

‘Membership is fully open to people of all ages and abilities’.¹

Those who have just found us and are observing us to see whether we offer what they want are thought of as ‘Seekers’. If they decide to stay with us, at least for the time being, they become ‘Attenders’.

Many Attenders are very much involved in the Local Meeting, perhaps offering vocal Ministry during Meeting for Worship or agreeing to carry out practical duties. An Attender who wishes to become committed to Quakerism can apply for Membership.

Members share responsibility for the running of the Meeting, (the work done by professional clergy in other places of worship still has to be done), and take on a financial commitment. We realise that an individual’s circumstances change throughout life and we expect you to make your own judgement as to how much time, effort and money you can contribute at any particular time. Opportunities are there, and each individual must decide what, if anything, to get involved in at any one time.

Our formal name is ‘The Religious Society of Friends’, which indicates that we do have a firm spiritual base, grounded in our personal experience. While we don’t have a written creed, we do have four Testimonies: Simplicity, Truth, Equality and Peace, (which reflect the corporate beliefs of the Society). Taken together, they are an expression of love and the more you practise them the more they can become part of your everyday life.

Quakers as a community are known for good works of various kinds, and that has attracted many Attenders in the first place. However, ‘membership is never based on worthiness: none of

us are members because we have attained a certain standard of goodness’.²

Quaker Faith and Practice contains a lot of useful information on Membership, especially in the Chapters ‘Belonging to a Quaker Meeting’ and ‘Membership’ (Chapters 10 and 11 in the fifth edition).

Meeting for Worship is central to Quaker life, and anyone applying for Membership needs to have experienced it on many occasions. How long any individual should wait before applying is not fixed. Some people find they have ‘come home’ as soon as they cross the threshold and need only a short introduction. Others are naturally cautious and may take years to decide what is right for them. ‘The process of becoming a member is part of the spiritual journey: part of the seeking that is integral to our religious heritage ... but also about finding’.¹

Before applying for Membership, it’s important to become familiar with our business method. This is unusual, in that we seek divine guidance when making decisions, rather than relying on what the majority wants; the full title of our business meeting is ‘Meeting for Worship for Business’. Our minutes are agreed at the time and record only the decision and any necessary additional information. Attending one or two local business meetings is advisable, and it would be a good idea to attend an Area Meeting too.

Membership is of the Area Meeting, not of the Local Meeting. Being a Member automatically confers Membership of Britain Yearly Meeting.

There are two ways of applying for Membership, and the method used is at the choice of the applicant.

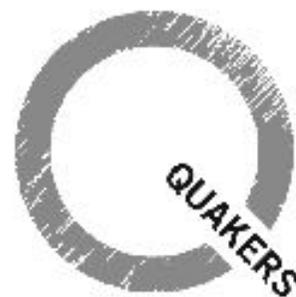
¹ Quaker Faith & Practice, 11.01

² Quaker Faith & Practice, 11.02

For the Traditional route, the first thing to do is to write to the Assistant Clerk (Membership). Your letter should state that you want to apply by the traditional route and give your contact details. How much you say about your reasons for applying and your previous spiritual journey is up to you. The Assistant Clerk (Membership) will arrange for your application to be minuted at the next Area Meeting and ask the Area Meeting Convener of Overseers to find two Visitors for you, usually one you know and one you don't. These two will arrange to visit you at your own home (or elsewhere if you prefer) and talk with you about where you are spiritually now and your journey so far. They are not there to judge you, just to answer your questions and to make sure that you are ready for this step and aware of the responsibilities you would be taking on. They will prepare a report, which will be discussed with you and sent to the Assistant Clerk (Membership). The report will be read out and considered at the next Area Meeting. If you and the Visitors are happy that membership is the right course for you, it is very unlikely that your application will be declined.

The alternative route is less formal and involves several discussions with two people you know. You need to approach a local Overseer (or the Local Meeting Clerk if there aren't any Overseers), and say that you wish to apply for membership by the less formal route and discuss with them who will be your two guiding Friends. Then you should write to the Assistant Clerk (Membership) giving the same information as for the Traditional route but also stating that you wish to use this route and indicating who your guiding Friends are. Your intention will be minuted. Over whatever period of time seems right, you will have meetings with your guiding Friends until all three of you feel that you are ready to write a report together for Area Meeting to consider.

Membership begins at the moment the Area Meeting Clerk writes the minute accepting your application.



Hampshire and Islands Area Meeting

Applying for Membership of The Religious Society of Friends

Entry into membership of the Religious Society of Friends is a public acknowledgment of a growing unity with a community of people whose worship and service reflect, however imperfectly, their perception of discipleship and their recognition of the work of the Holy Spirit in the world. This unity is grounded in the experience of being "gathered" in the love of God in the silent expectancy of our meetings for worship and in a willingness to surrender ourselves to a corporate seeking for the will of God in such measure as we can comprehend it.

(from To Lima with Love)

www.hampshirequakers.org.uk