meetings in this yearly meeting see it as helpful and important to require young adult Friends to make a personal decision to be a member. One approach is to welcome children as family members by request of their parents. At some age that family membership ends. Young adults are encouraged to request adult membership when they are ready and at some point before family membership ends.

Monthly meetings are encouraged to think deeply about different approaches and to learn from each other what specific practices have been found helpful to strengthen the sense of belonging among children, young Friends, and young adult Friends.

### ***Termination of Membership***

Membership in the monthly meeting may be terminated under the following circumstances:

1. At the request of the member. The monthly meeting may wish to appoint a clearness committee to inquire into the reasons for resignation before acting on this request.
2. When a monthly meeting approves a member's request to transfer to another monthly meeting or to become a member of another religious body.
3. At the discretion of a monthly meeting when no communication has been received from the member for a period of years.
4. When in the judgment of the monthly meeting further affiliation of a member is hurtful to the spiritual life of the meeting. Such *disownment* is a most grave step and shall be taken only after prolonged prayer and loving attempts to remedy the situation.

### ***Membership in the Yearly Meeting***

Individuals are members in good standing of the Religious Society of Friends in this Yearly Meeting if their names are recorded in the minutes of a member monthly meeting as accepted into membership, and if there has been no circumstance or action to terminate such recorded membership.

Historically, individual Friends in this Yearly Meeting have not been assessed for financial support of the Yearly Meeting. Support of the Yearly Meeting (and Quarterly Meetings, should they exist) comes primarily from the Monthly Meeting treasuries, although individuals may also give directly to the larger bodies.