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*1.26.2020 Threshing Session on Membership Report*

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**Introduction**

The bulk of this report is made of minutes of exercise taken by PYM Recording Clerk, Jim Herr. The minutes review the proceedings of the day. Following the minutes of exercise, the report contains a transcription of collections of “advice to the yearly meeting” in response to several queries that participants wrote down in small groups. Find in Appendix A the advance documents that were provided ahead of the threshing session.

**Table of Contents**

Minutes of Exercise – Page 1-3

Transcription of Individual Query Responses – Page 4-5

Appendix A – Page 6-20

**Minutes of Exercise, Threshing Session on Membership**

Held January 26, 2020 at Haddonfield Friends Meeting

The session opened, after worship and lunch, at about 12:15, with a brief introduction by the General Secretary, Christie Duncan Tesmer, expressing how wonderful it is to have people from all over the geography of the YM. Approximately 90 people attended the session.

Walter Hjelt Sullivan, Co-Facilitator, told us this was not going to be a threshing session like any other. Walter then explained his process of coming to join the Religious Society of Friends. He declined to apply for membership in his meeting until he felt a need after many years as an active attender. At the time, he had already been serving as his meeting’s treasurer. Later, when he moved a couple times to different places in the country, it took him less time to apply for membership. He came to see the importance of membership as a way of acknowledging he was already a part of the communities in which he lived.

Tenaja Henson, Co-Facilitator, spoke about her experience growing up in Upper Susquehanna Quarter and connecting with people all over PYM. She was active in PYM’s Young Friends Program and later a member of a group at Guilford College, until she realized the membership requirements for the group were no longer helping her.

Although we were a large group, filling most of the room, we divided into groups of two. Each person in the pair spent a minute and a half answering these questions:

- share a story about your experience with a group that was important to you;
- I know I am a member of a group when \_\_\_\_\_;

- and something that gets in the way of me feeling like a member of a group is \_\_\_\_\_.

As clerk of the Administrative Council, Terri Whiteford told us that the information generated here will go back to the councils for further discernment. There will be more opportunities for input at Annual Sessions.

We rearranged ourselves and broke into different groups of two and quickly answered a few more questions: name, pronouns, relationship to the Religious Society of Friends and, “one word I heard in the previous sharing that resonated with me.”

Two Friends read two paragraphs to the whole group of the [Young Adult Friends epistle](#) (also in Appendix A below) on membership and belonging. Individually we spent ten minutes journaling about our reactions to the minute, using these cues:

- What is the main point of the text?
- What new idea comes to you in the reading of this text today?
- Is this text true to your personal experience?
- What troubles you about this text?
- What is the implication (or takeaway) for you in your life?

When finished, we formed into groups of three and discussed our reactions with these queries: Share strongest reaction from your journaling.

- Share biggest surprise.
- Share how you feel led to move forward.

Moving the chairs out of the way, Walter and Tenaja had us move to places in the room as if on a large grid with an X-axis and a Y-axis. We did this three times:

- X-axis: Being in a group is very important/not important; Y-axis: I usually find myself in groups of people that are the same/different than me. Although scattered all over, most tended to the very important end of the X-axis.
- X-axis: In my family of origin we were always/never actively involved in a religious community; Y-axis: When I come into a new group, I find myself feeling like a member quickly/slowly. Again, the group was scattered, though there were many fewer people at the end of the X-axis representing never actively involved.
- And (3) X-axis: I feel very/not very well connected to the religious group that I am most connected with now, Y-axis: it is very/not very clear how and when one becomes a member in the religious group that I am most connected with now. This time, most of the group were gathered at the “very connected” end of the X-axis, but scattered across the very/not very clear how to become a member axis.



A Friend told us about a distinction in their Meeting between regular members and functional members. Some of the functional members hold positions that were previously only available to regular members.

We then formed into groups of ten and were presented with these queries:

- an advice we have for the Yearly Meeting as we move forward together on this issue is \_\_\_\_\_; d
- angers or concerns that we have are \_\_\_\_\_;
- a way the Yearly Meeting should be more mindful is \_\_\_\_\_;
- a way the Yearly Meeting should be more bold is \_\_\_\_\_;
- after some time to think about this individually, we shared as a group.

One member of each group clarified and wrote down the perceptions. Transcriptions of the individual responses to the queries are included in the next section of this report. The groups then shared with the gathering. Some statements included:

- A concern we have is that we can be so bound by our bureaucratic structure that we become calcified.
- Membership should move toward life.
- We want to be mindful how we invite individual relationships in our monthly meetings.
- Don't create stumbling blocks, keep Spirit at the center, and have courage to listen to all voices.
- What is culture? Truth vs. comfort: we need to accept the discomfort.
- Call on PYM to be an inclusive and welcoming community—age and other groups as well.
- Perhaps more fundamental to membership—not feeling connected and integrated into the Meeting.
- How can clearness committees be used to help in the process of membership? How can we redefine membership to be more inclusive than it is presently?

The session closed at about 2:25pm.

## **Transcriptions of Individual Responses to Queries**

### Advice to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting:

- Don't create stumbling blocks to moving forward.
- Seek out and listen to voices we don't usually hear.
- Look forward, not just backwards, for guidance.
- There are many more dimensions and complications to the concern than just membership.
- Membership is a symptom, but it may well create a window of opportunity.
- Don't insist on using the same tired process that has excluded so many for so long to address the concern and to make room for more participation.
- Remember we are the Religious Society of Friends – keep Spirit at the center and insist that those involved settle (frequently and regularly) before rushing to an intellectual solution.
- Who else do we have and how can I be genuinely supportive in welcoming Friends of Color into our communities?
- Be sure to ask, “is my monthly meeting still my spiritual home and what does that obligate me to do as an active member of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting?”
- Keep on doing this work (defining membership and paths to membership).
- Take a look at what was done at New York Yearly Meeting and other yearly meetings.
- This work does not have to be complicated; the answer does not have to be complicated
- Attend to what's important for the connection in the Religious Society of Friends TODAY, (not yesterday).
- Lift up connection.
- The process must reflect the desired outcome.
- There has been voice to some not feeling integrated within their Meeting (or the yearly meeting). We need to explore what we are doing that causes these feelings and how can we make all feel included, connected, and integrated.
- Periodic outreach to those whose attendance has fallen off is a way to discover what is obstructing their engagement and participation. This should be shared among meetings.

### Dangers/Concerns

- Too many choices may lead to fractures that divide us (e.g., someone who only wants to belong to Friends General Conference, or Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, or a Quarterly meeting). How will the need for corporate worship and discernment be met if we can choose lots of options for membership?
- Make sure folks know what they are joining:
  - Share what Quakerism is about in word and deed.
  - We are not a blank slate or a DIY religious affiliation.
- It is hard to take all types and points of view into consideration – concerns should arise out of silence and considered in silence. We need to practice agape (the



## Philadelphia Yearly Meeting

*of the Religious Society of Friends*

highest form of love, charity) in considering the needs and pain of those who feel they cannot find a place where others recognize and seek that of God.

- Will there be enough resources to address the needs of those who belong at the yearly meeting level along w/ those belonging at the monthly meeting level?

### Be Mindful

- Intergenerational conversations are key (we should do this much, MUCH more).
- Anyone who wants to be of service in a meeting is right for the meeting.
- Monthly Meeting Membership changes because: people move and want (or don't want) to find a new meeting nearer or have a falling out with their Meeting.

### Be Bold:

- Don't be timid – claim our history of leading
- Find the historical boldness which has led Quakers in service to God and following leadings for hundreds of years.
- Have the courage to really listen and to reflect. It's ok to make mistakes as long as we hold ourselves accountable to fix them and to try again. We have to believe in the redemptive value of trying again. We have a history of experimentation.
- Accept our history and past practices, know the reasons things are as they are, and then be open to change!



## Appendix A – 1.26.2020 Threshing Session on Membership Advance Documents

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### *Table of Contents*

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Young Adult Friends Epistle – Pages 6-8

Sections from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting 2018 Faith and Practice – Pages 8-12

New York Yearly Meeting At Large Membership – Pages 13-20

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### *Young Adult Friends Epistle*

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To All Friends Everywhere:

Greetings from a gathering of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Young Adult Friends, together on Lenni-Lenape land at Haverford Friends Meeting for our spring retreat, April 26–28, 2019.

Issues surrounding our structures of membership have long weighed on the hearts of young adults—among others—in the PYM community. Among YAFs, it has never been a requirement to hold a formal membership affiliation in order to serve in clerking roles. While we were together, we made time to think through these concerns: to share our stories about membership and belonging, and to be in dialogue with our recently appointed presiding clerk, Chris Lucca. We know this exploration to be one of many, as Britain Yearly Meeting and New York Yearly Meeting have been grappling with similar questions on membership. Just across the road, our recording clerk was part of an intergenerational group at the Haverford Corporation, holding a simultaneous discussion.

Chris and Karen joined Eric Peterson, Jeff Rosenthal, Paul Sutherland, Young Adult Engagement Coordinator Meg Rose, Maeve Sutherland, Nora Griffin-Snipes, Catherine Campbell, Maura Wise, Eleanor Barba, Sophy Jarka-Sellers, Carl Stanton, and Rachel Griffin-Snipes for the conversation. We began with our individual relationships with membership, all of which have been shaped by our experiences as white Friends. While we seek here to highlight the way we see membership functioning to uphold exclusion in our Yearly Meeting, we know that we have all benefited from privilege, and cannot begin to speak to the experiences of Friends of Color. Amongst those in the room, we heard examples of the ways membership has both functioned and failed to function in lives of Young Adults. Some present shared an easy step into a meeting as adults, while some had never felt led to pursue membership, or had done so only to serve on a Yearly Meeting committee. One YAF told a story of offering three different affiliations (the YAF community; their childhood meeting, where their membership is formally recorded; and the meeting they most often attend) in a PYM business meeting, and being pressed by a recording clerk who wanted to place them in one single category of belonging. Above all, we



demonstrated that a simple model of monthly meeting membership, in which one belongs to a singular community for life, is no longer useful, if it has been considered so in the past.

We collectively articulated a few key needs: in the life of our individual congregations, in Young Adult Friends, and in the Yearly Meeting. First, we are doing substantial work in all these contexts, to support all these bodies, and we need a structure to acknowledge and appreciate that work. Second, we need the governance of yearly meeting councils and committees to allow for our participation, despite the complexities of many Friends' histories with recorded membership. Third, we need affirmation of the validity of our Quaker faith, not merely in spite of our transience and (relative) youth, but because we are a vital part of the PYM body, and we are struggling to be heard.

We asked the question: what is membership, actually? We appreciate its real value as a milestone, and as a shared, public commitment to Quaker life. In some cases, however, such as the requirement for committee service, membership can be devalued, turned into a mere check-box, without rooting in our spiritual journeys. In one past situation, a YAF nominated to be an elder valued their membership in their home yearly meeting too highly to be willing to give it up and check the box in Philadelphia. We place this hurdle to the detriment both of those wishing to serve amongst us, and to the body deprived of their service. Compared to many other religious communities, Quakers attain membership by a fairly arduous process, one that might look fundamentally different for Friends without privileges tied to race, class background, education, and underlying knowledge of Quaker ways. We invite Friends to distinguish between a bureaucratic form of membership, and spiritual membership, representing a faithful commitment. For some, the former is simply burdensome, and for others, especially those already marginalized, that burden makes our communities less accessible. When barriers of membership intersect with other ways voices are marginalized, they contribute doubly to maintaining a status quo that we know is failing.

We cannot create the diverse, inclusive, welcoming, beloved community that we all long for, while holding up structures that exist as checkboxes, simply because that is the way things have always been. This call to rethink bureaucratic membership may sound frightening in the abstract, and those present for our conversation heard and acknowledged that. But what rose among the group was the recognition that if we are being asked to serve on a committee or a council, it is because we have been seen and known, and because that of God within us has been at work. We understand Quaker process, in its most authentic form, to be a remarkable, radical concept. We trust that there is a Spirit guiding us, to which everyone in the room has access, and which, if heard, can guide us to Truth. When we can trust that our process reflects the Spirit, we will also be able to trust our nominations process, to bring the right people into the service of our community. We have a vision that belonging to the body can have its basis in contributions and relationships, not only in process for process' sake. We wonder if membership could look more like asking, "How fares the truth with thee?" Friends can then



hear, from all their multiple communities, “we know you, and the Spirit is within you, and we acknowledge you.”

In Spirit,  
Young Adult Friends, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting

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*Sections from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting 2018 Faith and Practice*

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### **The Individual and the Meeting**

The relationship of the individual and the meeting includes the expectation that everyone will participate directly in the life of the meeting community. Active involvement typically includes regular attendance at meetings for worship and for business, service on committees, financial support, and other contributions to the ongoing work and life of the meeting. Active involvement ensures that one knows others and is known by them. Active involvement contributes to an individual’s spiritual growth in community.

The Religious Society of Friends accepts a variety of vocabularies for the expression of faith and encompasses a broad range of views on both the nature of faith and the ways faith can be carried into action. Friends meetings, with the guidance of this Faith and Practice and other sources, have the ongoing responsibility of interpreting Friends ways to prospective and experienced members. No one should hesitate to ask the meeting for explanation.

A person who feels a spiritual or personal concern—or a call to potentially life-changing social action or public witness—may seek the assistance of the meeting to test this leading. At times such testing is done informally through conversations with friends. At other times, the process is more structured. The person may ask for a “clearness committee,” composed of individuals chosen by the member and/or by the meeting, to meet with the person. Persons who serve on a clearness committee have a special responsibility to listen carefully, respond from their experience and understanding, and encourage individual and corporate faithfulness to spiritual leadings. (See Section VII. Clearness Committee.)

When the clearness process focuses on a leading to engage in social action or public witness, the individual Friend benefits by sharing this leading with the whole meeting. The meeting may decide to support the leading in specific ways, such as supporting the work collectively or offering guidance. Alternatively, the meeting may embolden the person to follow the leading independently. The person with the leading is encouraged to accept the decision of the meeting and to be open to learning from the process of corporate discernment. Through these experiences, the meeting can support spiritual growth and personal transformation.





When the clearness process focuses on a spiritual or personal concern, the individual works primarily with the pastoral care or worship and ministry committees. The result of this type of clearness process is often confidential and may not come before the meeting as a whole. Members and regular attenders are expected to serve on committees of the meeting. This service is essential for someone to be fully integrated into the life of the meeting. Since important work of the meeting is accomplished through its committees, an individual's willingness to serve when asked enables the Friends meeting to achieve its goals. An

individual's acceptance of a committee appointment entails a commitment to loving diligence in carrying out the committee's functions.

### **Membership**

The monthly meeting is the final authority in all matters concerning membership, and all membership occurs in the monthly meeting. A person joining a particular Friends meeting becomes thereby a member of a quarterly meeting, the yearly meeting, and the Religious Society of Friends.

Membership establishes a mutual commitment between members and their Friends meeting. On the one hand, membership commits the meeting to provide a spiritual home for its members and corporate support for their efforts to live in harmony with the faith and practices of Friends. Many meetings establish scholarship funds for members to attend workshops, retreats and other opportunities for spiritual nourishment, as well as scholarships for members' children to attend Friends schools. Meetings also support members faced with difficult, potentially life-changing decisions by forming clearness committees to assist them in their discernment process. Meeting support may also extend to elements of a member's life, such as economic insecurity, that could interfere with full and active participation in the meeting. Most important, the meeting provides regular opportunities for corporate worship, spiritual growth and other activities that enable the meeting to be a genuine community of faith for its members.

On the other hand, membership commits members of the meeting to live in spiritual unity with each other and to engage as fully as possible in the life of the meeting. Specifically, this means regular participation in meetings for worship and for business, financial support of the work of the meeting, and service to the meeting as an officer or on one of its committees. Membership also entails giving time, skills and material support to the meeting and its activities such as religious education, pastoral care and witness to the broader community. In Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, responsibility for the full range of monthly, quarterly and yearly meeting activities rests with the membership.

People from other religious backgrounds or with no religious ties often visit Friends meetings. Meetings welcome all visitors, giving continuing attention to those who return frequently. Meetings may provide these regular attenders with spiritual support and guidance as they seek



to learn more about Friends faith and practice. Regular attenders may be encouraged to attend business meetings and, at the discretion of the meeting, to serve on committees. These individuals can then witness Friends particular approach to worship and the conduct of meeting business, as well as the structure, finances and witness of the meeting. Regular attenders are invited to attend sessions of quarterly and yearly meeting and the annual summer gatherings of Friends General Conference. Meetings provide regular attenders with a copy of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's current Faith and Practice, and with information about the major spiritual writings of Friends and the history of Friends, as well as information regarding Friends organizations. (See Section V. Friends and Some of Their Organizations.)

Those attenders who participate regularly in meeting activities, especially meeting for worship, and who demonstrate a growing understanding and appreciation of Friends faith and practices are encouraged to apply for membership. (See Section VII. Procedures for Membership.) As noted above, membership entails a major commitment to participate in a particular community of Friends. Friends understand that membership is located in a single monthly meeting and have developed procedures so that individuals may easily transfer their membership from one meeting to another, or may become sojourning members during lengthy periods of visitation. Friends recognize that fulfilling the commitments of membership in two different faith communities at the same time is usually impractical. Should an applicant for membership in a monthly meeting wish to maintain membership in or affiliation with another religious body, the clearness committee established to review the application for membership will explore with sensitivity the reasons that underlie this desire.

Children Friends consider children from birth to maturity to be full participants in the life of the meeting, to be nurtured in their spiritual development and understanding of the faith and practice of Friends and guided and encouraged into Quaker adulthood. The meeting can help children prepare for the decisions they must make about friendships, peer pressure, recreation, education, career, and military or alternative service. As they mature, those who have received this care from their meeting will become increasingly conscious of the full meaning of membership in the Religious Society of Friends so as to make their own decisions regarding membership. The meeting provides an atmosphere of inclusion, care, love and recognition—in short, a spiritual home—for all young people in the meeting, regardless of their membership status or that of their parents.

A person of any age may apply for membership in a Friends meeting. Some people are spiritually ready for membership early in their lives; others are ready only as adults. Meetings are encouraged to respect parents' sense of what is best for their children regarding membership. Parents who are members may, at the time of their child's birth or adoption or later:

- Request membership for their child;
- Request associate membership for their child (see below);
- Not request any enrollment for the child.



Parents who are members of different meetings must decide which meeting records the membership of the child. When only one parent is a member, children may be recorded upon the request of that parent and with the permission of the other or, under unusual circumstances, upon the request of only one parent. Where there is only one legal parent, that

member may request membership or associate membership for the child. Meetings are urged to recognize the diversity of family patterns, with sensitivity to the concerns of all involved. Parents requesting membership for their child are expected to raise the child as a Friend in the meeting community. The parents and the meeting can then help the child to grow gradually into the responsibilities of membership and encourage the child when ready to take on specific responsibilities—such as service on a meeting committee. The meeting has an obligation to those recorded as members at a young age to ensure that as they reach adulthood they will thoughtfully consider their own commitment to membership.

Many meetings offer associate membership for children, with the full responsibilities and privileges of membership up to their adulthood, that age to be determined by the meeting. (For yearly meeting statistical purposes associate members will not be recorded after their 21st birthday.) Associate members may request full membership when they are ready, and the Friends meeting's role is one of active encouragement.

In the past, many Friends meetings automatically recorded as members (called "birthright" Friends) all newborn children whose parents were members, but this practice is inconsistent with the goal of a religious society of convinced Friends and has been abandoned.

**Transfer of Membership** A Friend who moves to a new area or is drawn to worship with another Friends meeting may request a transfer of membership. The transfer process entails specific responsibilities for both the sending and the receiving monthly meetings. (See Section VII. Procedures for Membership.)

**Sojourning Members** Friends may attend a meeting because they have moved temporarily into its vicinity, but may not wish to give up membership in their home meeting to which they expect to return. In such a case, a Friend may ask their home meeting to send a letter to the meeting attended, asking it to recognize the Friend as a sojourning member. Sojourning Friends may accept all roles that the host meeting sees fit to assign to them. However, they are not counted in the statistical reports of the host meeting and their sojourning membership ends when they leave that area.

**Joining Other Religious Bodies** If a member wishes to leave the Religious Society of Friends to join another religious body, they are expected to notify their monthly meeting. The meeting may give them a letter stating their good standing in the Religious Society of Friends. The meeting records the resignation in the minutes of the meeting.



Membership Records In Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, it is the practice for monthly meetings to maintain records of their members, including transfers of membership to and from the meeting, resignations, and new members. The recorder of each meeting keeps accurate information on the membership status of each active member and shares it with the quarterly meeting and yearly meeting as requested.

Inactive Members Some individuals may wish to retain membership in the Religious Society of Friends even though they have not been active in any Friends meeting for many years. At its discretion, a meeting may carry inactive persons on its membership rolls. Long-term nominal membership is generally discouraged, however, except when active meeting participation is not possible because of poor health, when residence is so far from any meeting (so that transfer of membership or sojourning membership is not feasible), or for some other compelling reason.

*New York Yearly Meeting At Large Membership*

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Read about this on the [Friends Journal website](#). Below is copy from the proposal that New York Yearly Meeting approved in November of 2019.

**Alternative Membership Pathway Proposal**

Ministry Coordinating Committee, the Committee to Revise Faith and Practice, and the Alternative Membership Pathways Working Group are ***deeply grateful*** for the questions, feedback, and ministry received from individuals and monthly meetings regarding the proposed alternative pathway to membership with New York Yearly Meeting. Since 2016, we have lovingly labored with how to best address the barriers of traditional membership to some Friends while honoring the rich tradition of local meeting membership in New York Yearly Meeting and the wider Religious Society of Friends. We have heard and held each of your concerns and are prepared to offer a second reading of the proposed revision to Faith and Practice at Fall Sessions 2019.

To ensure that we as a Body are prepared for this item of business, we would like to offer responses to some of your most frequently asked questions and explain how we have addressed your feedback. We also encourage you and your Monthly Meetings to refresh your memory and understanding of the [background](#) and [timeline](#) of this work.

*Background:* <http://bit.ly/backgroundampwg>

*Timeline:* <http://bit.ly/timelineampwg>

**Your Questions and Concerns Answered**

***1. Monthly Meetings are the basic unit of our Society. Doesn't that mean that membership should always live there?***

For many, Monthly Meetings remain the basic unit of our Society, and through our discernment we have learned that for many others this is not the case. Initially, there was no membership in our Society and identification as a Friend was that of a declaration of inward connection to the Light (God). Formalized membership was created in 1737 to ensure welfare was more carefully distributed to those who were an active part of the faith as well as to provide Committees for Sufferings for persecuted Friends. This formalized membership also sought to ensure leadings could be tested and corporately discerned. The new membership pathway does not take away the sacredness of membership with a Monthly Meeting; it instead offers an additional pathway for Friends

who believe that the Yearly Meeting can and in many cases already does serve these functions for people who have not found a home in a Monthly Meeting.

**2. *What happens with all our other practices that are linked to membership (marriage, religious education, transfer of membership, etc.)?***

This proposal only offers a process for membership with the Yearly Meeting and does not seek to address any related concerns. Additional revisions to Faith and Practice will take more time and require more discernment from our Body. We understand that this change might affect many areas of our practice and have faith that we can move forward without having every detail worked out. This is the beginning of an experiment in continuing revelation.

**3. *Our Monthly Meeting hasn't experienced this concern. Where is this coming from?***

The people for whom this new pathway is most relevant often have not found a home at a Monthly Meeting. Therefore, it makes sense that you have not experienced or heard this concern firsthand. Since 2016, the Alternative Membership Pathways Working Group has held workshops, traveled to Meetings, and collected stories from dozens of people who are not currently members but who are Quakers in faith *and* in practice. This new pathway seeks to invite people in from the margins and to tell them, "yes, you belong here with us."

**4. *In the text of the first reading, there was no mention of regular worship, before or after someone sought such affiliation, nor was there any mention of a spiritual dimension of any kind in an applicant's process of seeking membership in the Yearly Meeting.***

When we presented the first reading, we neglected to include the full membership section of Faith & Practice where worship and spiritual grounding are emphasized as a part of membership. This was an oversight and led to misunderstandings. We have added some language to the Yearly Meeting Membership section itself to address this concern. However, this new pathway should be seen as a second option to membership with the same functions and accountability structures as membership with Monthly Meetings. We have included the full membership section with the second reading. It is important that we understand that this larger section is not being revised at this time and should we seek to redefine membership at large, we should follow our process to revise Faith and Practice to do so.

**5. *I joined a Monthly Meeting and membership has been so important to my experience as a Quaker. Why are we making exceptions to our practice? Are the people seeking this new form of membership trying to circumvent tradition?***

It is so important to understand that most of the people with whom we have spoken wish that they could become a member of a Monthly Meeting. Since 2016, the Working Group has identified several barriers that exist for those who are seeking to either enter Quakerism or remain within it but are isolated from or prohibited from attending regular Monthly Meetings. Some of these barriers are schedules, differences in culture, differences of theology, incarceration, not being understood on one's spiritual journey, scheduling, distance, and caretaking responsibilities. This proposed pathway does not in any way diminish the importance of membership with local meetings. Instead, it seeks to bring people into a different type of spiritual community that is more accommodating to certain people's lives.

**6. *Won't this take people away from our Monthly Meetings which are already struggling to find members?***

No, and we hope that the opposite will be true. Monthly Meetings will remain the primary and most central entry point for new Friends and we do not expect for very active members to have any desire to transfer their membership to the Yearly Meeting. The people for whom this pathway would be relevant are mostly not members or not active members in Monthly Meetings. By providing an alternative pathway to membership, we anticipate welcoming more people into our Beloved Community and providing more opportunities for these Friends to interact with and potentially find a home in a local meeting.

**7. *Will members of the Yearly Meeting eventually become members of a Monthly Meeting?***

Some members of the Yearly Meeting may eventually find membership in Monthly Meetings, but this is not a requirement of membership with the Yearly Meeting.

**8. *What does accountability look like for members of the Yearly Meeting? How do we know that they're "in good standing"?***

Membership with the Yearly Meeting will follow the same accountability standards as Monthly Meetings. Ministry and Pastoral Care will provide oversight of membership, help members discern and test leadings, and offer mentorship, eldership, and support as needed. Members will contribute to the Yearly Meeting as they might to a Monthly Meeting by serving on committees, attending Sessions, and donating time and resources as appropriate.

**9. *Who will be the people seeking membership in the Yearly Meeting?***

We haven't tried it yet so we don't quite know who will be led to take this alternative pathway to membership. However, we expect that this pathway will be most appealing to people who are already involved with the Yearly Meeting and who are more transient, isolated, or unable to attend their local meetings. Some of the populations we have identified as likely to pursue this option are young adults, people who travel or move frequently, people who are incarcerated, and people who live far from a local meeting. In all cases, people seeking membership will participate in a clearness process to discern if membership with the Yearly Meeting is in good order.

**10. Will this be the only pathway being added?**

For now, this is the only alternative pathway being presented for approval. As we learn and grow, other forms may emerge in the future.

**FAITH & PRACTICE REVISION  
FOR CONSIDERATION AT FALL SESSIONS 2019**

- *New sections in red*
- *For purposes of consistency, "Ministry and Pastoral Care" is used to mean any committee with those functions, including Ministry and Counsel, Ministry and Oversight, and other such usages*
- *The proposed pathway revision being considered begins [HERE](#)*

**2. MEMBERSHIP**

Friends accept into active membership those whose declarations and ways of life manifest such unity with Friends' views and practices that they may be expected to enter fully into religious fellowship with the meeting. Part of the essential genius of the Society is the experience of growth through common worship and the loving acceptance of an individual by the group. It is an open fellowship that recognizes that of God in everyone.

Those inclined to join us should review carefully this entire book of *Faith and Practice* and other Friends' literature so as to gain an understanding of the basis of the Quaker faith, mode of worship, and manner of transacting business. They should attend meetings for worship and for business for a sufficient period of time to become convinced that membership will nourish and enrich their continuing growth in the life of the Spirit. They should be aware that this growth may entail changes in every aspect of their lives.

**There are two paths to becoming a member of the Religious Society of Friends in New York Yearly Meeting. The first is to apply to a monthly meeting or executive meeting.** Membership in a monthly or executive meeting includes membership in the quarterly or equivalent meeting, the New York Yearly Meeting, Friends United Meeting, and Friends General Conference.

**The second path is to apply directly to the Yearly Meeting without specifying a monthly meeting. The**





application, addressed to the Clerk of Ministry & Pastoral Care of New York Yearly Meeting, should include the applicant's spiritual journey, their involvement in a Friends organization, and why applying to a monthly or executive meeting is inappropriate or impossible at this time. As with membership in a monthly meeting, membership in the yearly meeting includes membership in Friends United Meeting and Friends General Conference.

All applicants for membership should have knowledge of the Friends World Committee for Consultation, the American Friends Service Committee, and the Friends Committee on National Legislation.

**Whichever path is chosen**, membership is a privilege and entails a corresponding responsibility. Members should be prepared to give resources of time and money. The shared ministry of the Society and the importance of the proper functioning of committees and meetings demand participation and cooperation. Membership is a commitment to enter wholeheartedly into the spiritual and corporate activities of the Society and to willingly assume responsibility for both service and support as the way opens.

**APPLICATION TO A MONTHLY MEETING.** A person applying for membership should address a letter to the monthly meeting, stating the reasons for wishing to join the Religious Society of Friends and indicating the extent of unity with its principles and testimonies. This letter, addressed to the monthly meeting, is forwarded to the meeting's committee on ministry and pastoral care, who should acknowledge it promptly.

The committee on ministry and pastoral care will appoint from among their members a clearness committee, which has the responsibility to evaluate an applicant for membership. Monthly meetings without a formal committee on ministry and pastoral care will undertake this responsibility directly. Although not requiring acceptance of any specific statement of faith or theological formulation of belief, the clearness committee should ascertain by personal visits the religious background and views of the applicant and the person's knowledge and acceptance of Friends' principles and practices. In particular, the applicant should be acquainted with the varieties of religious interpretation existing throughout the Society and with its emphasis on the loving spirit and teachings of Jesus. The applicant should discuss frankly with the clearness committee any reservations concerning Friends' beliefs and practices.

The clearness committee will explain the responsibilities and opportunities inherent in membership. These include faithful attendance at meetings for worship and business, service on committees, sharing in financial support of the meeting, and involvement in regional and yearly meeting activities. The clearness committee will report to the monthly meeting's committee on ministry and pastoral care who will then make a recommendation to the monthly meeting. If the committee reports that they find no obstruction, the monthly meeting may immediately receive the applicant into membership. If the committee feels that the applicant is not yet ready for membership, they may postpone recommending action until a subsequent meeting. It is then their responsibility to become better acquainted with the applicant and to offer such instruction and guidance as seem appropriate.



When the monthly meeting accepts an applicant into membership, the clerk records the action and furnishes the new member a copy of the approving minute. The meeting may appoint a welcoming committee.

Each meeting has a corporate personality of its own, so it is inevitable that there will be local coloration in the interpretation of membership requirements. This should not be construed, however, as license to impose additional requirements for membership or to set aside the guidelines in this Discipline. The receiving meeting must be mindful of the fact that it acts not only in its own behalf but in the name of the Religious Society of Friends in its entirety.

### **APPLICATION TO THE YEARLY MEETING.**

An adult who applies for membership “at large” in the body of New York Yearly Meeting is expected to have been actively involved in the yearly meeting business, committees, communities, worship, events, or sessions. Sometimes life circumstances make it difficult or impossible to join or regularly attend a monthly meeting. Applicants may be incarcerated, living in remote locations, frequently traveling, working as caregivers, or simply not finding a spiritual home in a nearby monthly meeting. Those seeking membership by this path should be prepared to give resources of time and/or money, and to participate in the work of the yearly meeting through committees, task groups, sessions, and Powell House. A commitment to enter wholeheartedly into the spiritual and corporate activities of the Society and to assume responsibility, as way opens, is expected.

The prospective Friend should write a letter addressed to the clerk of the Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee of New York Yearly Meeting stating the reasons for joining the Religious Society of Friends and why membership under the care of the yearly meeting is sought at this time, rather than membership through a monthly or executive meeting. The letter should include the applicant’s experience in worship, how the applicant is in unity with Friends’ testimonies and principles, and how the applicant envisions being involved in New York Yearly Meeting.

A designee of Ministry and Pastoral Care and at least one other Friend with a seasoned understanding of New York Yearly Meeting will consider the application letter and appoint a clearness committee of at least three people. If the applicant is recommended for membership by the clearness committee and the Committee on Ministry and Pastoral Care unites with that recommendation, the clerk of Ministry and Pastoral Care will advise the clerk of Ministry Coordinating Committee and the New York Yearly Meeting office to record the new friend as a member. Ministry Coordinating Committee may appoint a welcoming committee.

CHILDREN. Friends have a particular responsibility to bring children under the loving care of the meeting. Friends should be sensitive to the needs of these young people, nurturing their spiritual well-being and helping them grow into mature and concerned members.

Meetings differ in the ways in which they encourage children’s participation. Some monthly and executive meetings record children as members at birth or adoption when both parents are



**Philadelphia**  
**Yearly Meeting**  
*of the Religious Society of Friends*

members, unless parents request otherwise. Meetings may also extend membership to children under age 18: a) by written request of both member parents; b) by request of a member parent and written consent, if possible, of the nonmember parent; c) by request of a guardian; OR d) by request of the child upon recommendation of the committee on ministry and pastoral care. Some meetings record children as associate members.

[It is] our desire that all persons on whom involuntary membership has been conferred, either by birth or through entrance of parents into membership, be reaffirmed by commitment at an age which would make this appropriate.  
– Yearly Meeting Minute #13, 1976

All members age 18 and over are considered adult members for statistical and financial purposes.

**SOJOURNING MEMBERSHIP.** Friends who expect to be residing temporarily within the limits of monthly meetings not their own may request from their own meetings recommendations of sojourning membership. If their meetings approve, they may issue certificates commending these Friends to the other meetings and stating the lengths of time during which the sojourning memberships are to be effective. This temporary residence may include intermittent periods, such as that of students attending school or college or of Friends working under concerns that take them from home. Following the general procedures for membership applications, the meetings with which they wish to associate may accept Friends into sojourning membership, according them the same privileges and responsibilities as full members but not including them in the total membership of the meetings for statistical reports.

A certificate of sojourning membership does not terminate the membership in the originating meeting.

**ATTENDERS.** Attenders are those who manifest a continuing interest in the life of the meeting. Friends should welcome their participation in activities of the meeting, but they may not serve as clerks of the meeting, treasurers, elders, trustees, or members of ministry and pastoral care, or on the Finance, Advancement, or Nominating Committees, and they should know that it is the members who must make the decisions in the meetings for business.

**TRANSFER OF MEMBERSHIP.** **When a monthly meeting or the yearly meeting receives a request for transfer** from one of its members, the relevant Committee on Ministry and Pastoral Care should carefully inquire into the condition of the member's religious and temporal affairs. If, on such inquiry, it seems proper to do so, the meeting should direct its clerk to issue a minute of transfer and promptly forward it to the monthly or yearly meeting to which transfer is desired. Transfer minutes for those recorded in the gifts of ministry should so state. If objection to a transfer appears, the clerks of the meetings involved should confer.

When the meeting to which the member wishes to transfer receives the minute, its clerk should refer it to the relevant Committee on Ministry and Pastoral Care. Unless objection appears, the meeting should accept and record the Friend as a member. Until this is done, the Friend remains a member of the former meeting. The clerk of the meeting accepting the transfer should notify the former meeting of that action. One or more Friends should be appointed to visit the transferred member and extend a welcome.



JOINING OTHER DENOMINATIONS. If a member wishes to join another religious denomination, **the monthly or yearly meeting may grant a letter of recommendation and remove the individual's name from membership.** When any member has joined another denomination without requesting a letter of recommendation, the monthly or yearly meeting should remove the individual's name from the list of members, and the clerk should send notice of this action to the person concerned.

RELEASE FROM MEMBERSHIP. **When a member requests the monthly meeting or yearly meeting to release her or him from membership,** the meeting should appoint Friends to visit (or write to) the member and to inquire sensitively into the matter. If the member does not reconsider, the meeting should release that Friend from membership. The clerk should write to the former member, quoting the minute of release. For reinstatement, the applicant must follow the usual order of application for membership.

DISCONTINUANCE. After having made sustained and diligent efforts to reclaim the commitment of those Friends who have lost touch with meetings, **monthly meetings or the yearly meeting may discontinue their membership.**

Before taking that action, the meeting should have sent letters of loving inquiry to such members at least once a year for a period of three years. Having received no satisfactory replies, the monthly meeting clerk or the clerk of the Committee on Ministry and Pastoral Care may make a minute discontinuing membership and so inform the person(s) concerned.

DISOWNMEN. Whether at the monthly or Yearly Meeting level, a meeting should not disown a member until every method of reconciliation has been exhausted. Formal complaints against a member should be considered

prayerfully by the Committee on Ministry and Pastoral Care. A committee appointed to confer with the member should labor in love to try to resolve the problem. Care should be taken to distinguish between the deed and the doer. If the committee is unable to restore the member to fellowship with the meeting, the matter should be brought before the monthly meeting or the Yearly Meeting's Committee on Ministry and Pastoral Care which will, if it still be unresolved, prepare a minute of disownment. The member shall be given a copy of the minute and the membership records updated accordingly.

A disowned member of a monthly meeting may appeal the disownment to the appropriate regional meeting within six months for a review. If the regional meeting upholds the decision of the monthly meeting, the individual can still appeal to the yearly meeting. Likewise, a disowned member of NYYM can appeal to Ministry Coordinating Committee and then the yearly meeting. When there is a review before a quarterly or the yearly meeting, a committee of three should be appointed to represent the membership body from which the appeal is taken. Review may, by common accord, be conducted before a judicious and representative committee appointed by the meeting to which appeal is made rather than before the entire meeting.