

# Pastoral Care *Newsletter*

For Member Care Committees,  
Ministry and Counsel, Overseers,  
and others who provide pastoral care  
in unprogrammed Friends meetings

Vol. 11, No. 1 • September 2003

## Welcoming New Members

by Sue Heath

*"Was my membership approved at meeting for business last week?" asked the applicant for membership.*

*"Oh! Didn't anyone tell you? The meeting is happy that you are a member," responded a Friend.*

*"No, nobody told me, but I'm glad to hear it. Now that I'm a member I want to live up to my responsibilities. How do I get on a committee and how do I make a financial contribution?"*

*"You'll be contacted by Nominating Committee and the finance committee. Meanwhile, don't worry about it."*

Could this conversation happen at coffee-hour in your meeting? Some meetings can inadvertently be too casual in welcoming new members, not realizing that a new member may need a helping hand in the transition from applicant to member.

Some meetings make a big fuss over a new attender who introduces him or herself on the first visit. The warmth of the welcome can be as important as shared beliefs in drawing a person into the meeting. Much later, when an attender applies for membership, experiences the clearness process, and is approved as a member, we are called again to express that welcome.

When someone applies for membership they are tender and exposed. They have opened themselves up to rejection by asking to join. If there has been a thorough and searching clearness process they have learned about themselves and about Quakerism, as well as about the local meeting. They should feel all the meeting reaching out to include them in the corporate and religious life, and helping them enter fully into the life of the meeting.

Faith and Practice of my yearly meeting (Philadelphia) charges pastoral caregivers to, "pay special attention to new members, making them feel welcome, introducing them to other Friends, and offering them means of deepening their knowledge of Friends beliefs. This special attention should continue for some months or years, if necessary." Unfortunately, it says little about ways in which welcoming can be done.

### Who Extends the Meeting's Welcome?

Welcoming new members should be the duty and calling of the entire meeting. In some smaller meetings welcoming can happen seamlessly with many Friends taking part. Perhaps there is a pot luck or everyone goes out to brunch after meeting for worship. Even small meetings, however, should not assume that a new member, even if she or he has been attending a long while, feels well acquainted with other members or understands how to enter fully into the responsibilities and opportunities of membership.

In a bigger meeting, there may need to be a procedure that ensures that there are specifically named *ad hoc* welcoming committees to welcome new members and orient them to the life of the meeting. A few Friends, a couple, or a family can be designated to call on the new member(s) or entertain them in their own home. In some meetings, names for a welcoming committee are brought forward by the Pastoral Care Committee when they bring the recommendation for accepting someone into membership. Other



**Sue Heath**  
with grandson Cole Pollard

meetings invite volunteers at the meeting for business when the membership is finalized.

Appointing a welcoming committee can be a perfunctory matter:

*"So who shall we ask to welcome the new family, the Duncans?" asked the clerk of Ministry and Counsel.*

*"That's the parents and two boys? How old were those boys again?" asked one committee member.*

*"I think 12 and 9 or something like that. I guess we can ask Ruby and Bruce, they always welcome new members, they like to do it!"*

*"Sounds good to me," said the clerk."*

To have the same one person or couple or small group who always welcome new members may have the advantage of the welcoming group being comfortable and familiar with the responsibility, but may also mean that the act of welcoming becomes formal or routine, and it would be difficult for that one person or couple to be mentors for several people as they settle into membership.

It is a good practice, instead, to try to match newcomers with welcomers who have some natural connection. Perhaps the meeting would choose people near the age of the new member, or have a family with children welcome new people with children. People can be matched in other ways: similar occupation to encourage acquaintance, homes not too far from each other so they can ride together to meeting events, similar Quaker interests so that perhaps they will serve on the same committee at the beginning. When considering people to ask to welcome a new member, attendance at worship and meeting for business should be part of the qualifications because the welcomer might bring the new member to meeting for business or committee meetings at first, to help them feel at home.

*"So who shall we ask to welcome the new family, the Duncans?" asked the clerk of Ministry and Counsel.*

*"That is the teacher and his wife, and the two boys. How old were those boys again?" asked one committee member.*

*"I think 12 and 9 - the younger one is in my daughter's First Day School class. I would offer to welcome them, but at my girls' ages, boys are not part of their existence."*

*"I know!" responded one of the other committee members.*

*"What about the Coopers? They have 2 boys and a girl, and their kids are active in Younger Friends. They come to First Day School with the Duncan children, and Joan Cooper is a teacher too. They would have a lot to share. And I think the Coopers would welcome an opportunity for this service."*

If there has been a "designated welcomer" in a meeting, others may be reluctant to take on the job, being afraid they will not know what to do. In that case it is fine to have the veterans join the inexperienced welcomers to give them confidence about doing what needs to be done. Some meetings provide a sheet of "helpful hints" for welcoming committees to be sure that the important matters are covered. (See "A Guide for Welcomers," page 6).

*The most important thing is to extend a warm welcome.*

In some cases, meetings ask those welcoming a new member to look forward to a long-term relationship, to assume mentoring responsibility for those Friends over the years. Later on, if there is trouble in the family, or if the member stops coming to meeting for a while, there is a natural person to approach and see if there is something the meeting can do to help. Particularly if we are looking to a long-term relationship, it is important that we give thought to choosing appropriate Friends to welcome a new member.

## **Celebration and Education**

Of course, the most important thing is to extend a warm welcome to new members, to make them aware of how glad the meeting is to have them as part of the worship community. Often the welcoming is a supper or dessert celebration. But there is more that goes into helping new members feel at home.

Welcomers will want to ask the new members if they have any questions about the life of the meeting that were not covered in the clearness committee, what they are hoping for as members, and how the meeting can serve them. The new members may express needs such as new friends, religious experience, or fellowship. They may have specific hopes like a class in Quaker beliefs or Bible study or weekend retreats for them or their children. Sometimes a new member will have unanswered questions about the obligations of membership.

The welcomer will want to be sure that the new members know what is available to Friends in the meeting. It is important to help new members know about meeting events and to feel welcome to take part. First Day School, informational workshops, and the activities and resources of the meeting can be described. How does someone contact the pastoral caregiving committee if they are needing support from the meeting? Is there help available to those with financial emergencies and how is that help accessed? Is there a

Friends school affiliated with the meeting or in the area, and are there advantages given to students from the meeting? Are there grants or loans available for school fees in Friends or other schools or colleges? Does the meeting make grants to facilitate attendance at Quaker conferences, gatherings, study centers or camps? Is there a retirement home or nursing home connected to the meeting and is there special help available to meeting members?

There are times when a new member is taken in who does not understand Quaker practice. We may expect that the new member will have read *Faith and*

*Sometimes a new member will have unanswered questions.*

*Practice* and be familiar with meeting for worship and meeting for business, but it takes time to learn the

ways of Friends. The welcoming process is an opportunity to help new Friends deepen their understanding. Perhaps a young person has been raised in a meeting but has a limited understanding of Quaker practice. Or perhaps a transfer member has been out of touch with Quakerism for a time. Since transfers are usually accepted without a clearness process, it becomes the duty of the welcomers to find out how well versed the new member is in the ways of Friends and the practices of the new meeting.

### **The Responsibilities of Membership**

Part of the responsibility of a welcoming committee is to make sure that new Friends understand the obligations they take on as members. Perhaps the most vital is the obligation to attend meetings for worship and for business and to take an active part in each. The heart and soul of Quakerism is the meeting for worship. The meeting for business strengthens meeting for worship and enables it to happen. It is hard to put too much stress on this point. Sometimes attenders have not felt welcome or comfortable at meeting for business, so that when they become members it may not be a natural thing to attend. Welcomers can answer any questions about the business meeting and offer to accompany the new member to the next meeting for business.

Friends have a duty to serve on committees, and committee members have a duty to attend committee meetings and to follow through on their commitments. The welcomer should be familiar with meeting committees, what each one does, how extensive the obligation (the Property Committee, which meets frequently and has lots of chores, is more of a commitment than the Audit Committee, which

performs its work once each year), and whether there are any requirements for serving on any committee. In a larger meeting, it is helpful to have a short written summary of the duties and interests of each committee, for new members and their welcomers to review together. In some meetings, attenders serve on selected committees, and the new member may already be deep in the committee life of the meeting. Committees open only to meeting members are now open to the new member, so a description of those committees may be particularly helpful.

Financial support is the third important responsibility of membership. New members need to be told what is expected, and the welcoming group will find it useful to be familiar with the meeting budget, what expenses are and what revenues are needed. Sometimes new members will ask what is expected of them, and in some meetings members are told a specific amount which each member is encouraged to give. Other meetings just ask members to give what they can. In either case it is helpful to give a new member a ballpark idea. A useful figure divides the number of members into the expenses anticipated in the budget, to arrive at a rough "fair share" or amount that is needed per member. This is a good place to discuss where the meeting's money goes, the other Friends organizations that are supported, quarterly and yearly meetings and how they are financed, and the outside agencies and causes that the meeting supports for outreach. It is important, however, to reassure new members that if their

*Make sure new Friends understand the obligations and privileges of membership.*

means are small, it is all right that their gift is small. The key is that there should be some support, and \$50 from a struggling student or young family just starting out is as significant as a five figure gift from a Friend who has "done well."

### **Covering the Details**

One of the really enjoyable parts of orienting a new member, especially one who has come from another yearly meeting, is the alphabet soup of Quaker organizations and the structure of quarterly and yearly meetings. The welcoming committee may want to do a little outside study themselves!

It will not hurt to go equipped with pamphlets, fliers, and Quaker publications that the Friend may not know about, and especially meeting publications. If there is a newsletter or bulletin, a meeting directory, a

list of committees and their duties, the meeting budget or annual report, be sure the new member is familiar with them and has received them when appropriate. If the meetinghouse is large, it doesn't hurt to be sure the new member knows where the different rooms are located. It is easier to attend a committee meeting for the first time if you know where "Room B" is located, or that the "Furnas Room" is not where the heater is in the cellar but the lovely room filled with furniture from the Furnas family

There are usually forms the recorder wants filled out, with particulars about full names, place of birth,

### *Help others in the meeting come to know the newcomers.*

parents' names, birth dates, etc. for all members of the family, those joining meeting as well as other

members of the household. It is also a good time to be sure the meeting records include accurate addresses, phone numbers including work numbers if relevant, e-mail addresses, children's names and grades in school, and an emergency contact person.

One large and well-organized meeting sends a welcoming letter from the clerk to each new member and encloses the recorder's form, asking all the biographical questions and requesting that the new member fill it out and return it to the welcoming committee or mail it to the meeting office. They also enclose a form from Nominating Committee explaining the function of each meeting committee and asking the new member about committee preferences, serving as a meeting officer, and helping with other meeting functions. No matter how it is obtained, biographical information and family information all are necessary, and the Nominating Committee will find it useful to hear about how the member will be able to serve the meeting.

### **Reporting Back to the Meeting**

After the new members are welcomed, the welcomers should report to the Pastoral Care Committee and then to monthly meeting. This is the time to tell Friends about the special interests of the newcomers, their hobbies perhaps, something about their previous lives or their families. Information that is shared with the larger group will help the new folks to be integrated into the meeting.

This can include introducing them at monthly meeting, a reception for the whole meeting, an introductory paragraph in the meeting newsletter, their pictures and a brief biography on the bulletin board, or

any other way to help others in the meeting come to know the new members.

In continuing to extend the welcome, members can offer rides to meetings and other events, an invitation to attend a committee meeting, accompaniment to First Day School or meeting for business.

### **Welcomers Have a Special Mission**

There is little that is more important to the vitality of the Society of Friends than reaching out to new attenders and continuing the outreach when they become members. Even long-time members continue to grow in understanding of Quakerism, no one knows everything, new information or repetition of old information is needed, and we always can benefit from updating our faith and our practice.

Becoming a mentor to a new member can be a wonderful education, an opportunity for self-renewal, a reinforcement of our faith, and a time of excitement and growth for both the new member and the welcomers. Make it a celebration!

<<<<>>>>

*Sue Heath is a member of Moorestown, NJ, Meeting and has worked in the offices of Moorestown and Crosswicks Meetings. She has 3 daughters, 3 sons in law and 6 grandchildren. Sue is clerk of the editorial committee for Pastoral Care Newsletter.*

<<<<>>>>

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. What process does our meeting have for welcoming new members and helping them to feel that they are fully part of the meeting?
2. Is welcoming a single celebratory event or an ongoing process?
3. How could we improve our process for appointing welcomers to provide both experience and compatibility?
4. What key pieces of information would help a new member more fully enter the life of our meeting?
5. What information about the meeting might helpfully be provided in writing so the new member would have it for reference?
6. How do we help other members of the meeting get acquainted with a new member?

---

## Stories of Welcoming in Two Meetings

### A Warm Welcome in Delta Meeting

I was just welcomed as a member of Delta Meeting two weeks ago. A member of Ministry and Oversight asked me how I would like to be welcomed and I suggested that we hold worship under the giant sequoias at Calaveras Big Trees State Park.

Delta Meeting is a small meeting that meets once a month and also has a worship group that meets once monthly in each of two different areas. Our eleven members and twelve active attenders are spread over five counties in California's central valley and Sierra foothills. We have a custom of worshipping once a year at Big Trees and that seemed like a wonderful place for a welcome.

Though I have been worshipping with Friends since 1970, I moved to this part of the state just five years ago. As I have worshipped in the Jackson Worship Group of Delta Meeting, I have come to know the members and to learn about the history and customs of the meeting. I don't often make the 1½ hour trip to Stockton for meeting for business. Still, they were happy to add an experienced Friend to the meeting and were supportive of my expanding the worship group to Sonora where I live.

The welcoming was not so much an orientation to the meeting as a celebration of the transfer of my membership to Delta Meeting and an opportunity to worship and share together. Nine of us gathered for worship, a potluck, and a walk among the sequoias. The meeting gave me a card and a small gift of note cards. They would normally offer a copy *Friends for 300 Years* but I already had one.

I treasure that card that says "welcome."

*Based on an interview with Margaret Willits,  
newly a member of Delta Meeting in California*

### Finding a Spiritual Home in a Large Meeting

Sandy Spring Monthly Meeting will celebrate its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary this September. We are a large, active meeting with around 600 members, and each year we receive 18-20 new members counting children. Over the past few years we have been paying attention to how we could do a better job of making it easier for new members to become active, involved members.

When an applicant has been found clear for membership, the clearness committee asks them who they would like to have on a Welcome and Nurture Committee. Often the new member chooses people

that they know in the meeting or that they would like to get to know better. Those 2-5 names are brought forward to the meeting for business for approval when the membership is approved.

Those named to the Welcome and Nurture Committee arrange a time to meet with the new member, usually over a meal at someone's home, to extend the meeting's welcome. One person is asked to be the convenor and report back to Overseers after the welcome is accomplished. The committee is provided with a set of guidelines for welcoming and a packet of information for the new member. However, in the process of celebration and warm sharing, the more formal parts of the welcome sometimes get overlooked.

Each spring, we have a reception for everyone who has joined in the past year. They are introduced at rise of meeting, each one is given a carnation to wear, and the whole meeting is invited to gather for cake and conversation. At the reception we have taken pictures of the new members to add to our Member Directory and to put on a bulletin board in the Community House for several months.

Recently our Ministry and Counsel Committee has instituted a once-a-month simple meal followed by worship sharing on topics central to Quakerism. One recent evening the query was "Can you not be a pacifist and still be a Quaker?" Seasoned Friends and newcomers both are stretched by sharing together while the spiritual community is deepened.

We are finding, however, that some new members don't really understand how the meeting works or find it difficult to be fully engaged. We are looking for ways to help bring new members into our community more fully. Since each Welcome and Nurture Committee is *ad hoc* and not a regular responsibility, we are considering other ways to assist with the orientation and welcome of new members. For example, we are considering giving the "welcome packets" to applicants earlier, perhaps as part of the clearness process and having a member of Overseers on the Welcome and Nurture Committee to ensure that one or more of the committee members is well briefed on their responsibilities.

We want every member of Sandy Spring Meeting to find a spiritual home where they are acquainted with other members, participate in the life of the meeting, and deepen their relationship with the Divine.

*Based on an interview with Joan Liversidge  
Member of Overseers in Sandy Spring, MD, Meeting*

## A Sample Guide for Welcomers

Thanks for agreeing to serve on a welcoming committee. It is an important and enjoyable assignment in the process of helping a new member feel like a full member of the meeting.

While a welcoming meeting is a celebration of a person's membership, it is also a significant occasion for briefing the new member on the privileges and obligations of meeting membership. It is quite possible that some new members may never have had or have again such an opportunity—with the focus on *their* concerns and questions—so make the most of it.

- 1) Extend a warm welcome to our new member. This is often done at a shared meal or dessert.
- 2) Discuss the importance of regular attendance at meetings for worship and business as these are the core of our life as a meeting.
- 3) Invite the new member to participate deeply in the life of the meeting. Discuss small groups, meeting retreats, and other meeting activities.
- 4) Review the responsibility for financial support of the meeting. Our budget calls for an average of \$XXX per adult member. Each member should prayerfully consider whether her/his means allow a gift above the average or require a smaller than average gift.
- 5) Remind our new member that the meeting can only function if every member carries his/her weight in committee service. Go over the functions of the various committees and discuss any concerns or reservations the new member has about committee service.
- 6) Review benefits of membership such as scholarships to Friends schools for member's children, aid for a financial emergency, and how to contact the Pastoral Care Committee.
- 7) If needed, clarify the relationships among the monthly, quarterly, or yearly meetings and other Friends organizations such as AFSC, FGC, FCNL. Help her/him to understand that solicitations from Quaker organizations do not represent an obligation but rather an opportunity to participate in the work of Friends.
- 8) Urge the new member to return the member information form and the Nominating Committee form as soon as possible.

- 9) Offer yourselves, both as a committee and as individuals, as a special resource to the new member should the person have concerns, questions, etc., that she or he is unable to address in other ways.

The report of the welcoming committee should be made at the next meeting for business after the welcoming has taken place.

*Adapted from Central Philadelphia Meeting  
Guidelines for Welcoming Committees*

## RESOURCES

### Basic guidance on welcoming new members:

"Grounding Newcomers in Quakerism," *Pastoral Care Newsletter*, June 2001. 1515 Cherry St., Philadelphia, PA 19102, 215-241-7068. [steveg@pym.org](mailto:steveg@pym.org)

"Welcoming New Friends," *Friends Journal*, July 2003, 1216 Arch Street, #2A, Philadelphia, PA 19107, 800-471-6863, [circulation@friendsjournal.org](mailto:circulation@friendsjournal.org).

*Copies of both of these publications are available from the publishers. Both offer discounts for multiple copies.*

*Also consult your yearly meeting's Faith and Practice and that of other yearly meetings.*

### Resources for learning more about Quakerism:

#### Bookstores:

Quaker Books of Friends General Conference provides an excellent resource guide for Quaker materials. 1216 Arch St., #2B, Philadelphia, PA 19107, 800-966-4556, [www.quakerbooks.org](http://www.quakerbooks.org).

Other Quaker bookstores: Pendle Hill, Wallingford, PA; Quaker Book Service, Ottawa, ON; Powell House Bookstore, Old Chatham, NY; AFSC Bookstore, Pasadena, CA. Contact information can be found at [www.quaker.org/bookstores.html](http://www.quaker.org/bookstores.html)

#### Libraries:

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Library, 215-241-7220, [www.pym.org](http://www.pym.org). Friends outside PYM can subscribe to the library.

Quaker colleges around the country have special Quaker collections in their libraries.

#### Study Centers:

*Beacon Hill Friends House*, Boston, MA; *Earlham School of Religion*, Richmond, IN; *Friends Center*, Barnesville, OH; *Pendle Hill*, Wallingford, PA; *Powell House*, Old Chatham, NY; *Quaker Center*, Ben Lomond, CA; *School of the Spirit*, *William Penn House*, Washington, DC; *Woolman Hill*, Deerfield, MA. Contact information can be found in the July 2003 *Friends Journal*, [www.quaker.org](http://www.quaker.org) and at the website of each center.

*Pastoral Care Newsletter* is published quarterly by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Editorial Committee: Susan Heath, clerk, Suzanne Day, Carolyn Terrell. Patricia McBee, editor. We are located at 1515 Cherry St., Philadelphia, PA 19102. Comments are welcome. **Please do not duplicate without permission.** To obtain additional copies or to subscribe, contact Steve Gulick, at 215-241-7068 or [steveg@pym.org](mailto:steveg@pym.org).