



Guidance for Meetings

INTRODUCTION

Many years ago, the elders at Balby said, *“Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by; but that all, with a measure of the light, which is pure and holy, may be guided: and so in the light walking and abiding, these things may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not in the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.”*

Much and little has changed since then. Our ways of being together have shifted. We now have many virtual and hybrid meeting communities. These changes oblige us to discern whether it’s time to go about some things differently. In the following pages, you’ll find practical suggestions about life together in communities that are partly or wholly online.

You’ll also find queries to help with your discernment. Your meeting might engage with each of the twenty sections, one or two at a time, over the period of a year or so. Or you might choose to skip around, focusing on those sections that seem most pressing.

But of course, the Spirit that giveth life has not changed. We are still Friends, still led by the Divine, still seeking faithfulness. The contents of this guide are intended to support you in that walk, not to insist upon a particular way of walking.

*“Trust in the Light that gives life and empowers
everyone who comes into the world.”*

—Philadelphia Yearly Meeting’s Faith and Practice

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WORSHIP

Friends worship with the sincere expectation that we will be led by the Divine. We have always understood that God can be present in all places. The same is true for virtual spaces. That said, some Friends experience greater ease at reaching a centered place when gathering with others in person. Other Friends experience greater ease doing so online.

If a meeting worships online, that does not mean it must gather exclusively online. Some Friends might form a group of two or three others physically in a home or yard. They can connect to the meeting with a shared device. And some meetings practice hybrid worship, in which a group gathers in a meeting space while others join online.

In all cases, it is crucial to ensure that all Friends can hear any vocal ministry that arises. It helps to remind Friends online to unmute their microphones to offer ministry. Mute microphones at other times to prevent background noise. Friends gathered in a meetinghouse during hybrid worship will probably also need amplification. Some videoconference services offer automatic transcription subtitles. Using subtitles can be helpful to Friends with hearing loss.

Hybrid worship also requires careful consideration of physical arrangement. Friends online can be seen on a screen or projected in the meeting room. In either case, some meetings have found it useful to place this screen or projection off to one side. That helps those gathered in person to feel as though Friends online are part of the meeting but not at the center of the meeting. Also consider the meetinghouse seating. At least some in-person Friends should be visible by camera to those online. Others will prefer an off-camera place to sit.

Entirely unprogrammed worship is difficult for some Friends in an online setting. Children might find it difficult, for example, but some adult Friends also have this experience. Experimenting with occasional semi-programmed worship can help. Semi-programmed worship includes periods of silent expectant worship. It might also include stories, songs, queries, and physical activities such as body prayers or crafts.

Any of the above changes may be emotionally or spiritually challenging for Friends accustomed to in-person worship. However, what one person finds disruptive might be a crucial accommodation for another person.

We may have more empathy if we construct opportunities for each Friend to talk about their experience of the changes. Friends' testimony of community reminds us that the presence (or absence) of each person matters to us all. Ensuring that all can be present may require some flexibility from everyone.

1. Have we made opportunities recently to talk with each other about our experiences of worship, including but not limited to the technical aspects?
2. Are we open to occasionally trying different types of worship, such as singing, worship sharing, queries, and stories, to see whether this helps some of us connect more deeply with Spirit?

CORPORATE DISCERNMENT

In the practice of corporate discernment, Friends come together with the understanding that we will be guided. The presence and participation of each Friend is important. We listen for the guidance of Spirit more effectively when we listen together.

The spiritual practices of corporate discernment do not change online. However, some logistical considerations do. Agendas, physical positioning, audio considerations, technical guidance, pacing, and approvals all require specific attention. It helps if all Friends can remember and commit to the goal of ensuring that everyone present can participate meaningfully. Sometimes, this will require flexibility and patience on the part of other members of the group.

In virtual and hybrid meetings for business, participants will find a well-crafted agenda, published in advance, particularly useful. If possible, the agenda should include a little basic information (facts only) about each item. This is helpful for two reasons. First, it is often slightly more difficult to hear when meetings include an on-line component. If the basic information is available in writing, fewer Friends will be confused. Second, when Friends gather in person only, it is easy to ask a quick question without interrupting the flow of the meeting. This is not the case if the meeting is virtual or hybrid. A clear agenda will reduce the need for interruptions and clarifying questions.

If the meeting is hybrid, the clerk and recording clerk will sometimes have a decision to make: to be in person, or to be online? Either can work, but when there is a choice, the clerk might want to consider this

question: from which position am I most likely to be able to see most Friends well? Many clerks rely heavily on body language and facial expressions when evaluating the sense of the meeting. Also, clerks and recording clerks often find it helpful to be able to have a quick, quiet conversation while working on minutes.

This is easiest if either they are both online (using a chat function) or both in-person (where they can simply whisper).

It's crucial, in corporate discernment, that all Friends be able to hear one another. Friends should be reminded to keep their microphones on mute to eliminate background noise and to articulate carefully when speaking. In a hybrid setting, in-person Friends may also need amplification to be heard online. Some videoconference services offer automatic transcription subtitles, which can be helpful.

Friends who join by phone will need additional consideration because they are unable to see. It is kind, if there are Friends participating by phone, for the clerk to briefly name every person present before the meeting begins. Otherwise, the Friend on the phone has no way of knowing who is "in the room." Friends can also say their names before speaking every time, so that on-the-phone Friends are not expected to recognize voices. If the group is engaging with a visual image, such as a screen share, the clerk or presenter should briefly describe what is being seen. Finally, it helps to rename the phone participant with their name in the videoconference. This reminds others that the unseen participant is not 493-555-0835. It is our beloved Friend Natalie or Daniel.

Consider potential technical needs ahead of time. The clerk can ask presenters whether a screen share will be necessary. If so, does the person giving the report have the technical capability of screen sharing comfortably? If not, who can do the screen share on their behalf? Naturally, if the meeting is hybrid and the presenter is in-person, someone else will need to share the presentation online.

Some groups have found it helpful to name a technical clerk or technical elder. This person mutes microphones, monitors the chat, screen shares presentations, and/or serves as a troubleshooter for anyone having technical difficulties. When seeking this person, consider the gifts of everyone in the meeting. Age and technological skills often correlate, but they don't always, and assuming they do can be hurtful.

Successful online or hybrid corporate discernment requires self-discipline and mutual awareness on the part of all. Because of the technological aspects, it is more important than ever that one Friend speak at a time and that all Friends wait to be recognized by the clerk. If we are not careful to maintain these practices, the meeting can grow chaotic. Some Friends may be left out entirely. It is useful for Friends to have an agreed-upon method of indicating a need to speak. In larger meetings, those online and on the phone can use a virtual hand in most video conference services. Clerks might also be helped by designated "watchers" in each physical or online space. Watchers let the clerk know if someone is trying to speak and has not been noticed.

Use of the chat function will vary widely by group. Some groups ask that no one use the chat or change the settings so that only the technical clerk can be reached by chat. Other groups use the chat as a place to deposit announcements, links, correct spellings of names, and other informational pieces. This is especially helpful to recording clerks. A small group accustomed to informality might use the chat as an additional stream of communication, such as quick questions that require a very simple answer. Sometimes, private side conversations through chat might be hurtful during sensitive discernment. In those cases, a community might disable the chat or request that such conversations do not occur.

When the group has reached a sense of the meeting, Friends gathering in person usually say, all at once, "Approved!" If most or all of those present are online, this can create some auditory chaos because of the overlapping voices. Many meetings find this acceptable or even joyful, as it only lasts for a moment. Other meetings have switched to other ways of indicating approval, such as a visual sign.

1. In our meetings for business, are we committed to practices that help everyone participate, including Friends in person, Friends on video, and Friends on the phone? Are we all in agreement about how we will use the chat function, ask to speak, approve minutes, and so forth?
2. Are we patient and loving with one another and willing to be flexible in order to help each other participate in corporate discernment?

THE MEETING COMMUNITY: GENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

When Friends gather regularly in person, they stumble into one another. They pass in hallways and exchange greetings over a bowl of hummus. Casual encounters happen even when Friends are mostly occupying separate spaces, such as if young Friends meet in a room down the hall from adult Friends. But casual, accidental encounters decrease in frequency when Friends meet online. Sometimes, such encounters vanish completely.

All Friends of all ages benefit when communities prioritize multi-generational relationships. Virtual and hybrid communities can support such relationships in multiple ways. Occasional all-ages semi-programmed worship is one. Outdoor all-age activities is another, such as a Saturday morning gathering at the park.

Friends can also take the initiative to maintain such relationships individually. With permission from the family, trusted adults might reach out to young people by going for walks or playing in a backyard. They can initiate small-group videoconference activities such as Lego construction or bread baking. Parents of younger children might be asked about a “parents night out” or other support for them to engage in community. People of all ages can reach out to aging or homebound Friends. Letter-writing, phone calls, walks, and front-porch visits can all work well.

1. Do all of us make specific efforts to build inter-generational community?
2. What aspects of inter-generational community feel joyful to us?

THE MEETING COMMUNITY: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN

Religious education opportunities for children and youth serve multiple purposes. In addition to seeding life-long spiritual formation, they provide a place in which relationships between the meetings’ children (and their adult mentors) are nurtured. They’re important for development of identity as Friends and in establishing a common vocabulary and culture. They are also avenues of service for teachers and facilitators.

Some online Quaker meetings have had successful videoconference-based religious education for children and youth. Most of these programs are highly interac-

tive. For younger children, they often include physical elements such as crafts. Crafts feel even more special when the children have received craft kits in the mail. Stories—either picture books or Godly Play/Faith & Play stories—are another good approach. Some monthly meetings don’t have enough children to populate programs. In this case, Friends might consider quarterly meeting gatherings for young people.

Sometimes, families live close enough to each other that there can be small, in-person gatherings. Groups of children might enjoy playing in a park together and hearing stories. Families who live far from other members might enjoy receiving themed kits to explore a Quaker concept in the home.

If youth and parents are agreeable, other trusted adults in the meeting might move into a more informal ongoing relationship. Trusted adults and teens can share coffee at a picnic table, for example. Of course, older children and teens are highly verbal and capable individuals. Asking them how best to connect might be a good first step.

1. Do our children, youth, and parents feel well cared for?
2. Does our meeting as a whole support the religious education of children and youth?

THE MEETING COMMUNITY: PASTORAL CARE

Friends gathering online see one another mostly from the neck up while seated. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to perceive a child growing or maturing. We may not notice a pregnancy. It’s also harder to notice changing physical capacities in those who are elderly or who have been ill. If Friends join online gatherings by phone or with their cameras disabled, we lose all access to visual cues.

Therefore, Quaker meetings that are hybrid or virtual might need to begin pastoral care with the noticing phase. In some meetings, pastoral care committees regularly call and check in with members and attenders. Another approach is to divide the meeting into small groups, each of which meets socially and practices mutual care. Meetings may also establish a “sharing of joys and sorrows” at the end of each meeting for worship. This provides a natural platform in which Friends can let others know if they are having difficulties.

It's important to remember that pastoral care doesn't always require committee approval. Pastoral care may encompass food and shelter, emotional needs, celebration of joys, counseling through conflicts, and helping people make difficult decisions. Some of these things can be provided unofficially by a caring individual as a natural part of being in community.

Other types of pastoral care require expertise, sustained effort, or both. In these cases, entrusting the care to a committee or working group is appropriate and useful. Support for a Friend undergoing long-term treatment for an illness is an example of such a concern. Pastoral care committees can also seek training in such things as addiction support, mental wellness, and abuse response. Most Friends are not experts in these areas and should not act as though they are. However, we can learn to recognize warning signs and connect Friends to sources of professional help.

Virtual and hybrid meetings often have participants who are far away from the primary geographic location of the meeting. Distant members can both give and receive many types of pastoral care. Clearness committees, restaurant gift certificates, friendly phone calls, and get-well cards can be provided from afar. But some needs cannot be met from a distance. In these cases, Friends might consider (with permission) contacting the distant member's nearest Quaker meeting. If there is none, another faith-based group might help.

1. If a member of our community had a serious problem or joyful life event, would the rest of us know about it? How?
2. Have we found ways in which all members of our community, regardless of physical location, can both give and receive pastoral care?

THE MEETING COMMUNITY: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR ADULTS

Religious education for adults serves multiple purposes. It provides spiritual formation, social connection, development of a common vocabulary and culture, deepening of relationships, and avenues of service for facilitators. Religious education might include Bible studies, reading Quaker texts, studies of books that resonate with Quaker faith and testimonies, watching and discussing videos, Quakerism 101-type sessions, and so forth.

When held online, religious education opportunities do not require travel. They can be held over a lunch hour or on a weekday evening. Not all adult religious education opportunities must appeal to all people. They can be tailored to small groups' particular interests. Small groups are helpful to both newcomers and long-term members in developing and maintaining a sense of belonging.

For many, it's hard to listen to a single speaker for a long time. It helps to make sessions interactive. Breakout groups allow participants more opportunities to speak. Longer gatherings might include invitations to write, draw, or go for a brief walk within the flow of the program.

1. Are we providing regular opportunities for religious education for adult members of our community, including but not limited to newcomers?
2. Are these opportunities easily accessible to all? Are they interactive?

THE MEETING COMMUNITY: SOCIALIZATION AND FELLOWSHIP

When we consider the many real crises in the world, ordinary loneliness can feel like a frivolous concern. But social contact, fellowship, and friendship are vitally important. One reason for this is the simple human need for social connection. Another is learning how to maintain relationship in the presence of disagreements and differences, is a skill that does not come naturally to many.

Large-group videoconference settings lend themselves to formally structured interactions. Audio problems interfere with natural conversational rhythms. It's impossible for groups of two or three to form spontaneously and interact more intimately as they would if the group were gathered in person.

Quaker meetings have found several ways to encourage and support fellowship in online settings. Some have created a special time post-worship for "news of me," in which a few Friends each week share what is happening in their day-to-day lives. Others spend time in randomly selected break-out groups after worship for fifteen minutes or so of informal chatting. Some groups have a regular virtual gathering on a weekday evening specifically for social time. A few meetings are experimenting with small groups that are encouraged to meet monthly.

However Friends' social needs are met, it can be helpful to remember that some people strongly preferred structured interactions while others strongly prefer unstructured interactions. Both may be needed.

Meetings that engage in hybrid worship need to be particularly careful about the patterns that develop in social interactions. Hybrid post-worship social times must be highly structured to include everyone, and that can feel uncomfortable. But if Friends regularly socialize in two separate groups—one group in person, one group online—the groups might drift apart over time and begin feeling like two separate communities. In order to resist this, meetings can practice some other form of social interaction at a different time in addition to the separate post-worship fellowship time.

1. Does our meeting make space for social connections on a regular basis?
2. Do we connect socially with everyone in the meeting, or have we subdivided ourselves in some way?

THE MEETING COMMUNITY: REMOTE MEMBERSHIP

A few Quaker meetings have been online since their beginnings. But most virtual or hybrid meetings began as in-person-only meetings and are organized with that model in mind. Today, many virtual or hybrid meetings have remote members or attenders. These Friends have been worshipping with the community for months or years. They feel connected to the community while being geographically distant. Some Quaker meetings will ultimately discern that their time as a virtual or hybrid meeting was temporary. They will shift back to a wholly in-person model. These meetings will need to lovingly support their geographically distant participants in a transition to a faith community that can accept and encompass them permanently.

Other meetings will continue as virtual or hybrid communities. They may always have remote members and attenders. These meetings need to assess their habits and structures. Does the meeting allow for full and meaningful participation for all community members, including remote members? Remote membership has implications for how a meeting engages with corporate discernment, pastoral care, religious education, socialization and fellowship, service to the meeting, budgets and

property, neighborhood ministries, institutional affiliation, outreach, and witness. Much of this is explored in more detail in other parts of this guide.

A meeting that worships in a small town in Pennsylvania cannot continue to function identically when it becomes a meeting with a meetinghouse in a small town in Pennsylvania that also has members in seven other states and a country in Europe. If there have not been considerable adaptations, there is work to be done. This is not simply a matter of better including remote members in a pre-existing community. It is a matter of allowing the whole meeting to grow into the fullness of the new thing that God has called it to be.

1. Have we come to a sense of the meeting about whether our status as a hybrid or virtual meeting is temporary or permanent? If not, when will we revisit this question?
2. Do we believe geographically distant members and attenders to be full and equal participants in our meeting community? Do we act as though this is true?

SERVICE TO THE MEETING: NOMINATIONS

Nominating committees in virtual or hybrid meetings have at least three factors to consider in addition to the usual work. These are changes in committee responsibilities, tracking community participation, and considering the potential service of remote members.

If your meeting used to be an in-person-only meeting, have you reexamined your committee descriptions? Some committees have a different scope of responsibilities in the context of a virtual or hybrid community. New technical tasks might be required. The existence of remote members might change the general approach to the committee's work in some way. Nominating committees can get a sense of such changes by talking to those who are currently doing the work of the committee. What new skills or gifts might be needed as additional Friends are asked to serve in these positions?

The nominating committee also might need to take additional steps to get to know the community. There may be new regular attenders or members who are less easily noticed because they have only been seen virtually. Does the nominating committee have a list of everyone

who has attended worship at least once a month (roughly) for the last year? Other Friends might have changes in their abilities or circumstances that aren't easy to perceive virtually. If the nominating committee can first check in with all Friends, getting to know all Friends in greater depth, it can be simpler to find the right names when considering the committee list.

Finally, the nominating committee may need to consider the right proportion of local to remote members on each committee. Most committees will probably function best with some of each. The particular tasks entrusted to the committee will help in this discernment.

1. Do we understand the ways in which various committees' responsibilities may have changed if we shifted from an in-person community to a virtual or hybrid community?
2. Do we have a sense of the full list of Friends who consider themselves part of our community and who currently participate regularly in our worship and activities?

SERVICE TO THE MEETING: THINKING FLEXIBLY

Friends have no standard definition of the differences between committees, working groups, and task groups. However, here is one way of thinking about them that may be helpful:

A committee has a set term of service (one year, three years, etc.) and a formal nominations process in which committee members are approved by the meeting. A committee has a specific, written description of its duties. Committees tend to work well for groups of tasks that are well-defined and that must be done constantly or repeatedly.

A working group may or may not have a set term of service and often does not have a formal nominations process. People might be invited to serve or might volunteer to serve. A working group attends to a particular concern but usually does not have a written description of duties. Working groups tend to work well when a group of people is passionate about a concern but the tasks involved are likely to change over time or are hard to define.

A task group is intended to address one particular task or group of tasks that needs to be done only once or for a short period of time. These groups are often formed spontaneously in order to address a special circumstance. They tend to be composed of volunteers and are automatically laid down when the task is completed.

A virtual or hybrid meeting might discover that it's useful to consider task groups or working groups to take on some of the work of the meeting. The relative informality of task groups and working groups allows for greater agility and easier experimentation. The primary benefit of a formal committee structure is how well it perpetuates established patterns. That might not be what is most needed in the case of a meeting still growing into its online presence.

It can also be helpful to consider which tasks can easily be filled by one-time volunteers. Friends may offer to take on small pieces of work just once or for a very limited time, such as a month. These types of flexible service opportunities allow Friends to serve who otherwise could not.

1. How are we experimenting with our committee structure and distribution of tasks?
2. Are we prepared to try new things that might work better for our community?

STEWARDSHIP: PROPERTY

Even Quaker meetings that worship solely in person often don't use their property to its full potential. Buildings and grounds may be used once or twice per week and be empty the rest of the time. Virtual and hybrid meetings might use their property even less. Or they might use it differently, such as using the grounds but not the building.

Meetinghouses, gardens, and so forth are often more than physical assets. They hold memories. In some cases, they have played a significant role in our vision of the future. Nevertheless, some virtual and hybrid meetings may discern that someone else has a greater need for their property than they do. These meetings can sell, rent, or donate that property to other groups or individuals.

Sometimes property is going unused, but the meeting is clear that it is not the right time to sell or rent that

property. In this case, a meeting may need to speak with other occupants of the neighborhood. Is the disuse of the meeting's property affecting the neighbors in any way?

1. What does our property (buildings and grounds) mean to each of us?
2. How are we led to use our property?

STEWARDSHIP: BUDGETS

Budgets are a visible reflection of the activities to which we are led by Spirit. Hybrid and virtual meetings might discover that their leadings differ from those of an in-person meeting. Property maintenance may become less important, especially if the meeting is entirely virtual. Meetings with large numbers of remote members may support world-wide organizations more than local ones. Meetings might invest in new technology.

Some Quaker meetings, including virtual and hybrid meetings, experience a fear of scarcity. This fear can materialize regardless of whether there is actual scarcity. Fear of scarcity is a normal human reaction to uncertainty about the future. Genuine scarcity really can lead to instability. But this fear also complicates budgeting processes and can make it difficult for meetings to budget according to their genuine Spirit-led priorities. Meetings may find it easier to reach unity on budgeting if they have had opportunities for individual Friends to share about their own perspectives on financial stewardship. What does it look like to use the meeting's money as Spirit-led stewards?

1. When we consider our meeting's budget, do we feel as though we are experiencing scarcity, abundance, or something in between?
2. Does our budget accurately reflect our Spirit-led priorities at this time?

STEWARDSHIP: TRANSITIONS AND ENDINGS

Over time, virtual and hybrid groups might discover that the meeting's composition is changing. For example, a monthly meeting might discover that it is ready to transition to being a worship group. Worship groups gather for worship, social contact, and possibly other activities but do not do business. Or the reverse might occur; a

worship group might become a monthly meeting. If a group's regular attendance numbers have changed dramatically, that is one indication of a possible need for change. A change in the types of activities the group is led to undertake might also be relevant.

Some hybrid meetings will always be hybrid. Other hybrid meetings will discover it is more accurate to describe themselves as two separate communities, one of which meets in person and one of which meets online. One group might become a worship group under the care of the other. Some quarterly meetings might discover a need for a new, entirely online monthly meeting under the care of the quarter. There is no need to rush such transitions. They can be seen as opportunities to accurately reflect the reality of meetings when circumstances have changed.

Finally, as is the case for any meeting, a virtual or hybrid meet might reach a point of being ready to be laid down. This is a natural part of the life cycle of any institution. Meetings will benefit from entering discernment about this while there is still sufficient energy to do it well.

1. Is our meeting a hybrid meeting or a virtual meeting? Are we a monthly meeting, a worship group, or something else? Under whose care are we? (For example, are we under the care of a quarterly meeting?) Does our current status feel like the right fit for right now?
2. What do we think our meeting might look like in five years?

THE LOCAL COMMUNITY: BEING GOOD NEIGHBORS

Meetings that own property are part of neighborhood communities. Even rural meetings usually have some geographic neighbors. What it means to be good neighbors in a particular context is a matter for discernment. It will differ from one meeting to the next. Some meetings will be led to offer their property for rental or free use to community organizations. Others may host events and invite community members. Meetings may be led to engage in local environmental demonstrations. They might support protests at the local library or school that are in keeping with Friends' testimonies. They may join local ecumenical or interfaith organizations.

Hybrid meetings might experience a natural tension around “local” activities. This is especially true if the meeting has many remote members. Distant Friends will feel less connection to the local neighborhood. When considering how the meeting will use its time, energy, budget, and property, Friends will need to balance the leadings of individual Friends with the responsibilities of owning or renting property in a particular place.

Meetings that are entirely virtual may not own or rent physical property at all. This does not result in having no neighbors; it merely results in every member having different neighbors. The meeting can still engage in regular conversations about what it means to be a faithful member of one’s own local community.

1. For meetings that own or rent property or space: are we in right relationship with the people who live, work, and play in the local area? How so?
2. What does it mean to be a good neighbor?

THE LOCAL COMMUNITY: RELATIONAL LOCAL MINISTRIES

Some meetings are called to local ministries such as food pantries, homeless shelters, schools, scholarships, or community gardens. When this is the case for a hybrid or virtual meeting, particular care is needed. Over time, meeting membership may shift. Friends may be more geographically scattered. If that happens, the meeting’s priorities and leadings are likely to shift as well. It may become difficult to find enough volunteers from the meeting to serve the ministry’s needs. Many of the meeting’s participants will be too far away to volunteer. Geographically distant members might also find it difficult to feel connected to a local ministry, especially if they have never seen it or its fruits.

Virtual and hybrid meetings can take special efforts to help all members feel connected to the ministry. Sharing reports, stories, and photographs will help. But such meetings should also reassess regularly whether the meeting is still led to engage in the local ministry. If not, and if the ministry is still needed, it may be time to explore whether the ministry can form its own non-profit or if another local community organization could take it under its care. To delay or avoid a transition when it’s appropriate could ultimately harm people who rely on the ministry.

1. Does our meeting have a local (geographically specific) ministry? If so, in what way(s) is that ministry supported by the meeting as a whole?
2. What active steps are we taking to ensure that all members and attenders of our meeting feel connected to, and informed about, our local ministry?

THE WIDER BODY OF FRIENDS: QUARTERLY AND YEARLY MEETINGS

Quarterly and yearly meetings exist for fellowship and connection beyond the monthly meeting. They also provide pathways for work that cannot be done by a single monthly meeting. When gathering, Friends can share best practices and new ideas. Quarterly and yearly meetings can also provide various types of support for meetings that are struggling.

Some yearly and quarterly meetings are, themselves, now gathering in virtual or hybrid settings. Friends who have not participated before might find it easier to do so. Meetings can encourage their members and attenders to try joining in.

Most quarterly and yearly meetings have not historically included virtual or hybrid meetings. It will take deliberate intention to make gatherings accessible and relevant to virtual, hybrid, and in-person meetings alike. Whatever the topic at hand in a given discussion, it will be important to consider how traditional methods are useful, or not useful, in virtual and hybrid contexts.

1. Do Friends in our meeting feel connected to our quarterly meeting and yearly meeting, including Friends who are do not live in the geographic area of the quarterly or yearly meeting? Do we understand these groups not as external entities but as larger communities of Friends of which we are each an equal part?
2. Are we prepared to ask for help from other Friends in our quarterly and yearly meetings? Do we offer our own help and expertise when others need it?

THE WIDER BODY OF FRIENDS: OTHER QUAKER INSTITUTIONS

Many large Quaker institutions are not geographically specific or encompass very large areas. Examples of these include the Friends World Committee for Consultation, Friends General Conference, American Friends Service Committee, Quaker Earthcare Witness, Right Sharing of World Resources, the Quaker Religious Education Collaborative, and the Friends Committee on National Legislation. The concerns carried by such groups, and the fellowship that can be found by connecting with these groups, may be especially important to hybrid and virtual meetings that do not emphasize geographically local connections. They can help the meeting as a whole feel less like an isolated group. Large Quaker institutions can also provide inspiration, best practices, and channels for action that a virtual or hybrid meeting not engaging in such relationships might otherwise need to replicate.

1. What experiences have we had in connecting with large Quaker institutions such as the ones listed in this section? In what ways have such connections felt useful or important?
2. Do we encourage Friends to try connecting with various Quaker organizations? How do we help Friends in our meeting know about such opportunities?

THE WIDER BODY OF FRIENDS: INTERVISITATION

Intervisitation, and the more formal practice of travel in the ministry, have been important to Friends for a long time. Because Friends don't use a hierarchy or centralized leadership, we have relied on travelers to share new revelations and helpful practices.

For hybrid and virtual meetings, it is simple both to send and to receive visitors online. Sharing worship is important, but the greatest benefits of intervisitation occur when Friends also have the opportunity to engage in deliberate conversation. This is true during the visit and also after the visit, when a Friend might offer a post-visit report to a home meeting. Some meetings have found it helpful to explicitly encourage members to visit and worship with other meetings occasionally.

Intervisitation can be done by any Friend. But the practice of travel in the ministry is understood as a spe-

cific spiritual leading. It often involves multiple visits over an extended period of time, possibly with a specific concern on which the Friend is expected to speak. Travel in the ministry to (or from) virtual and hybrid meetings should not be taken less seriously simply because it is logistically easier when done online. The practice requires discernment, support, and accountability.

1. Do Friends in our meeting visit other meetings, either in-person or online? Do we make space to listen to what returning Friends may have experienced or learned?
2. When Friends from other meetings visit us, do we welcome them and make an effort to engage in meaningful conversation?

THE WORLD COMMUNITY: OUTREACH

What does outreach look like for virtual and hybrid Quaker meetings, especially for meetings that are less firmly rooted in particular geography? For a meeting with at least some remote membership, geographic convenience is no longer a significant limiting factor in the question, "For whom is this meeting?" Friends in such meetings need a strong understanding of what the meeting is about in order to do meaningful outreach. "All are welcome" is not terribly helpful guidance for a seeker. If a meeting's identity is not rooted in geography, it will feel more inviting if its website, social media, and other types of communications indicate some kind of specific identity. Hopefully, this is a description of what the meeting is rather than what it hopes to be.

Examples might include:

"We are a primarily Christian Quaker community with a strong concern for anti-racism."

"Our meeting community is drawn to Spirit-led earthcare and also has a long-standing book club in which we read and discuss the writings of early Friends."

"This Quaker meeting has many families of preschoolers and elementary schoolers. We engage in all-ages worship with singing and storytelling twice a month."

Meetings also need to discuss how visitors and newcomers will be welcomed and nurtured. There will be visitors who appear online and, in the case of hybrid meetings, also visitors who appear in person.

Strong welcoming includes having a familiarity with at least a few other online Quaker communities. If a seeker asks for suggestions of other meetings they might try, Friends should be prepared to respond helpfully. The ultimate purpose of outreach is not to grow the individual meeting. It's to minister to spiritual seekers, regardless of where they might ultimately be led.

1. Do we have a sense of our meeting identity? Are we prepared to say clearly what sort of meeting we are inviting seekers into?
2. Are we explicitly welcoming to visitors without overwhelming them? Are we supportive of seekers who are trying to discover whether our meeting is the right place for them long-term?

THE WORLD COMMUNITY: WITNESS

Friends' witness dates back to our beginnings. We have often felt let to testify in matters of justice, stewardship, and the inherent value of all human beings. These callings have been a consistent part of Friends' faith and practice. We can anticipate their continuing significance in virtual and hybrid meetings.

That doesn't mean that hybrid and virtual meetings will be led to witness in exactly the same ways as in-person meetings. Friends might not be able to gather physically as a whole. But the act of physical protest can't easily be replaced by online acts. Online witness is either mostly private (email, videoconferences) or subject to algorithms (social media). And algorithms often make it impossible for social media statements to be seen by anyone who disagrees with them. A virtual or hybrid meeting might instead need to encourage and support individual Friends who connect with demonstrations in their own local areas.

Also, minutes approved by meetings are often sent to local legislative representatives. In the case of a largely non-geographic meeting, the intended recipients may need to be reconsidered—in whose district is the meeting, precisely? And another definition of witness—the act of being present at the time of an injustice and bearing witness to it—is almost impossible to replicate online. Again, meetings may discover that it becomes more appropriate to support individual Friends in physical, in-person witness activities.

Friends in virtual or hybrid meetings might also consider whether they're led to witness on subjects not previously considered. Just access to technology, global monopolies of tech companies, the role of social media in encouraging divisiveness and violence, perpetration of injustice by artificial intelligence, and other related concerns might feel more present and relevant to meetings that spend much of their time together online.

1. In what ways does Spirit lead us to witness to the world as individual Friends?
2. In what ways does Spirit lead us to witness to the world as a meeting community?

CONCLUSION

“Dear Friends, keep all your meetings in the authority, wisdom and power of Truth and the unity of the blessed Spirit.”

– the elders at Balby, 1656

This advice, though hundreds of years old, is no less relevant in Friends' communities today. It speaks of that which is unchangeable even in times of rapid societal and technological change. Today's virtual and hybrid meetings are part of a tradition that began well before living memory and that will continue beyond our lifetimes. Our work is simply to be faithful.

GUIDANCE FOR MEETINGS AUTHOR

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